



river west church

The Gift of Being God's People

1Peter 1:1-3

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New Identity

Peter begins by telling us who we are. Everything flows from that. His original audience was an assortment of first century Christians, scattered over a wide area in what is modern day Turkey. His audience was made up primarily of gentiles who turned to faith in Christ through the preaching of the Gospel. Peter's first priority was to firmly anchor their lives in their new identity in Christ. He wanted to show them who they were in Christ, not just as individuals, but as the church of Jesus Christ – an outpost of God's kingdom in the midst of a broken world.

Peter's words are as relevant and powerful today as when he first wrote them. In order to be "God's people on mission" in a broken world, our first priority is to see ourselves, not as the world sees us, but as God sees us. To do that, we must see God and understand His purpose, plan, and work in our lives.

Who we are as Christians does not come from ourselves. It comes from God. It doesn't come from ethnic heritage, personal accomplishments, social status, job, bank balance, or education. It comes from God in Christ – period. That's the starting point for everything Peter has to say. That's the foundation for everything in true Christian faith and life. As we look at the introduction to First Peter again this week, let's focus on seeing the sovereign work of God in making us who we are in Christ!

Israel, the Church, and You

To feel the impact of Peter's teaching, we need to unpack the intense language he uses to describe these gentiles who have come to faith in Christ. Here are some of the ways Peter describes these believers:

Elect; exiles; foreknown by God; sanctified by the Holy Spirit; sprinkled with the blood of Christ; a chosen race; A kingdom of priests; a holy nation; a people for his own possession; the people of God. That's quite a list!

There's a dimension to these descriptions that is especially important to see. Peter is using words that describe Israel in the Old Testament and applying them to gentile believers in Christ. Peter isn't just borrowing Old Testament language about Israel – he is building on it!

Peter wants us to understand our identity and mission as believers in Christ. To do this, he points us back to Israel in the Old Testament. Israel was to be God's special people on mission in a broken world. Israel was God's people in exile. Israel was to be a holy people. Israel was drawn into a special covenant relationship with God. All of that was a foreshadowing of our calling right here and now – to be God's people on mission in a broken world. As we begin First Peter, we need to spend some time also looking at Israel in the Old Testament, to get our bearings on the power Peter's teaching.

Being God's People – the Gift of God through Jesus Christ

So where do you fit in? How do you become a part of God's people on mission? The answer is – this is the gift of God's grace through Jesus Christ. Everything in the opening lines of First Peter tells us

this. It isn't something you earn. It isn't something you make happen. This isn't like joining a club or an organization. It is the result of a supernatural work of God in your life. That's why Peter speaks twice of the new birth of believers through Christ (1:3 and 1:23); New birth – into a new life, a new identity, a new family, a new purpose and mission. That's the starting place. That's the gift of God. It changes everything. Is that how you see yourself? If you are a believer in Christ, that's how God sees you. You cannot earn this. You can only receive it by grace through faith. (John 1-10-12). Let's start there!