

IDENTITY - PART 1

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"Come to me" - These words are powerful. They have the capacity to resonate within each of us should we be honest enough to hear them.

They speak of a God who wants to have a relationship with you, wants to fill your life with his love and grace and presence.

But I think the reason that these words truly resonate is that each of us longs to hear them, because each of us knows what it is to lose our way. At some point in your life you will find yourself in a place, wondering how you got there and what to do now. How do I find my way back?

Maybe something happened in school, or with your job, or with your marriage. Things fail, life throws us a curveball. Maybe it's a choice we made, or didn't make, and something inside us broke as a result. We just live the same day, every day, and we forget our passions, our dreams, and forget that there is a God who makes all things new.

There's a book in the Bible written to a group of people who knew what it's like to lose everything. That book is 1 PETER. It was written to the "diaspora", which means, "the dispersed." At the time this book was written, it was a horrible time of persecution towards Christians. The Emperor Nero committed horrible atrocities against believers. People had to flee their homes, and leave everything they knew behind. Peter is writing this to them. They're trying to figure out their new lives, wherever they are.

Peter doesn't write, "Okay, here's the thing to do now," or "Here's what I want you to follow." No. Peter tells them, "This is who you are. I know things have gotten crazy, you've lost so much -- but remember who you are and live out of that. This is your identity."

The reason this is so significant is that life can change on you. But what doesn't change is who God created you to be. It's your identity. It's who you are. Your identity doesn't change with circumstances. Your identity is the depth of truth within you.

This is relevant for us today. We look around and wonder - what do we do now? Maybe we should spend less time telling people what to do, and more time telling them who they are. Out of that flows everything.

The first step back home is to remember who you are.

There's a verse in 1 Peter that is profoundly powerful because it is a succinct illustration of our identity.

1 PETER 2:9 - But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

There are four profound statements of identity right there.

1. A chosen race. 2. A royal priesthood. 3. A holy nation. 4. A people belonging to God.

Today we'll look at "a chosen race". It's meant to be an encouragement. If you are a follower of Christ, you are a chosen race.

What does it mean by "chosen race"? Unfortunately, we hear this term today, and those words are historically charged with negativity. We think of the Aryan race as envisioned by the Nazis. But what does Peter mean by it? He's drawing back to the Old Testament account of Abram,

whom we also know as Abraam.

In Genesis 11 we are introduced to Abram. In Genesis 12, God speaks to Abram.

GENESIS 12:1-3 - The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go into the land I will show you. I will made you into a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those you bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

God is telling Abram, "I choose you. I will grow you into a great nation. I will bless you." All of this is confirmed in Genesis 15. God promises to Abram that he will have descendants as numerous as the stars.

It can be very dangerous if we start to see "chosen" as "superior". What we forget then is what we're chosen for.

When I was in high school, I worked in a grocery store as a courtesy clerk. What that meant was that I was a bagger, I pushed carts, and so forth. Often I'd be bagging groceries for hours. One particularly busy time we'd been doing this, and the manager came along and selected one of my co-workers, Matt, for a "special project". Matt went with the manager, returned, and said nothing about the project. This happened several more times over a number of days. Anytime there was a "special project", Matt was selected.

Finally, on one occasion, I said, "What, is Matt your favorite?" Matt was told to take me along with him on the special project. We headed to the men's restroom to clean up a horrible mess. The point is -- it's not about being chosen. It's what we're chosen for.

What was Abram chosen for? He was 75 years old, and his wife was barren. She'd never borne children. And God wants to build a nation with them. He tells them to go from their country, start a new life elsewhere, "so that you will be a blessing. In you all the families of the world will be blessed."

God is saying, "I'm choosing the world, but I'm starting with you, because I want to bless the whole world through who you are."

Two thousand years later, a descendant of Abraham was born. His name was Jesus.

Jesus brings unconditional love into a very conditional world.

When you bless someone, you raise them up. That's why Jesus was not seated upon a throne. He sees people dying under the weight of their sin, and he dies for us in our place -- because he was blessed to be a blessing.

"Come to me."

What does this have to do with us? We're not Abraham or Jesus. What does this mean for us?

There's an interesting moment in the Gospels. Jesus is in a room with his followers, and his mother and brothers arrive at where he is staying, and they send a messenger in, asking him to come out. Jesus said, "These are my brothers and sisters. This is my family. Those who do the will of my Father in Heaven are my brothers and sisters and mothers."

If you are a follower of Christ, Jesus has just folded you into the family. You are a chosen race. You are a part of the family.

But remember - it's about what you've been chosen for. In John 20, Jesus has died, and his

followers are freaking out. They didn't know he would rise. So they've locked themselves in a room, and they're trying to figure out what to do next. Jesus appears to them. Imagine the surprise of this moment. I mean -- what next?

JOHN 20:21 - Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." In other words, "The same purpose I had to take my message to the whole world is yours. It's who you are. You are a chosen race."

This is meant for us. You who have been blessed to be a blessing. It's who you are. Unconditional love, grace, joy, to bless others who have not known it, or given up on it.

We are blessed with power not just to avoid sin, but to live life. So live it. It's not just about being chosen, it's what we're chosen for,

Imagine the audience in 1 Peter. They hear this and they realize wherever they go, Jesus goes with them. We can't lose that. We can't lose Jesus.

Discover who you are. Remember a God who gives you unconditional love.

1 PETER 2:9 - "... that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

The world waits to hear, "Come to me."