

Our True Status in Christ

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Date: 26 July 2020

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[0 : 00] Well, it'd be great if you could grab your Bible again and turn with me back to 1 Peter chapter 2, if you've not turned there already, as we continue our series through Peter's first letter.

Well, I wonder whom you would say are the world's A-listers, you know, those sporting stars or celebrities, those red carpet types, the so-called chosen ones whom our world treats with honour. For me, this person on the next slide came to mind, Federer. He earned a cool \$106.3 million this year alone, even despite COVID cancelling some tournaments. That's pretty good.

Or there's Oprah. After giving this speech at the Oscars, she was even encouraged to run for president. I asked my wife whom she thought and she said, Brad. She didn't even call him Brad Pitt. She actually just said, oh, Brad. I tried not to get too jealous.

Or there's, of course, the Queen. She is seen as chosen and precious and is certainly treated with honour. Unrightly so, I suspect.

[1 : 25] But what about us Christians? Do you think we Christians would make the world's A-list? I doubt it. I doubt we'd make their B-list or even Z-list for that matter.

I mean, before COVID-19 took over the world, we've probably forgotten that we Christians were increasingly viewed in Melbourne as quaint and irrelevant nobodies at best and as intolerant, bigoted traditionalists at worst.

Which is why this time last year, not that long ago, the ABC had an article which on your screens said 71% of Australians think religious discrimination occurs in our country.

So clearly, we Christians wouldn't make the world's A-list, would we? And it was the same in Peter's day. Christians were ridiculed and rejected. They were persecuted for their faith.

And we'll see this in the coming weeks. But such suffering can tempt us to give up following Christ, can't it? In fact, even when life is hard and fatigue sets in from COVID, we can be tempted to keep or give up, keep coming to Christ each day.

[2 : 45] We can stop continuing to trust in Christ each day when life has gone pear-shaped and we can't see the way out and the solution. Or we can, you know, be tempted to give up, continue to pray through Christ when we're busy.

Or we can be tempted to give up, continue to live like Christ when we're tired and the kids are driving us mad with online schooling. You know, saying, our teachers don't do it like that. Just a random example, of course.

So today, Peter reminds us that despite suffering, whether it's the world's rejection or COVID life in general, it's worth continuing to come to Christ.

Why? Well, firstly, because Christ is God's ultimate A-lister. So point one on the outlines in verse four in your Bibles. He says, As you come to him, that is Christ, the living stone, rejected by humans, but chosen by God and precious to him.

So here in verse four, Jesus is referred to as a stone, probably because Peter is about to quote the Old Testament, which also talks about stones. But unlike a stone, Jesus is alive.

[4 : 07] As we were reminded in chapter one, he is risen from the dead. And so Peter calls him the living stone. And notice Jesus was rejected by people too.

Yet, verse four, he is chosen and precious to God. So while he may not make the world's A-list even today, he is God's ultimate A-lister, chosen and precious to God.

And God's list matters a whole lot more than the world's list, does it not? Now to back up this A-list status, Peter quotes the Old Testament in verse six.

So just skip ahead for a moment and have a look at verse six. He says, For in scripture it says, See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone.

Here Peter quotes from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. And did you notice how the words chosen and precious are repeated here? So despite being rejected by the world, God has made Jesus this cornerstone, which is itself a chosen and precious stone.

[5 : 26] You see, only one stone was chosen to be the cornerstone. And it was precious because all the other stones were built out and up from this chosen stone, as you can see on your screens there.

You see, the cornerstone is both chosen and precious. Or so to Christ. Because Christ was chosen to be the one through whom, by his death and resurrection, God would build the church.

And so Christ is both chosen and precious. Even more precious to God, if that were possible. You see, Jesus is God's ultimate A-list, God's most treasured possession, his most loved son.

Growing up, my wife had one particular teddy bear that was her treasured possession. So much so that when she left home and got married to me, she brought it with her. And she kept it safe all these years until just a couple of weeks ago, when it fell off our daughter's bed and one of the rabbits got loose and bit its head.

Here it is on your screens. It was a very sad day. You can see the chunk taken out of its head. And on the next screen, it's all bandaged up. But the point is, this is Michelle's chosen and precious teddy.

