

Our Identity and Purpose

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[0 : 00] 1 Peter 2, verse 4. 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 to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For it stands in Scripture, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone, chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

So, the honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.

They stumble because they disobeyed the word as they were destined to do. 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 marvellous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you're God's people. Once you would not receive mercy, but now you've received mercy. Beloved, I urge you, as sojourners and exiles, to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

[1 : 22] Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Well, let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for this encouraging word of who we are and what you've given us to do.

We pray that as we look at this now, that you will encourage us, you will teach us, you will remind us of who we are and what we're here for. Amen. And I think that there's an outline in your bulletin, so grab that and we're going to have a look at this passage together.

And I reckon our society is confused about a bunch of things, but I think Western society at the moment is having a bit of a teenage phase. I've hung out with a lot of teenagers over my life and I think there's two big questions that teenagers are trying to figure out and our society is hopelessly confused about these things at the moment.

That is, who are we? And secondly, what is our purpose? They're the questions that every person needs to figure out as a teenager. And as they work out who they are, there's two parts to this, you know, who am I question, right?

[2 : 38] Who am I like? And who am I not like? And they find people who like the same music or the same clothes or the same sport or the same hobby or the same TV show or something and they say, I'm a bit like these people.

And at the same time, they figure out, who am I not like? And the answer invariably is, my parents. And so we see teenagers separating a bit, right, from their parents, trying to find out who they are separate from their family identity and as we move towards some people and away from other people and figure out who we are in relation to others, right, that's a really normal part, necessary part of being a teenager.

And incidentally, that's why we've got youth leaders, right? There's a bunch of other Christian people around who aren't the parents, right? Adults hanging out with young people to deliberately say, hey, be like me.

This is what it looks like to follow Jesus, right, as they navigate these identity questions. The second question they're asking is, well, then, okay, who am I? How do I figure that one out?

And what's the point of life? What am I doing here? How does anything make any sense, right? If we're all just evolutionary accidents, then there's no extrinsic purpose.

[3 : 52] It doesn't really matter what you do. It doesn't matter what your purpose is. You just be and do whatever you feel is true for you, and then we wonder why we're so unhealthy as a culture.

We wonder why young people are so confused, right? But if there is an actual purpose, and you know who you are, what that purpose is, well, then it just clears the fog of confusion. It means that life does actually have some sort of meaning and significance.

You actually can choose wisely or unwisely accordingly. And so this passage has this wonderful, glorious news that we have an identity and we have a purpose and it doesn't rely on us.

You don't have to come up with it. You don't have to visualize it to achieve it. It's not based on your looks. It's not based on your genetics. It's not based on your ability. Your identity and purpose are given to us by God.

And it's this wonderful, glorious identity and purpose. So we're looking at these fundamental questions in this passage today. Who am I? What am I here for? And then thirdly, how do I live that out?

[4 : 51] And so 1 Peter has had this recurring theme of the sojourner. We have this inheritance kept for us in heaven because of the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

So we've been redeemed from our empty way of life, but we haven't made it to our inheritance yet. Here we are in this world now, but we're just sojourning. We're just traveling through.

We're not settling down. It's not our home. And so a lot of 1 Peter is saying, well, how do you actually live as this foreigner, as this traveler in the midst of this world? So three things in this passage, identity and purpose, and then living that out.

So firstly, let's have a look at our identity in verse 4. 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.

So Jesus is called a living stone. He's a stone. He's a steady, unmoving object, the one that you can build your life upon. And yet, he's living. He's raised from the dead as Lord of all.

[5 : 56] He's alive forever. And he's utterly dependable like a stone. And Jesus, this stone, is described in three different ways. He's a chosen and precious stone. He's a rejected stone.

And he's a stumbling stone. Each of these references draw from the Old Testament. And Peter is linking our identity with Jesus. Just as he is a living stone, so are we.

We are like him. Also chosen and precious. Also rejected. Also stumbling. Stone for others. We're connected to him. We're built on him.

So what does it mean for us to be living stones? Well, it means we belong to each other. We need each other in community. Just as stones in a wall need other stones around them to support them, join with them.

We're not being built into a random pile of individual bricks that get together once a week. But we're being built into something far more significant. A spiritual house. A house for God.

[6 : 56] A temple. A community. We belong to each other. And God is the one who's building us together. Which means if God is building us together, nothing is going to thwart that building.

