

“The Church’s True Identity” (part 2)

1 Peter 2:4-10

How you answer the question, “Who am I?” may in fact be the most important thing about you. It is a question that gets to the heart of your identity. Our identity is where we find meaning, stability, and our sense of purpose in life. It is where we find confidence and our sense of joy. Failure to understand and live out of our identity as sons and daughters of God is the main culprit for so much of the insecurity in our lives. You know what insecurity is, don’t you? Insecurity is the voice that whispers, “I cannot really succeed as this because I am not [blank] enough.” Notice how this often plays out:

- You were hired for a new job, and nobody else seems to think that you can do it. Each time a group gathers without you, you’re sure they are talking about you.
- You have entered a new phase of life, such as college, married life, an empty nester, or recent retirement. You’re not sure that you have what it takes to succeed.
- An opportunity to serve as a leader in the church comes your way, but you refuse because you feel insufficient.
- You know someone who needs Christ, and yet you don’t think that you are competent to share the gospel.
- You are confronted with a set of circumstances in which you feel totally incapable of dealing with them.

Add to this the fact that we now live in the age of social media, our feelings of insecurity are exacerbated by instant comparison. We think, “I’m not as attractive as she is.” Or, “My life is not as interesting as his.” No matter what we do, we can always find someone out there who does it better.

Moses is an illustration of someone who wrestled with personal insecurity. Yet he came to understand that his identity and purpose is defined through a relationship with God,

and not his own weaknesses. Think about where he had been up until we read about his encounter with God at the burning bush in the third chapter of Exodus.

He had been a fugitive on the run from Pharaoh, having had murdered an Egyptian. Talk about a bad day at work...

He was living in seclusion while taking care of his father in law's sheep. And by the way, he was 80...

Let's just say that Moses was not where a man his age really wanted to be. In his mind, he was a failure. He was a wash-up, would-be savior of his people who failed miserably at trying to bring them relief.

Exodus 3:11 — “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

God didn't respond to Moses' insecurity by telling him to go attend a Tony Robbins seminar, then go look in a mirror and repeat to himself, “You is good, you is smart, you is kind...” That's not the way that Moses overcame his insecurity at all.

Three verses later, God tells Moses, “It is not about who you are. It is about who I am. Tell the people that ‘I AM’ has sent you.” Moses would find his confidence in God. It is only when you and I are properly related to God that we can be properly related to both ourselves and to others.

Within this passage that we began looking at last week, you will notice that Peter makes several identity statements that are true of God's people. His point is that you and I need to know who we are in Christ, and how we fit into the corporate body of Christ.

Peter is writing to believers who were being threatened by persecution. They quickly found themselves in an insecure position. For those who under such pressure, having been stripped of their comforts, it was very important that they seek their identity in Christ rather than their circumstances. Having nearly forgotten who they were as God's beloved children, they were facing the the temptation to retreat back into a lifestyle that was less offensive to the unbelieving culture around them.

And so Peter writes to remind these struggling Christians of their true identity because they needed the security that comes from the knowledge of who they were in Christ. Without such confidence, they were sure to buckle under the weight of cultural pressure. The same thing is true for us as well. If we are going to thrive in the midst of a corrupt culture, we need to know 'who' we are and 'whose' we are.

Who are we as believers, according to Peter?

1. We are living stones in God's BUILDING (2:4-5a)

4—As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,

5a—you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house,

Peter begins by saying, "As you come to him." Who is he referring to? A brief glance back up into verse 3 will reveal the 'him' mentioned here as none other than the Lord Jesus. These believers have personally tasted and seen that the Lord is good. They have come to Him in faith and trust. The phrase 'as you come to him' not only implies their initial conversion, but also to their drawing nearer to Him in intimate, abiding, and personal fellowship.

"As You Come" - *translates a Greek verb that is a present participle; continually coming*

It is connected to the main verb in the sentence which is found in verse 5 so that it reads this way, "As you come to him...you are being built up." Peter's emphasis is that by drawing nearer to Christ, we are being built up in Christ. It is a passive verb, meaning that Christ Jesus Himself is the One who is doing the building up.