[6 : 51] And yet it is nothing compared to Jesus. In fact, I don't think it's possible for us to quite grasp how precious Jesus is to God.

Which makes God's love for us all the more amazing, doesn't it? That God would give up his most treasured and loved son to die for us sinners.

It's extraordinary, isn't it? But the point for Peter's readers is that Jesus may have been rejected by the world like they are, but he is God's ultimate A-lister.

So who better to keep coming to each day? Who better to keep trusting in even when life goes pear-shaped? Who better to keep following even when we're busy or fatigued?

And who better to even suffer for? There is no one better than the Lord Jesus, not on God's list, which is the only list that truly matters, isn't it?

[7 : 54] But in case that's not enough reason to keep coming to Christ, despite suffering, well, Peter shows us that in Christ we become God's A-listers too. So point two, and let me read again from verse four to five.

He says, Now Peter has packed lots here.

In fact, he's packed quite a bit into this short passage. So let me unpack it bit by bit. I first notice that as we come to Christ, we too are like living stones.

And the implication is that we too are chosen and precious. Although Peter doesn't use those words, he describes us in terms of becoming a spiritual house, that is temple, the place God dwells. For in Christ, God dwells in us by his spirit. You see, the moment we become a Christian is the moment God's spirit comes to live in us, to work through our conscience, prompting us to please God.

[9 : 18] Like when your conscience says you should tune into morning church, even though we'd all much prefer to stay warm in our comfy beds, it's freezing in here at the moment.

But the moment we believe in Jesus, the spirit comes to live in us, and we are built into a spiritual house, where God lives by his spirit.

But remember, Peter is writing to Christians. And so in verse four, he says, As you Christians come, present tense, to Christ.

In other words, he assumes that we Christians will keep coming to Christ each day. And as we do, we are built not into a spiritual house, because we actually already are, the moment we believe.

Perhaps better on your screens is the ESV version, which says we are built up as a spiritual house. In other words, as we keep coming to Christ, keep following him, we are built up in Christian maturity, as God's spiritual temple, the place he dwells.

[10 : 29] But either way, we are God's temple, the place his spirit lives. And that makes us A-listers, doesn't it? I mean, the glorious God of the universe is not going to dwell in some B-list accommodation, is he?

I remember when my wife Michelle and I were just married, I booked this place for our honeymoon on the north coast of New South Wales. And when we walked into the room, it was so small that we opened the door and it hit the corner of the bed.

You had to kind of push the door open. That's how small the room was. And it was so dirty that when we turned the light on, we saw several cockroaches run across the floor. This was no A-list place.

And so there was no way I was going to let my new bride dwell in this place, except for the first night, because I'd already paid for it. But after that, there was no way she was going to dwell here. Well, our sin made our hearts like that small, dirty room. Yet by trusting in Christ, we are forgiven and cleansed. We are made a big and clean A-list room where God is happy to dwell by his spirit. [11:47] In other words, built on Christ, the cornerstone, we become A-listers. An A-list place for God's spirit to dwell. And as we keep coming to Christ, we grow in maturity as that place.

And what's more, in Christ, we become not just God's place, but God's holy priests. Verse 5. Our priests were set apart with a privileged position and a special purpose.

A privileged position because only priests had such access to God. A special purpose because only priests could make acceptable sacrifices to God.

In our first reading, this privilege and purpose belonged to Israel, you remember. Out of all the other nations, only they were to be a kingdom of priests.

And within Israel, it belonged only to the tribe of Levi. Out of all the tribes of Israel, only they had such access to God at the temple and could bring acceptable sacrifices to God.

[12:56] But now in Christ, it's us. We have the privileged position of direct access to God in prayer, anytime, anywhere.

And we have the privilege or the special purpose of offering acceptable sacrifices to God. Not animals like the Levites did, but godly lives that praise his name.

And that's what Israel were to do in the Old Testament. To live such godly lives that praise his name that the other nations would see and be drawn to God.

And we see this idea of sacrifices and praising on your screens from Hebrews chapter 13. And we'll see it again later in our passage in verse 9. But the point is, in Christ, we become God's A-listers. His place. His priests. With privilege and purpose. So while the world may ridicule us, we will never be put to shame by the one who really matters.

