

Your Identity is Weird

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Date: 14 May 2022

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[0:00] Bridget Jones arrived at her party to feel horribly out of place in her bunny costume. And as we looked at the first half of One Feet to One earlier, we were thinking about how we hate to feel weird, but how it's worth it, because of the amazing wealth, the utterly safe inheritance that we have in Jesus.

And I remember the last time I deliberately chose to dress differently from the crowd and make myself look odd. Not accidentally, I'm afraid that happens all the time, but on purpose. Last October, we were heading off for a week in the sun. Now, all of us know that October in London is when you start digging out the gloves and the skulls. It's properly parched, and noses are starting to run.

To be warm, you need proper ducats and woolly hats. Now, I was incredibly excited to get out of the country for some sunshine, but it did mean that I had to deal with what I'm going to trademark as the vacation dressing dilemma.

TM. Are you familiar with this? Basically, the vacation dressing dilemma, TM, states that when travelling from a cold country to a warm country, or vice versa, you can either dress appropriately for the country you're leaving, or the country you're arriving in.

[1:13] In one of the two, you're going to look and feel wrong. So I had the dilemma. Puppets and gloves would have made me feel rather conspicuous and uncomfortable as I arrived into the sunshine poolside.

I could just picture all the other guests washing around, coolly in catapans, and then me, bright pink, and melting under loads of goose sounds. So I dressed for my destination.

I willingly shivered as I tackled the tube in a floaty skirt, and I used my handbag space for funnies and sun cream instead of gloves. The journey, you see, was relatively short.

And after months of lockdown, my sights were locked on my future holiday. I wanted to fit in when I got there. I didn't really care how much of a weirdo I looked while I was on route.

And in this passage today, 1 Peter 1, verses 13 to 21, what Peter's basically doing is urging his readers to dress for their destination in heaven, and not for the journey, even if that means they get some strange looks along the way.

[2:16] In the second half of chapter 1 here, Peter builds on what he said in verses 1 to 12. He tells them not just that they don't need to worry about looking weird. Actually, he tells them that being weird is positively good, while being different is now at the core of their new identity.

And that's what we're going to look at now. If they and we are going to embrace feeling like ovals as we journey through life, there are three questions that we'll need to be sure of. And Peter's going to give us a very different set of answers for those we get from our non-Christian family.

And I've popped these on the handout. So we're going to look at verse 13. What's our focus?

What's our identity? In verses 14 to 16. And what's our value?

In verses 17 to 21. What's our focus? What's our identity? And what's our value? Let's start off in verse 13. You'll see it starts off with a therefore.

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. It starts off with a therefore.

[3:26] And so we know that the focus is going to flow out of everything Peter's been saying so far in verses 1 to 5 about the security of their future inheritance. And we've got three actions described.

We've got preparing your minds for action, being sober-minded, and setting your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

So what does this look like in practice? Well, I guess all of these describe a reorientation of the heart and mind. These Christians are to focus on their future, when Jesus will appear in glory, and

when they'll be with him in heaven.

Now, I wonder if any of you watched Emma Raducanu as she won the Women's Open tennis in the US. And as she stood holding the trophy, she told the world's press that she dreamed of this day since childhood.

She'd visualised every aspect. And since then, pundits have been lining up to explain that the reason she won was her extreme focus and hard work. From pre-cutting her racket strings, to having a different coach for every stroke, to training with heavier weights than most adults, the future she hoped for determined her actions.

[4 : 38] And this is true of other fields too. And when we know that financiers focus on their bonuses, academics set their hopes on tenure, even influencers are focused on obtaining fame, the futures they dream of determine their actions in the present.

And as Christians, we're to show the same focus. Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you as a revelation of Jesus Christ. Focus on the future.

Let's think about why Peter says set your hope fully. Well, I wonder what setting your hope partially might look like. Because isn't that what many of us are doing?

We know Jesus. Yes, we're waiting for him. But with a career safety net, if we've got children, we might urge them to follow him. But we hedge our bets and we hope for a good education and a place on the hockey team too.

Where is our hope set? Now, the US Open final was hugely gripping because until the last minute, it wasn't clear that Redi Parnie had won. Fernandez looked like she might just scrape a respite.

[5 : 44] But unlike tennis players or financiers waiting for their annual bonus figures, the end result for Christians is not in doubt. We saw in verses 4 to 5 that our reward is securely kept for us in heaven and that we, in turn, are being she-will-giv'd, guarded for it by the power of God.

So how much more should Christians keep going to claim their prize? So we don't prove this because we've got to earn our reward like Emma Ragicani. We've got it already.

The ticket and the holiday accommodation are booked and paid for with our name on it. But Peter says it's still hard work. He says be sober-minded or disciplined.

It's not a hobby like knitting to be picked up when you've got the time. The phrase prepare your minds for action literally means gird up the loins of your mind. It kind of evokes people gathering up long roads out of the way ready to labour in the fields or to fight.

We're exiles on a journey to claim a glorious inheritance, says Peter. And this should impact all of our life and work. It's something for us to remember every morning as we face the day as we deal with dishes, battle-free rush hour, hand-hold unreasonable clients or unreasonable followers.

[7 : 01] We can have assurance that our destiny isn't here. It's a glorious future. Jesus is our forever home. Not the overpriced rental or the mortgage we're enslaved to.

Not our career. Where do we focus? On the future. But as we journey through life, where do we find our identity? And this brings me to our second point.