There's no attack from outside. There's no sin from within that's ever going to stop this. We're not just another human institution muddling along. We are actually, as God's people, being built together by God himself.

We're going to come back to this idea of priesthood in verse 5 there. But jump to verse 6. See, Jesus is this living stone. Right? Gets fleshed out in more detail. Just as in verse 4, Jesus is called chosen and precious.

So, for it stands in Scripture, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone. A cornerstone chosen and precious. And whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. That comes from Isaiah 28. Isaiah 28, 16. God is warning those who take refuge in lies and shelter in falsehood. That actually, in the midst of all that, he is laying this precious cornerstone.

[7 : 58] Which has been, you know, plumb lined up with righteousness and justice. And those who think that they're actually, their safety is in lies, they're going to be swept away. But this stone is going to stand.

God has chosen Jesus as the precious cornerstone. God has laid him down. He's true. He's trustworthy. Whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. So, our identity, who are we? That comes directly from Jesus himself. We're dependent on him. He's trustworthy. He's been chosen. He's been placed by God for the very purpose that we might be built on him. And we're like him.

We're living stones built together by God to be his house. Where he dwells. And secondly, Jesus is described as the rejected stone. So, verse 7.

The honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Alright, so the quarrymen shape the stone, ship it to the builders.

[9 : 00] If there's a wonky cut stone, builders go, nah, send it back, get a different one. So, there's this picture of God's precious chosen Messiah, right? The one who's going to establish God's kingdom, bring salvation, fulfil all the hopes of Israel.

God has chosen him, precious. He's been cut exactly right. He comes to his people and he gets rejected. Now, you're the wrong shape. You're not the Messiah we're expecting. Go back.

God sent us the right one. And yet, this rejected Messiah has become the cornerstone. He is the one that God has placed as the foundation for his building. And so, this quote comes from Psalm 118.

And it's about this astonishing victory of God's king. Turned about in fortunes. And Jesus actually quotes this in the parable of the tenants and the vineyard in Matthew.

So, the rejected son is actually the victorious king. He is the solid cornerstone that everything is built on. So, he's rejected by men, but he's chosen by God.

[10 : 01] And if God has chosen this stone, what does that mean? What does it make you if you reject what he has chosen? Those who trust Jesus will receive honour, but those who do not believe are those who have rejected him.

They're shamed. They're made fools of. They've rejected the stone, but it's actually become the most important stone in the whole building. Peter's pointing to identity, but this time it's the negative side of things.

Who will we like? We're like Jesus. Who will we not like? We're not like those who've actually rejected the cornerstone. We're different to them. We're not like those who will be put to shame. We share in this astonishing change of our thing. Though we might be rejected by men, just as Jesus was, we're honoured by God because we belong to God.

It's wonderful news, isn't it? So, expect to be rejected by men, just as Jesus was. But know that your true identity is precious to God, and you'll never be put to shame.

[11 : 10] And thirdly, Jesus is called the stumbling stone. So, in verse 8, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. He isn't just pictured as this weird stone that doesn't seem to fit, that people want to send back, but he's actually pictured as this offensive stone, right?

This stone which is actually in people's way that causes them to stumble and to fall. This comes from Isaiah 8, where God is both this rock of safety and this deliberate trap for people to cause them to stumble and then to snare them.

Jesus is deliberately offensive to some. That's God's foreplay and design. And so, again, we're told that those who don't believe what they're like, and it's not who we are, right?

But verse 8, they stumble. Why? Because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. Just as Jesus was actually destined to be crucified in order to pay for the sins of the world, just as Judas was destined to betray him for a handful of silver, many others are destined to stumble and they disobey God's word.

God hasn't tucked Jesus in a corner and made faith a private matter. God has intentionally made Jesus into this stumbling stone, which causes those who disobey his word to stumble.

[12 : 28] He intentionally made this crucified peasant the saviour king, the ruler of the universe. He intentionally made this man unavoidable. You actually can't get on with life.

He has a claim that he rules over you. And if you say, no, I'm just going to ignore that, you've stumbled over him. You've disobeyed God's word.

You can't just get on with life. You either believe in him or you stumble over him. So who are we? We're the dwelling of God. We're being built together by him, built on Jesus, who's our living cornerstone.

We trust him. We imitate him. We belong to him and to each other. We're inseparably connected to Jesus. Who are we not like?

We're not like those who reject Jesus and stumble. We don't live like them. We don't imitate them. We don't belong to them. We belong to Jesus.

