

Living well on the way home - session 2

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Date: 19 May 2024

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[0 : 00] Every corporation has a tagline, a corporate identity, a strapline that helps explain what they're all about.

Obviously you can see what this is, but two of the most obvious straplines or identity, corporate identities, are the two of the hats, the Coca-Cola and the Pepsi that I've just put on there.

But they're very, very recognisable brands, aren't they? Well, we're turning now to think about corporate identity, the corporate identity of God's people.

What's distinctive about Grace Church and how will that affect how we live? Now, Andrew and I have just celebrated 30 years of marriage, but I still remember my family's shock when I told them that I wanted to promise to submit to my husband.

It was distinctive and definitely a point of discussion. Christians are different and will want to live distinctively, both individually and corporately.

[1 : 14] So we have three points on the handout. If we're Christians, then we're God's spiritual house, we're God's special possession, and we're a holy nation.

So first up, we're God's spiritual house, starting to look at verse 4 to 8. So there are two clear pictures here. People either centre their lives around Jesus or he's a stumbling block.

So either they are God's house, verse 4 to 7a, or those rejecting Jesus, 4b. And Jesus is at the heart of everything.

He's the living stone, the cornerstone, and the stumbling block. God's spiritual house, then, 4 to 7a, verse 4.

Jesus is a living stone, rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious. His people are living stones, verse 5, being built up into a spiritual house.

[2 : 25] They're a holy priesthood, living for God because of their connection to Jesus. Now in verse 6, Peter quotes from Isaiah to prove his point from the Old Testament.

Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone, chosen and precious. God is building his new covenant people, and he uses the picture of a building.

That foundation stone, or cornerstone, is Jesus. Whoever believes in him is part of his house and is part of a corporate unit.

Remember, you're God's spiritual house and live accordingly, he says. What does that look like? When the rubber hits the road, what's the corporate application?

It's things like serving together, loving each other, both practically and spiritually. Coming to church on a Sunday morning.

[3 : 27] It's not just a social club or hobby, is it? Going to Bible study. It's not just what you happen to do on a Tuesday night or a Thursday morning. Going to scallywags is serving non-Christians in the community, serving one another, and serving Jesus.

So remember who we are in Christ. We're his spiritual house, working together for his glory. So those rejecting Jesus, let's look at verses 7b to 8.

But for those who do not believe, Peter is turning to describe the unbelievers now. And he quotes Psalm 118.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. And from Isaiah 8, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. Those who reject him will find him a stumbling block.

These are people who have heard the word, verse 8. But they disobey it. They have turned away in disobedience, as God knew they would. So that's God's spiritual house.

[4 : 43] Second up, we're God's special possession. And we're looking at verses 9 and 10. In stark contrast, God's people are his special possession.

They've been chosen and called out of darkness to proclaim his excellencies. Verse 9. Notice the but here again. You are a chosen race.

He's painting a contrast here to those who have stumbled. He goes on, A royal priesthood. A holy nation. A people for his own possession.

The language is loaded with Old Testament imagery. Just as God had called his people out of Egypt in the Exodus.

The first century Christians are also God's people. His new covenant people. And what's your job, Christian? Answer. That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you.

[5 : 43] What has he called you from and to? Well, out of darkness into his marvellous light. Just think about each of those truths for a moment.

Our faithful creator has made the first century Christians, who were of no importance in the world's eyes, into a people for his own possession.

In Exodus 19, God had called his people, my treasured possession. The Lord is saying to these elect exiles that they too are his very own people.

Verse 10. God's people have received mercy, the forgiveness of sins, because of what the Lord Jesus has done. Now we're a people who can live together for him.

So what does that mean for them? And what does it mean for us? Answer. We're to remember and go on remembering who we are and why we were saved.

[6 : 50] To live for him together as his people and to proclaim his excellencies. So how do we put that into practice? Well, once we've remembered who we are, that will affect how we feel.

We're God's special possession. It will affect how we pray for ourselves, for each other and for outsiders. It will affect how we act too.

Corporately, we'll want to demonstrate love for each other and we'll want to reach out together to our friends and neighbours, our family, whatever that might look like for you.

It could be together at the school gate, for example, or through Scallywags, through your Bible study group, having socials with church family members so you meet each other's friends.

So Christians are God's spiritual house, God's special possession. And so we're to remember this, to remember why they then and we now are saved and to go on living for him as we tell others.

[8 : 02] Part three. We're a holy nation, so we're starting to look at verse 11. The next part of the letter is a series, I think, of three visual aids to help us navigate what it looks like to live out our identity in Christ.

This section in verse 11, you'll have noticed, starts beloved. These Christians are beloved by God and he's using strong language.

He says, I urge you as surgeons, that means strangers and exiles to... Abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

Verse 12. 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.

It's not a question of whether they speak against you, notice, it's when they speak against you. And what's the point of good deeds?

[9 : 10] Well, it's so that others can come to faith and glorify God themselves at the second coming. So let's look at these three visual aids, how to live in a very distinctive way amongst outsiders, and it's God's strategy to win people to himself.

So in the ESV, we get three B subjects. So verse 13, verse 18 and 3.1. Living first with regard to government, second with bosses at work, and third with non-Christian husbands.

Now, please don't understand me. There are many caveats to be made in this section. We live in a fallen world. Christians are not to obey those authorities if it goes against God's word or the law of the land.

Because God sees everything. But that said, let's have a look at what he says here. So one, government. Verse 13. Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution.

The Lord is powerful and he is sovereign over every institution. Government, both national and local, are put in place to punish evildoers, by and large.

[10 : 33] And that's still true here in the UK with our Christian heritage. Verse 15. The Christian's job is to submit in all circumstances and to do good.

If you do, it will put to silence the ignorance of foolish people, God's enemies. Verse 16. We're to live as servants of God.