Verses 14 to 16, what's our identity? After set your hope fully on grace, the next big command we come across is this.

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you this holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

Now, much has been made of Raducanu's multicultural identity of the Canadian-born Romanian Chinese living in the UK, and she attributes her mental toughness to her family.

[7 : 56] She credits her Chinese father-mother for instauring her with discipline, while acknowledging her father's sported tennis dreams growing up in communist Romania under Ceausescu.

So her identity and goals were clearly shaped by her parents. And that's true of all of us to some extent. But Peter says, if you're a Christian, you need to remember you've been born again to a living hope in verse 3.

This little phrase that we have here in verse 14, obedient children, literally means children of obedience. Now we've been fathered by obedience.

We've got a new family. And just as the DNA inherited from our parents and their nurture determined our old shape, we're now children of a heavenly father and called to be obedient. Because the defining characteristic of our heavenly dad is holiness, and we are called to be like him. The command, be holy, comes from Leviticus.

[8 : 55] And it doesn't just speak to the kind of moral purity, but to God's otherness, his distinctiveness from what surrounds him. We are to be separate, particularly from evil.

There's to be no moral darkness or compromise. Verse 14, those Christians are not to be shaped by our former sinful desires or passions of our former ignorance.

And we're no longer ignorant because the long-promised Jesus has been made manifest in the flesh. Have a quick look forward to verse 20. So we know what God looks like, and we are to be like him.

We're called to stand out from the crowd, to be weirdos even. Because, as we know, it will be costly when there's gossip around the water cooler, when our friends are getting drunk and focusing on their careers or their love lives.

Our different choices are likely to mark us out as obel. People will look as scant, they'll see the snipe. But we are to be holy as our Father is. Perhaps we're weary.

[10 : 02] People will go through periods of feeling tempted to conform as we walk through the wilderness. What does it matter? I mean, after all, we've got the ticket and we're going to get to our glorious destination.

We fear that if we're dressing for our destination, we're going to look rather strange while we're on the journey. We'll experience discomfort. But Jesus' death is more than a get-out-of-jail-free card that we can invoke in the endgame.

We're called to be holy because we're going to be with a holy God. What's our identity? Holy, like our Father. But it's easy to become discouraged in this sort of situation and feel rubbish when we're set out of step with the world around us.

And that takes me to my next one, verse 3. Let's have a look at verses 17 to 21. What is our value? Verses 17 to 21 give us a further motivation to keep on being weird as they explain that we're accountable for our holiness to God.

He is our benchmark. Take a look with me at the third big command of our passage in verse 17. Peter reminds us that we've got the immense privilege of calling God Father, but the same God is also our judge.

[11 : 38] And we need to conduct our lives in reverent fear of him. When the Israelites left Egypt and met God at Mount Saloni, they reacted with fear. As they saw God judge his enemies and rescue his people, they had a right fear of him.

When the disciples saw that Jesus had such immense power over nature, they felt fear. How we behave matters to God. In fact, his verdict is the only verdict that matters.

not our boss's appraisal, not our friend's admiration. When our fear of how others rate us stops us seeking up for Christ, we need to remember this.

We need to dress for the destination. God has spent the most precious thing in the world to give us this solid future with him. We no longer need to be betting on the tulip bubble of this world.

Back in verse 30, we saw that our conduct in the present is to be motivated by our futures in heaven. But also, Peter says, is to be motivated by what happened in the past.

[12 : 48] Look with me at verse 18. It says, you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

Note that past tense, you were ransomed. The focus of these first-century Christians had previously been on perishable, transient things, status, education, perhaps on building their own reputation.

But Jesus paid a price to three people for my life devoted to futile content. I've got huge admiration for the dedication of good sports people, but imagine devoting your whole life to hitting balls.

He said it. God sent his only son into the world. He lived a life of utter perfection, a spotless, holy man, and he died on the cross so that we might be forgiven.

And he did this, verse 20, for our sake, for the sake of you. As we realise how much we're worth, so we're to conduct ourselves through our exile in fear, in awe of God.

[13 : 59] The world's verdict doesn't matter because God has given us infinite value. Gold, famously, doesn't rust. But in verse 18, the shock is that Peter calls gold perishable in comparison with the precious blood of Jesus.

Verse 19. The Jesus who died for us, said we, that existed before the creation of the world. And remember, this is Peter saying this. Peter who knew him in the flesh, as Fiona was explaining last night, and betrayed him.

But he came down to earth and was made manifest so that we can have this amazing and secure hope in God. What a great privilege. passage. It's easy, I think, to feel rudderless as we re-enter normal life after lockdown.

Many of us are looking for a reset. This passage is a wonderful reminder of our goal, our identity, and our benchmarks. We're to dress for our destination, focus on our future in heaven when Jesus appears, model our identity on our Holy Father in heaven, and fear God's verdict on our everyday because he's the only judge of counsel.

Peter wants his readers to know that their past and future are bound up with Jesus so that they continue living for him today. He knows the past. Holy living will stand out and attract the peace. [15 : 25] But his overarching goal for them is to stand firm and keep on identifying as one of God's families. So what's our focus? Focus on the future.

In heaven, glorious and secure. What's our identity? Be holy like our dad. Be different from the crowd, just like our heavenly father. And what's our value?

The world may think we're weird, but we are chosen, infinitely precious to God. We are so loved and his verdict on us is the only one that counts.