[14:06] God. Remember verse 6? Have a look there again. It says, for in Scripture it says, See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him, Christ, will never be put to shame.

God will never put us to shame. Through Jesus, God instead forgives us and gives us freedom from sin and shame. Our sins are cleansed, wiped away, so that we no longer have to be ashamed by them in God's sight.

In fact, instead of shame, God gives us honour. Again, the NIV translation is a bit unfortunate here, because it literally says on your screens, Therefore, the honour, this is verse 7, I should say, The honour is to you who believe.

Honour to you, not shame. The honour of being his dwelling place and priests with privilege and purpose. This is what Christ gives us.

But only if we believe in him. Those who don't, well, we read in the rest of verse 7. Verse 7, Now honour to you who believe, but to those who do not believe, the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone that causes people to stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.

[15:46] For those who don't believe, Christ is a stone they have rejected, like a pebble in your shoe to get rid of. And since they reject Christ, then verse 8, he becomes a stumbling stone for them.

That is, they will face judgment. I don't know if you've heard of those ways of dividing the world into two types of people. You know, there's two types of people in the world.

There's dog people and cat people. Have you heard of this before? Or there's two types of people in the world. There's folders and crumpled, whether it comes to clothes or toilet paper.

Speaking of toilet paper, there's two types of people in the world on your screens. There's overs and unders. How you put the toilet roll. Or there's two types of people in the world.

Those who finish things, and those... I hope you got that one. But here, in our passage, there's two types of people in the world.

[16:43] Those who believe, and those who don't. And while those other categories don't matter a whole lot, you know, whether we believe... Sorry, whether we're a dog person or a cat person, it

really does matter whether we believe or not, doesn't it?

Because those who believe become God's A-listers. Verse 7, Honor is to you who believe. But those who don't will fall or stumble.

That is face judgment. Because, verse 7, they rejected Christ. Or because the rest of verse 8, do you see there? They stumble because they disobey the message, which is also what they were destined for.

You see, they stumble or face judgment because they disobey the message. And the message says, if you believe in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, then He will give you life eternal.

But they disobey that message. That is, they disbelieve or they refuse to believe in Jesus. So they will face judgment.

[17 : 57] This is their choice. And yet, verse 8 also says, it's what they were destined for. Now, I know people have problems with the topic of predestination and free will or our choice.

But here they are, side by side, in one verse. Half a verse, actually. We choose to believe or disbelieve, disobey.

And at the same time, God chooses. He destines who will believe or not believe. As I've said before, it's 100% God's choice, 100% our choice.

Bad maths, good theology. But because it is bad maths, it doesn't make sense to us, does it? How does it work? It's kind of like, how can Jesus be 100% human and 100% God at the same time?

But these things that don't make sense to us are actually good for us. For lots of reasons. But one of them being, they keep us humble. That is, they remind us that we're not God.

[19 : 11] Are you? I'm not. And so they force us to trust the one who is God. To whom all this does make sense. Our job is not to be God and to understand absolutely everything in the universe.

That job has already been taken. Our job, rather, is to act on all he has revealed and made sense to us. As Deuteronomy puts it on your screens, the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us.

And what has been revealed to us is this message about Jesus who died to pay for our sins and rose as Lord. And so which type of person are you?

Are you a person who believes or refuses to believe? For us who do, then do you realize that we are A-listers in God's eyes?

Honor is to you who believe. For built on Christ, we are God's place and priests with both privilege and purpose. What an honor!

[20 : 31] God's dwelling place, his very priests. So it's worth being a Christian. It's worth continuing to come to Christ each day. And to help us see how great it is, Peter basically says the same thing again.

Point three. Have a look at verse 9 and 10. He says, But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

I noticed a similar language that Peter has already used here. Chosen, priesthood, special. Here is his summary and our true status in Christ.

The celebrity or sporting A-lister may be the world's chosen ones, but we are gods. The people of God himself. and we are a royal priesthood.

[21 : 50] Meghan Markle did not have to marry Prince Harry to become royal and then have to fight for her privacy from the world. She could have just believed in Jesus and she would have gained even greater honour.