Verse 17. Honour everyone. That is a big ask. Love the brotherhood or sisterhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor. We're to fear the right person, the Lord. To do good to all because we're part of God's family. Now there are plenty of caveats to obeying the government. But in this country, at the moment, we're called to obey the law. This is not the same for our brothers and sisters in many places overseas. Now back in the 1980s, when I became a Christian, Margaret Thatcher was in government and introduced the poll tax.

[11:40] Well, I paid the poll tax. But all my flatmates refused to pay it. And I'll never remember the look of bemusement on their faces when I tried to explain why I did pay it.

They could not get their heads around it at all. God's people are called to be different, to be distinctive. It's very distinctive in our day if we don't grumble about the government. But God wants us to live differently so that others may see the difference and perhaps come to worship him for themselves. And don't forget to love the brotherhood or sisterhood. What might that look like for you, for Grace Church as a whole? Perhaps today you could think of one very small way to show your love for your brothers and sisters in the church family. It could be absolutely anything. Second point. Bosses. Verse 18. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect.

[12:46] That means fear. We honour God if we respect those in authority over us in the workplace. If we're the ones at the water cooler, not bad-mouthing the boss at every opportunity, not grumbling.

That will be noticed by our work colleagues. Now here in the first century, many of the Christians were house slaves. In Roman times, that was an integral part of the culture. Some were treated well, but obviously others were not. Now we're not talking about people stealing here. We're not like the transatlantic slave trade.

The Bible is very clear and teaches against that. Rather, Peter is encouraging his Christian readers. Verse 19. For this is a gracious thing when mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

Christians are to remember that God sees everything and reminds them in verse 20. This is a gracious thing in the sight of God to suffer for doing good.

[13:53] We too are continued to be mindful of him and he sees it all. And let me say again, there are many caveats here. We're not to put up with unlawful or abusive behaviour, but we are called to subject ourselves to authority.

And how our generation seems to bulk against authority. The word submit is almost a dirty word. But how counter-cultural, when Christians do it.

It's noticed, it's distinctive, and it's precious in God's sight. Verses 21 to 25. Briefly here, Jesus leaves us as an example of how to suffer unjustly.

Verse 23. When he, that's Jesus, was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

What a beautiful picture. Of course, he's not only an example. He was a one-off sacrifice for his people. Verse 24. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that he might die to sin and live to righteousness.

[15:16] Peter can't help but to remind us that Christ died to save us, and that his people are called to follow a suffering servant, a saviour.

Number three, non-Christian husband. So, this is 3, 1 to 7. Now, this passage is addressed to wives who have non-Christian husbands.

And the wife is to be subject to her own husband, so that, verse 1, they might be won over without a word. Wives in this situation should not rebel against the non-believing husband, but instead should show, verse 2, respectful and pure conduct.

It's like saying she should aim to go above and beyond. Be such a good wife that he must see her goodness and wonder what drives it. The main thrust is to be like Sarah, Abraham's wife.

Submit, do good, and verse 6, do not fear anything that is frightening. You are to put your fear or your respect in the right place, and that's with God.

[16:24] On the whole theme of submitting, again, caveats apply. Wives are not to put up with unlawful treatment. Abuse is not something to live with, but is something to seek help about.

And we're all called to love one another in this area. But as we close this section, I just want to say, don't be put off by verse 7. It's addressed to Christian husbands.

If their prayers are not to be hindered, they're to live in an understanding way with their wives, who are generally physically weaker than them. Their wives are joint and equal spiritual heirs in the sight of God, so they must be treated accordingly.

So, we're a holy nation. We're to live distinctively, both individually and corporately. So, what about us in these scenarios? You might have recognised yourself already.

These verses help Christians to remember to fear God and him only. It empowers us to deal with injustice at the school gate or in the office.

[17 : 36] Remember, everything is in God's sight. We're to fear him as we live distinctively and try to witness to outsiders. Reading an autobiography or a biography of a Christian woman, like someone like Corrie ten Boom's *The Hiding Place*, might inspire us in some small way to try to honour God in the place where he's put us.

There's a book table over there, and I've brought loads of biographies with me, and they're all to borrow. There's no money needs to be exchanged. They're either mine or the bookstalls.

So, there are lots of books on Christian women right down the ages who have lived in this way as God's special possession. So, I do encourage you, if you fancy it, to borrow a book.

But our Saviour, the Lord Jesus, is our ultimate example of one who suffered to bring God glory, as we touched on earlier. So, we're God's people.

We're God's spiritual house. We're God's special possession. We're a holy nation. Going back to the tagline, I was wearing a Pepsi hat and a Coca-Cola hat earlier, if you missed it.

[18 : 56] And basically, we want to be known corporately as God's house, and to live accordingly in grateful thankfulness.

Whatever our individual life circumstances right now, together, we want to be distinctive. We'll submit to government, to bosses, to husbands, as we witness to outsiders.

All these things are counter-cultural, but they're beautiful in the sight of God, imperishable and precious. They're distinctive and will be noticed.

And we get to proclaim the excellencies of Jesus. We do it corporately as well as individually. If we, personally, or Grace Church Dulwich as a whole, had a tagline, perhaps it would be something like, keep your conduct honourable, which was verse 12, so that some others may see your good deeds and glorify God on that final day.

We'll do it emotionally. We'll do it tell you the same way as we consider ours. We'll take the clip and let it out people about the Trinity. And we've been able to show a way of increasing the relationship and bearing on purpose.

[20 : 18] And we've clearly done some frameworks because it's a way to arrange the picture and perspective, it's not a way to do it consistently. And we'll be as good as a false template. And we will prevent it from other butorang pandemic as weCO and that's how we can take this action.

And we're at the time to do it tomorrow.