[13 : 29] And so we will never be put to shame. Wonderful encouragement. But we're not only called a spiritual house, this temple in which God lives, but we're also called the priests inside the temple.

So have a look at the second half of verse 5. You yourselves like living stones being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

And priesthood is this amazing privilege of actually being able to draw near to God. So in the Old Testament, you had tabernacle and it had a wall around it and then inside it, there was a tent and then inside that, there was the Holy of Holies with another curtain.

And only the priest could go into the presence of God to the altar to make sacrifices before God. We have the amazing privilege of coming right into the presence of God.

Jesus has opened the way for us that despite our sin, we can come directly before our God. No intermediary needed because Christ is interceding for us. And in Christ, our high priest, we are all made priests.

[14 : 35] So jump down to verse 9. It gets unpacked a bit more. Peter says, But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.

That comes out of Exodus 19. God has rescued his people from Egypt. He was taking them to the promised land. And he gave them this identity. This is who you are as my people that I've redeemed out of slavery, made into a people.

And now Peter is applying it to Christians. To us. We're chosen. We're royal. We're holy. So out of all the people, we have been chosen to be God's people.

To reign with Jesus, our King. To be set apart and devoted to God. What a wonderful calling to have in life. And it's not because we're awesome.

But it's because of God's incredible generosity and kindness. And 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.

[15 : 44] Which comes out of Hosea chapter 1 and chapter 2. God rejected his people. Cast them off. But then he said to them, he would again show them mercy. And again call them his people.

And again this is applied to Christians. We're not a people, but now we are a people. But we have received mercy now. Without God we wouldn't be a people. With a purpose. We'd just be a bunch of individuals.

Trying to create meaning. Out of life from our own heads. We'd be confused and lost as society around us. Like Israel, before God rescued them.

We'd still be slaves. Not to Egypt. But slaves to sin. But just as God had mercy on his people in the Old Testament. God has mercy and calls us together to be his.

To be a people. And that speaks to the core of who we are. Now the biggest and most important thing about you is not what you look like. It's not what job you do. It's not the relationships that you have as mother or brother or son or daughter or friend.

[16 : 46] But the most important thing about you is this. You belong to God. That's it. He's chosen you. And though people will reject you.

You'll never be put to shame. If you are his. Every believer is part of this new priesthood. Jesus is our high priest. He's gone to the heavenly temple. Bringing his own blood as a sacrifice.

Which covers over our sin. Intercedes for us. So we can actually come directly to God. We're chosen by God to be his. To be holy. To be this living demonstration of the mercy of God.

God. So who am I? Who are you? Deep down. Fundamentally. Under all the stuff I've gathered over the years. Under the masks that we wear at work or at church. Underneath our children's identity. Or our husbands. Or our wives. Or our parents. Underneath what we look like. What we do. With our time. Who am I? And if you come to Jesus. You're God's possession. Chosen by him.

[17 : 44] Just as Jesus was chosen by him. Deeply connected to Jesus. Different from those who reject him. A priest. In God's service. Knowing God's will. Able to come into his very presence.

To offer sacrifices. Which are actually pleasing to God. Which brings us to then. Our purpose. So. What am I here for?

What is my purpose in life? If life is just an evolutionary accident. Then. You're just going to have to invent your own meaning. If there is no resurrection. If there is no eternal life.

Then everything really does become meaningless. Right. And it's actually then. The young people. Who have no motivation. To do anything with their lives. Who see the logical implications. Most clearly. But for us.

Who have been ransomed. By the precious blood of Jesus. Who have this. Incredible new identity. Given to us by God. What's our purpose? It's given to us here. For us.

[18:37] In verse five. And in verse nine. So verse five. To offer spiritual sacrifices. Acceptable to God. Through Jesus Christ. God made us to be priests.

To offer these sacrifices. He's given us the identity. For this purpose. What does it mean? Gets unpacked more in verse nine. So verse nine. You're a chosen race.

A royal priesthood. A holy nation. A people for his own possession. Why? That you may proclaim the excellencies. Of him who called you out of darkness.

And into his marvelous light. And just as an aside. All these people coming up. And sharing about why they read the Bible. And how they read it. Like. Why do we need to read the Bible? How are you going to proclaim God's excellencies?

Unless you know them. And the more we read them. The more we can know Jesus. And his excellencies. And proclaim them. We are. As God's possessions. As his holy priesthood.