Peter says that Jesus is able to do this because:

- He is the Living Stone
- He is the Corner Stone

- He is the Rejected Stone
- He is the Stumbling Stone

He makes two more identity statements here in the text and applies them to the church. Not only are we living stones in God's building, but notice also:

2. We are holy priests in God's TEMPLE

5b—to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Peter says that believers are being built up into a spiritual house in order to be a holy priesthood so that we might offer spiritual sacrifices of worship to God through Jesus. We are a building of God's own design, and we are a holy priesthood for God's own purposes.

Our identity

You will notice that in verses 5 and 9, Peter uses two words to describe us as priests—we are a 'holy' priesthood, and we are a 'royal' priesthood.

That we are 'holy' means we are set apart from others.

Obviously, that doesn't mean that we are better than others or more deserving of God's grace than others. It simply means that we have become recipients of God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and as such, we are set apart as a 'holy' priesthood. God has placed His special affection on those who are in Christ. We are the elect people of God.

That we are 'royal' means we are identified with the King.

Have you thought of yourself as royalty lately? I am safe to assume that more than likely you have not.

Perhaps you've heard the story of a Maryland mechanic by the name of David Drew Howe. A couple of years back, he made headlines by claiming to be heir to the throne

of the Isle of Man and cousin to Queen Elizabeth. Supposedly, Howe made the discovery while researching his family ancestry online and filed a notice of his intention to claim his title in the London Gazette in January 2007, which is the official journal of record for the British government. It even led to a reality TV series called “Suddenly Royal” on TLC that followed Howe and his family as they travelled to the Isle of Man in 2015 to claim the title. They also learned how to be ‘royal’ with the help of an adviser and etiquette coach. In one episode, David shocks his royal adviser when he tries to give her a fist bump instead of a handshake, and is she equally appalled when he puts his napkin in the collar of his shirt and then blows his nose in it.

The moment you came to faith in Jesus Christ, you were immediately transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. You were suddenly royal.

Revelation 1:5-6—“To him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

You may not feel like it when you wake up on Monday morning, but to be a Christian is to be a holy, royal member of God’s family. It means that you belong to the King of Kings, He has made you His own, and He calls you by name.

Our responsibility

In order to understand what it means to be a holy and royal ‘priesthood,’ we need to go back into the Old Testament to uncover the biblical office and responsibilities of those who served in the tabernacle (and later the temple) as God’s priests.

The priests were responsible for mediating between God and His people. They offered up prayers on behalf of the people. They made sacrifices. They were responsible for carrying out God’s orders and leading worship.

Several passages from the Old Testament are important to understanding the priesthood under the old system, and those key passages are Exodus 28-29, and Leviticus 8-10.

These passages reveal that the priests were:

- **Chosen**—the Lord specifically chose Aaron and his sons to serve as priests (Ex. 28)
- **Cleansed**—they were cleansed from their sins before they could begin their priestly duties (Lev. 8)
- **Clothed**—the priests wore garments that were specially crafted for them to wear (Ex. 28)
- **Consecrated**—they were anointed for service with oil and blood; identified with God’s presence and power
- **Commissioned**—they were given commands by God and were instructed in order to carry out their service

The book of Hebrews provides fresh New Testament light as to how you and I have been made priests through the work of Jesus Christ, our Faithful High Priest. Under the old system, God’s people had a priesthood. Yet because of the finished work of Jesus, now God’s people are a priesthood. That simply means that each and every believer has the privilege of coming into the presence of God and ministering to Him.

I am a priest, you are a priest, and together we are a priesthood. We have been chosen, cleansed, clothed, consecrated, and commissioned to offer up ‘spiritual sacrifices’ that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest. (illus. of choir)

“Spiritual” —word is *‘pneumatikos’* which is the same word we get our modern word *‘pneumatic’* from

A ‘pneumatic’ instrument is one that makes use of pressurized air. Like a drill or a nail gun that you hook up to an air compressor. Without the power of the air flowing through it, the instrument is useless.

The church is a ‘spiritual house’ which is being built upon Christ, in which dwells the Spirit of the Living God. God’s house is no longer a physical dwelling, but one that is

spiritual in nature. He has taken up residence in us, and because of this, we are now able to offer up 'spiritual sacrifices.'

It begins through offering up our bodies in worshipful submission to the Lord.

Romans 12:1-2—“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

Another way that we offer up spiritual sacrifices to God is through praise, worship, and sacrificial giving.

Hebrews 13:15—“Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

Paul even referred to new believers as a spiritual sacrifice.

In Romans 15, he compared his ministry to that of a priest who ministered the gospel of God “so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:16).