On the list that really matters, God's A-list. That's where we are. For we also are God's special possession.

Like Israel were in our first reading, God's treasured possession. Like Michelle's teddy bear is to her or better, like Christ is to God.

That's how special we are. Now, this shouldn't make us arrogant, as though, you know, we got tickets on ourselves, because we only become God's A-listers because of Christ.

As verse 9 says, we have been called out of darkness. We didn't find our own way out. God called us out. Or verse 10 says, we received mercy.

[22 : 53] We didn't deserve this status. It was mercifully given to us. All through Christ. And I think that's why Peter starts with Christ in verse 4, and then us, verse 5, then back to Christ, verse 6, to the end.

This back and forth shows our lives are bound up with His, you see. He is the cornerstone on whom we are built. He is God's ultimate A-lister who makes us A-listers too.

This is who we are. And so apart from believing, the first application is, do you see yourself as this? Because God does. When you look in the mirror, what do you see?

Do you see yourself as the world sees you? When I was on leave, I grew a bit of a beard, but there was almost as much grey hair as there was brown in my beard.

So every time I looked in the mirror, I saw someone getting old, and my children helpfully pointed it out too. But I don't know what it is when you look at yourself in the mirror, what you see.

[24 : 06] But the thing that determines our true status is not grey hair, or body weight, or white teeth, or nice clothes. It's Christ. He determines our primary identity, our true status, as God's place and priests with privilege and purpose, as God's chosen, royal, holy, honoured, precious people.

I mean, how many more adjectives, does Peter need to use to get the message across? This is our true A-list status in Christ. This is how we are to see ourselves.

This is what we are to remember about ourselves, so that secondly, we'll keep coming humbly to Christ. That is, we won't believe what the world tells us when it says we're quaint and outdated nobodies, or perhaps intolerant, bigoted traditionalists, but instead we'll keep coming humbly to Christ, even when we suffer rejection and ridicule, even if we suffer from the busyness or fatigue of COVID.

For the world only offers us moral darkness and judgment with confusion over identity and a status that is very fleeting.

I mean, when people grow old or lose their job or have mental health issues, the world takes your status from you very quickly. I've seen it happen, but not in Christ.

[25 : 46] We remain permanently on God's A-list status with light and hope, so why wouldn't you keep coming humbly to Him?

And thirdly, we are to remember our true status in Christ that we might also declare God's greatness. And that's our purpose, verse 9. We are made His precious people to declare God's praises, literally His excellencies, His greatness.

I mean, God gave His precious Son to die for us sinners and make us His treasured possession, as special as Christ is to God. Which means that like Michelle and her teddy, God will keep us safe, even from rabbits, until He brings us home to heaven.

And so if God has done all this for us, then how can we not declare His greatness? Whether it's to one another inside the church or to those outside the church.

Before this second lockdown, a guy from church was lamenting with a colleague at work about how bad COVID has been. But he also added, I'm finding church really helpful.

[27 : 03] By which he meant finding God, being reminded by the church about God's greatness really helpful. Now the comment wasn't more than that.

And he wasn't even trying to convert his colleague. It was just a simple and genuine declaration of God's greatness, which helped him to cope during COVID.

This is what we are to do as the opportunity arises. Or another person who was telling their Christian friends how encouraging they were found online church.

And not because we've been doing things well, but because they were reminded of God's greatness. I think his control over evil as we were doing our Genesis series on Joseph.

And they're reminded of this and they were declaring it like this so much so that their Christian friends have started tuning in to our services. Welcome if that's you.

[28 : 03] But the point is here is another person who was reminded of God's greatness in Christ. So they declared it. Whether to those inside the church or those outside, we are simply and genuinely to declare God's greatness.

And we're to keep coming to Christ each day who has made us God's A-listers. Let's pray we would. Let's pray. Our great God, we thank you for who you have made us to be in Christ.

May we remember our true status in him, that we might not believe the world's assessment of us, but continue to come to Christ each day, even if we are ridiculed.

busy or fatigued. And may we remember our true status in Christ, that we might simply and genuinely declare your praises whenever we can.
For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.