[19:35] To proclaim his excellencies. That's our purpose. Right? Our purpose is one of worship. And this actually comes from Isaiah 43. Peter's quoting again. Right? A people.

God made a people. For himself. To declare his praises. To acknowledge the goodness of God. The mercy of God. The excellencies. Of him who called us. Out of where? Out of darkness.

Out of being lost. Into. His marvelous light. Right? It's good to be in Christ. Is it good to walk in his light? To have life and identity wrapped up in Jesus himself who died for us.

Who rose again. Who lives internally. And so will we. Is that good? When we declare his praises. Share what's awesome about them. We do that in a sermon each week.

We do that when we sing together each week. We do that in prayer. We do that as we read God's word. We do it around our dinner tables. When we chat about what it means to follow Jesus. We do it when we speak to each other. About what God's done in our lives.

[20:34] When we share him with a work friend. Or a family member. We declare God's praises. Because he's praiseworthy. It's where we find meaning and purpose.

And this purpose will never actually stop. Even in a new creation. We're going to be proclaiming God's eternal excellencies for eternity. Maybe that sounds a little boring.

But it won't be. Think about it. If we can put it another way. Our purpose in life. To find the best. The greatest. The most glorious thing. That there actually is in life. And then go and enjoy that thing.

Enjoy that thing with each other. Who've also found this most glorious thing. And then tell everyone about the glory of this thing. So they can share in it too. But of course it's not a thing. It's God. And God found us.

Not we found him. And it's the God who makes holidays on tropical beaches. And makes beauty and rest. It's the God who makes that feeling of victory. When you score a goal in front of thousands of people.

[21:34] I don't know what that feeling is like. It's the God who created love. It's the security and comfort of knowing that you are truly loved and truly secure. It's the God who created wealth and freedom and joy and relaxation and safety and rest.

The most glorious thing in all of existence is the God who made us and then redeemed us by his son. And we're known and we're loved by him.

We have his seal of identity stamped onto us. We're chosen by him. With the purpose of enjoying him.

And praising his excellencies. Proclaiming the most excellent thing that there is. God himself. And that purpose is never going to get old or lame.

Even for all eternity. Because God is eternally and unlimitedly excellent. We were made to glorify God.

[22:33] We were made to take our eyes off ourselves. Get out of our own belly buttons. And actually fix them on the God who created us. Who redeemed us. Who chose us. Who loved us. Our God who brought us out of darkness and death and lostness.

And right into the presence of his glorious light. He's given us a new identity. He's given us a new community. He's given us a saviour. Who cannot be thwarted. He's given us a new living hope

which is guaranteed for us.

Stored up for us in heaven. Our purpose is to worship him. To declare his praises. That's not an odious or a burdensome task. Because he's praiseworthy. And it's there that life makes most sense. That's where we're living as God designed us. So what's my purpose? What am I here for? God has given us the identity of his people. His priesthood. His dwelling.

And with that he's given us this new purpose. To offer spiritual sacrifices. To declare his praises. So then. Living it out.

[23 : 34] God has told us his identity in this breathtaking imagery. Where his chosen, loved, cared for, joined together by him to be his dwelling. Designated to come right into his very presence as priest. He's given us this purpose. To offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim his entities.

But we're not in heaven yet. We're living here in this world as strangers. How do we live? And how we live comes from who we are. We're not like those who reject Jesus as the cornerstone.

So we don't live like them. We are like Jesus. We belong to him. We proclaim his glory. We imitate him. So have a look at verse 11. As Peter tells us what we're then to do.

Do you notice that it's not just a case of be good. Don't do this. Do do that. But he links it right back to our identity. This is how you live. Because of who you are.

So verse 11. Beloved, I urge you, as sojourners and exiles, to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Sojourners living in a place that's not their own.

[24 : 40] Exiles in a place they don't want to be in. Not their homeland. That's us. That's how we're to live. People who are away from our homeland, just visiting here.

And so live from that identity. The passions of the flesh are waging war against your soul. Right?

They're seeking to destroy you. And I take it these things, things like what's mentioned at the start of the chapter in verses 1, 2 and 3. And so malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander.

All those things which are so easy to do. So easy to get caught up in. So much part of this world.

That we actually don't belong to. So easy to forget that we're sojourners.

And think we're citizens of this world. It's easy to live like those around us, isn't it? Take the path of least resistance, doing what's easiest. Getting involved in slander. Finding ourselves caught in hypocrisy.

