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I Peter 2:2-10:

## **“Who You Are NOW”**

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## Who You Are NOW

### 1 Peter 2:2-10

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Most coffee and tea drinkers are familiar with the strange language of your average café. The unnecessarily complicated rituals that accompany getting a simple cup of coffee are often laughable. In some places, you need prior knowledge just to order the right size—Venti for a 20-ounce drink, Grande for a 16-ounce drink. I avoided places like that for a long time for that very reason. But there is one coffee shop idiosyncrasy we all know well. It's that dreaded question the barista asks, marker in hand, cup ready: "What's your name?"

And then, when your drink is finally called, you hear something close... but not quite right. Instead of "Lucas," it's "Luke" or "Luca." And it's always spelled with a "k." Close, but no cigar. It's a small thing. Harmless, even. Just a mistake from someone moving too fast, trying to keep up with a long line of orders. Many of us know the feeling. But it does make you think about how often something like that happens on a much deeper level. How often are names, labels, and identities placed on you that aren't quite right?

#### **I. Finding Identity in the Unidentifiable**

These labels that are given to us are so often unfair, and many of them are not only unchosen but nearly impossible to shake. That is especially true when they are tied to some embarrassment, failure, or even a sin. While we want them to be fair and honorable, sometimes a single moment can follow a person for years, shaping how others see them and even how they begin to see themselves. It can be difficult to trace exactly where these labels come from. Sometimes they are spoken outright. Other times, they are implied, quietly reinforced over time. But one thing is certain: for the Christian, they are almost never true when they come from those apart from Christ.

And when a Christian dares to speak as God speaks by calling sin what God calls sin and honoring what He calls good, the response is often swift. The labels come quickly: judgmental, intolerant, out of touch, and hypocritical. Those are just some of the names that are assigned. Many are far nastier. Identities are imposed, and the message that comes with them from those apart from Christ is clear: this is who you are, and it is not who you should be.

They may sound convincing, but they do not speak with the authority of the One who created you and redeemed you. Be assured, brother and sisters, those names, no matter how loud or persistent, do not define you. They never have and they never will. But it's important that we also see our part in the endless names and identities we impose on people. We can become just as guilty of failing to protect the reputations of our neighbors, but especially those who we would rather not love. We fail to protect our enemies. As written in James 3,

"...no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so."

The Word of God is clear: both the unbeliever and the believer are always searching for an identity in the unidentifiable. After the fall into sin and complete rebellion against a right relationship with our Creator that

continues even into today, the identity that we are supposed to have, that is, being God's own child and created in His image, has been lost. As God says in Genesis 5, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." That's not a small statement. What it means is that by nature, we who were once made to be good have become inherently evil, lost, and with no real identity if we are apart from God.

Before faith was brought by the Holy Spirit through the Word, that was you and me. The thoughts and intentions of our hearts were only evil. Thanks be to God that He did not leave us in that state. Those apart from Christ may call us any name or give us any identity they want, but they can never call us a name worse than the one that already belongs to them and to us by nature: sinner. That is not a misunderstanding or a mislabel. That is the true proclamation of guilty before God.

## **II. Identity—A Gift to the Unidentifiable**

It is here that the Word of God from our text this morning shines so bright. It states, "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." Despite our complete rebellion and despite every sin you and I have ever committed, that is now what is said of you. You are God's people, and you have received mercy.

That did not come from anything within you. Despite how the rest of humanity tries to change their identities, it did not come from making our own decisions, correcting our lives, cleaning ourselves up, or proving that we are worthy of a different name. It came from Christ and His death and resurrection alone. Where you have been false, He has been faithful. Where you have been unclean, He has stood before the Father in perfect righteousness. And He did not keep that righteousness for Himself. He placed Himself under the full weight of your guilt, bore it as His own, and answered for it completely.

So now the matter is settled, and it is not by what others say about you, nor by what your own conscience throws back in your face. It is settled by what God Himself declares. The names that once belonged to you of guilty, condemned, and unclean have been answered for. And in their place, God speaks something entirely different. He declares that we are His own, and we are His people. God has given the greatest gift to those who were once unidentifiable. He has given us true, real, and everlasting identity with one little word: forgiven.

And if you happen to hear that and think, "That's not me," then do not assume that this Word has nothing to say to you. Do not conclude that this identity can belong to others, but not to you. Because the very same Word that declares what God's people are also reveals what you are apart from Christ: you stand without mercy, still bearing the weight of your sin before God.

Hear clearly that the difference between those who are God's people and those who are not is not found in them. It is found entirely in Christ and in the Word that He speaks. The same Christ who has answered for your sin, who has borne your guilt, and who has secured your mercy, does not hold it at a distance from you. He speaks it to you now. He calls you through that very Word to turn from what you are by nature and to receive what He alone gives. The call is not to make yourself into someone new, but to receive what Christ has already done. And where that Word is heard and believed, there a new and real identity becomes true for you as well. It is by that faith that you are no longer without a people, no longer without mercy, but belonging to God Himself.

### III. “A People for His Own Possession”

For those who believe, Peter does not let this remain vague or distant. He says, “As you come to Him, a living Stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house.” In your life, God is building you into something that He Himself is constructing. That building began in the waters of Holy Baptism, where he did not merely invite you into something but placed you into it. He took you, a poor and hopeless sinner, and by His Word and promise, joined you to Christ the cornerstone. By that washing of regeneration for the forgiveness of your sins, you are built into His house, and it is by the very fact that Peter can speak so confidently when He says, “...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession...”

Peter does not stop there. He tells you why: “...that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” Those who have been brought out of darkness do not pretend they are still there. Those who have been given light speak of it. Those who have received mercy cannot help but confess it. Your life, your words, and your confession are no longer attempts to create an identity, but the overflow of the identity that has already been given. You speak because something has been done to you. You confess because something has been given to you.

Indeed, let us “proclaim the excellencies” of the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave up everything so that we may have life everlasting. Let us allow every day of our lives to be centered and focused on that which Christ has given. And when we fail to do so, let us run back to Him over and over again. Let us run back to that Baptism that is the sure and certain assurance that we are God’s children and that nothing but our own rejection can take that away from us. As the apostle says, “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” (1 Timothy 6)

At the same time, do not be surprised when that life is met with resistance. Do not let it bring you to despair as things crumble around us. The more clearly Christ is confessed, the more sharply the contrast is drawn. To live as God’s people, to proclaim His excellencies, to return again and again to His promises, will not go unnoticed. When the names and false identities come, and they will, you do not need to answer them. When your own conscience accuses, and it will, you do not need to settle the matter yourself. The matter has already been settled. Not by you, but by Christ. And now, over and above every other voice, one Word remains: You are His people. You have received mercy. You are forgiven. That is **Who You Are NOW**. And in Christ, that is who you will remain.

Amen.

Pastor Lucas Abbott