As a Christian, how are you offering up spiritual sacrifices? Know that you have been saved for this purpose!

We are living stones in God’s building, and holy priests in God’s temple. Peter also says:

3. We are chosen people in God’s POSSESSION

9—But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

10—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.

The basis of their election

Peter tells them, “But you are a *chosen* race.” Think about how encouraging this would have been to all of those hurting brothers and sisters that Peter is writing to. To hear that God had not abandoned them to their painful circumstances. To know that God had a purpose behind their hurt. To understand that they were more than their failures and mistakes.

“Chosen” — *word is ‘eklektos’ and is the same word used to describe Jesus Christ in verses 4 and 6*

They were not helpless victims of their circumstances. No, instead, they were chosen people in God’s possession. They were loved, they were remembered, and they were valuable. Let me tell you how the devil works. He tries to take a precious truth like election and make it divisive. Yet it is essential for the Christian’s sense of security. You are ‘eklekton’ just as sure as Christ is the ‘eklekton.’

Who are the elect? The elect are those who repent of their sin and place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. I believe that anyone can be saved. I believe that God desires for everyone to be saved. But not all will be saved. Those who are saved are those who respond to the gracious work of God’s Spirit. On the outside looking in, you see that a decision must be made on your part for which you are personally responsible. On the inside looking out, you are able to see that God alone gets the glory for saving you by His electing grace. Such marvelous mystery!

(illus. of ant on the seashore)

The purpose of their election

As believers, Peter says that we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy ‘nation.’ The word he uses there is the word ‘ethnos’ which means tribe or group who live together. Everyone is looking to belong to some kind of ‘tribe.’ We want to belong. We

want to find acceptance. The church belongs to Christ, as a nation among the nations, and we have been given a specific purpose.

What is that purpose? Here it is:

“...that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

“Proclaim”—*word is ‘exangello’ and means to tell out loud or declare abroad or make known through proclamation*

Believers are saved to loudly proclaim the ‘excellencies’ of the One who has called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light. The ‘excellencies’ of Christ are His moral virtues, the goodness for which He is worthy of praise and adoration.

We've been saved so that the praises of Jesus Christ will ever be on our lips. Listen, when Jesus Christ has truly captured your heart, He will also have control of your tongue. It is not hard for us to talk about what we love the most.

To illustrate this, consider for a moment Peter’s own example in the book of Acts. In Acts 5, we read that the religious leaders had Peter and the apostles arrested and thrown in prison. During the night, an angel from God opened the prison doors and brought them out, then told them to “go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” So they did.

And in spite of the threat, they preached Christ.

Acts 5:40-42—“And when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.”

The value of their election

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession. And notice how all of this has come about according to what Peter says in verse 10:

“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.”

By His mercy and grace, God has made us part of His family. Through faith in Christ, we are now the sons and daughters of God. We are His people who exist for His own possession. We’ve been bought with a price!

The value of something is determined by its owner. For example, I gave Andrew a teddy bear that used to belong to me when I was small. It is nearly 40 years old, and one that my dad got for me on a trip he made to Germany. Can I tell you, it may not mean a lot to you, but it sure does mean a lot to me. It is valuable to me because it is mine, and now it is my son’s.

You may not feel like royalty right now in your life. You may not think of yourself as holy. You may not think that your life is extremely precious because of what others have done to you. Listen—to God, you are precious. As one who is in Christ, you are His own possession. That means your life has value and purpose.

You say, “Well, I’m not saved. What implications does this have for my life?” I find here an urgent application for those who are not saved. Like every other person who has ever lived or will ever live, you too are invited to the table of God’s grace and mercy. Identity can’t be found in self-effort. It won’t be found through fame or fortune. It can’t be found anywhere else apart from faith in Jesus Christ. He died on the cross to save sinners from their sins. He rose again from the dead, and as the Living Stone who is the Cornerstone, eternal life is found only in Him. What is true of God’s people in this passage can also be true of you if you repent of your sins and trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. Come to Christ now so that you might be found in Him.

As those who have come to Him, who do you think you are, church? Peter says that:

- As a spiritual house, you are being built up in Christ
- As a holy priesthood, you are offering spiritual sacrifices
- As a chosen people, you are pointing others to Jesus

All of this that Peter mentions in this passage is intended to encourage you and me and provide us with a great sense of security and purpose while living in a corrupt culture.