[25 : 38] Or whatever else it might be. But the encouragement is remember who you are. You have been redeemed from this empty way of life. For us who have been saved by Jesus' precious blood, we have a new identity.

We define ourselves against the world. I'm not like you. Therefore, I won't live like you. And it doesn't mean a rejection of people. Or a hatred of them or a withdrawal from society.

But rather, loving the people in this land in which we sojourn, just as Christ loved us. Living beautifully different lives among them. And we see this in the next verse, in verse 12.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable. So that when they speak against you as the evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. And what's interesting here, the word honourable and the word good are both translations of the word meaning good in a kind of beautiful, noble, honourable kind of way.

Same root word in the first half of calligraphy. Like good writing. Beautiful writing. This is kind of beauty to goodness. So here as Christians, we're to live with this beautiful conduct.

[26 : 54] This noble, this honourable, this good looking conduct. That people might see our beautiful deeds. Do you see the emphasis here? It's not a clench your teeth and be gooder.

Strive for this unreachable, abstract perfection and what the perfect person should be. But rather, it's live a life which is beautifully good. Live a life which comes from your identity in Jesus.

It's not this abstracted good, but it's personalised. Live in line with our cornerstone. Recognising his excellencies, proclaiming them both in your conduct and in your speech.

Living out who God has made you to be beautifully. And what is it saying here in verse 12? Well, that beauty won't be acknowledged. It'll be condemned. You'll be spoken of as evildoer.

An ugly blemish on society. A hater. Perhaps a bigot. They won't acknowledge your good deeds, but they'll see them. And it's through these good deeds, through this beautiful living, that they will glorify God when he comes.

[27 : 59] Now, there's two possible ways of understanding that. So one is, do your good deeds... Do they see your good deeds? And then, because they've seen that, they repent and voluntarily glorify God on the day of visitation?

Or is it a case that though they continue to speak against you, on that last day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. And people will admit in judgment, I did see the glory and the goodness of your deeds.

Even I rejected it. And their rejection, but their acknowledgement, will bring glory to God. I think it's most likely here that he's speaking of people voluntarily glorifying God when he comes.

That is, though they accuse you of evil, they will see your good deeds and they'll repent of their sins and they'll also trust Jesus. The reason I think that is because at the start of chapter 3, when it's talking about wives who are married to husbands that don't obey the word, it's the same kind of language, that through their conduct, they might win over their husbands.

So the idea is that our lives will be a testimony to the glory of God. Our lives will reflect that we're built in line with the cornerstone. That we're people who come directly into the presence of God to declare his praises.

[29 : 23] That our lives will be so different from those around us, so good and full of beauty, they will actually give glory to God on the last day. They'll deny it. They'll revile you for not joining their practices, for not settling down and being a citizen of the world.

But they will see that you're different. They will glorify God. So how do we live this beautiful, this different life? Well, 11 and 12 here kick off the next section of 1 Peter, where Peter unpacks what it means to abstain from the passions of our flesh, what it means to live good lives among the nations, without going into it too much, because that'll steal the thunder from next week.

The answer is submission. Godly, beautiful submission, which is powerful, which changes lives, which brings glory to God on the last day.

So Peter, here, is answering these fundamental questions of every teenager, but actually each one of us as well, isn't it?

Fundamental questions of our society as well. Who am I? Well, if you belong to Jesus, if you trust Jesus, you are God's.

[30 : 34] You belong to God, you're chosen, you're precious, just as Jesus is. You're dependent on Him. And you're not like those who reject Him. What's my purpose?

Well, to proclaim God's excellencies. And lastly, how is it that I live out my identity as a stranger, as a sojourner in this world? Well, live differently.

Don't live like you're a citizen here. Live like you belong to God. God's well-being. We're going to live like you belong to God differently, beautifully, in such a way that people who hate us will glorify God on the last day because of the way they've seen us live our lives for Jesus.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this incredible word that you've given us, that we can know who we are in the Lord Jesus, that just as He is a living stone, you've made us to be living stones, connected to Him, that we're a people that you've chosen that belong to you.

Thank you you've given us a purpose to proclaim your excellencies of which they are infinite. Thank you that we don't belong to this world, but we belong to you.

[31 : 53] Please help us to live now in this world as people who do belong to you, that our conduct might be obviously and beautifully different, living for your sake.

Amen.