

Our True Status in Christ

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Preacher: Andrew Price

- [0 : 0 0] Coming back to the next question, the world's A-listers, who would you say they are? I had done this on your screens. I had Fed or Federer.
- He earned a cool \$106.3 million this year, even despite COVID cancelling tournaments and the like.
- Or perhaps you might have said for the basketball fans, LeBron James, he had \$88.2 million this year. Or from sporting stars to celebrities, Oprah.
- In fact, people encouraged her to run for president after she gave that speech there. I think it was at the Oscars. I asked my wife whom she thought, and she said, Brad.
- She didn't even say Brad Pitt. In fact, she actually went, Brad. I tried not to get too jealous. Or there's the next slide, the Queen.
- [0 : 5 6] She is seen as chosen and precious. Treated with honour. These are some of the world's A-listers. The so-called chosen ones. The red carpet types whom the world treats with honour.
- But what about Christians? Where do you think we Christians would make the world's list? Would we be on their A-list? I doubt it. I'm not even sure Christians would make the B-list or even the Z-list.
- I mean, before COVID-19 took over the world, we may have forgotten this, but it wasn't that long ago when increasingly Christians were viewed here in Melbourne, at best, as outdated and quaint nobodies, really.
- And at worst, intolerant, bigoted traditionalists. In fact, this time last year, the ABC released an article which is on your screens now.
- And it said 71% of Australians think religious discrimination occurs in our country. And so clearly we Christians wouldn't make the world's A-list, would we?
- [2 : 0 9] And it was the same in Peter's day. Christians were ridiculed and rejected. They were persecuted for their faith. I will see this in coming weeks. But such suffering can tempt someone 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 give up coming to Christ each day.
- You know, we can be tempted to give up continuing to trust in Christ when life has gone pear-shaped and we can't see how our problems will be resolved. Or we can be tempted to give up praying through Christ each day when the busyness of family life and work and everything else sets in.
- Or we can be tempted to stop continuing to live like Christ when we're tired and the kids are hassling us with online schooling. You know, saying things like, but our teachers don't do it that way.
- Just a random example, of course. So today, Peter reminds us that despite suffering, whether it's rejection or ridicule by the world, or even life under COVID in general, it's worth continuing to come to Christ.

- [3 : 34] Because firstly, Christ is God's ultimate A-lister. So at point one on your screens or outlines, then have a look at verse four in your Bibles.
- Verse four, it says, As you come to him, Christ, the living stone, rejected by humans, but chosen by God and precious to him.
- Here, Jesus is referred to as a stone. Probably because Peter will quote the Old Testament shortly, which speaks about stones. But unlike a stone, Jesus is alive.
- He's risen from the dead, as chapter one, verse three reminds us. And so he's rightly called a living stone. And notice Jesus was rejected by people too.
- Yet he is chosen and precious to God, it says. So while he may not make the world's A-list even today, he is God's ultimate A-lister.
- [4 : 40] The chosen one, the precious one. And to back this up, Peter quotes the Old Testament in verse six. I just skip ahead to verse six for a moment and have a look there.
- 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 the words chosen and precious there again? So despite Jesus being rejected by the world, God has made Jesus this precious chosen cornerstone.
- In fact, that's what a cornerstone is. It's chosen and precious. That's chosen because only one stone can be the cornerstone. It's chosen for that particular purpose.
- And it was precious because, like you can see on your screens, all the other stones were built out and up from this one chosen stone, which makes it a precious stone as well.
- [5 : 47] You see, the cornerstone is both chosen and precious. Also to Christ. For God chose Christ to be the one through whom, by his death and resurrection, he would grow the church.
- He would build us up and out. So Christ is both chosen and precious to God. He is God's ultimate A-lister.
- God's most treasured possession. His most loved son. Now the difficulty with talking to the children's minister about children's talks is sometimes you give them your own ideas.
- And so I'm going to talk about my wife's teddy bear, who was my wife's most treasured possession as well. And so much so that when she left home, like Michelle, she took her teddy with her and kept it safe all these years.
- Until a couple of weeks ago, when the teddy fell off our daughter's bed and the rabbits got loose and bit its head. Have a look on the slide.
- [6 : 55] You can see the big chunk taken out of its head. It was a very, very sad day. And here it is now, all bandaged up, recuperating.
- But the point is, Michelle's teddy was her chosen and precious treasured possession. And yet it's nothing compared to Christ, how Christ is to God.
- In fact, I don't think it's possible for us to quite grasp how precious Jesus is to God. Which makes it even more extraordinary that God would be willing to give him up and die for us.
- Doesn't it? But the point for Peter's readers is that Jesus may have been rejected by the world like they are. Jesus might have been treated like an exile 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?
- [8 : 03] 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. And that's the list that really matters, isn't it? But in case it's not enough, Peter also shows us that in Christ, we then become God's A-list too.

So point two on the screens or your outlines. And let me read again from verse four to five in your Bibles. As you come to Christ, the living stone, rejected by humans, but chosen by God and precious to him, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Now, Peter packs quite a bit into just these little verses. And in fact, this whole little passage. So let me unpack it bit by bit. At first notice, as we come to Christ, we too are like living stones.

And so the implication is, we too are chosen and precious to God. Although here, Peter uses different language. At first, he says we are becoming part of a spiritual house, the temple, the place God dwells.

[9 : 35] For in Christ, God dwells in us by his spirit. You see, the moment we become a Christian, it's the moment God's spirit lives in us to work through our conscience, prompting us to please God.

Like when your conscience says, you know, you should tune into church this morning, even when you'd prefer to stay in bed or do something else. Because man, is it cold in this church at the moment.

So the moment we believe in Jesus, we are built into a spiritual house where God lives by his spirit. But the thing here in these verses is we need to remember Peter is writing to Christians.

And verse 4 says, then, as you Christians come, present tense, to Christ. In other words, Peter assumes we will keep coming to Christ each day.

Keep trusting in him, listening and following him. And as we do, we are not so much built into a spiritual house, as the NIV says here, because that happens the moment we believe.

[10 : 50] Rather, as you can see on your screens, the way the ESV puts it, 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 house, the place he dwells. Either way, though, we are God's house. That place, he dwells by his spirit.

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 by his spirit, is he?

I remember when Michelle and I were married, I had booked a place for our honeymoon up on the north coast of New South Wales. And when we walked in, the room was so small that you open the door and it hit the corner of the bed.

You had to push the door open to get into the room. That's how small it was. And the room was so dirty that when we flicked the light on, we saw several cockroaches scamper across the floor.

[11 : 59] This was no A-list accommodation. And so I said, there's no way my new bride is going to be staying dwelling in this accommodation.

Well, except for the first night, because I'd already paid for the first night. But after that, no way. Well, our sin has made our hearts like that small, dirty room.

And yet by trusting in Jesus, we are forgiven and cleansed, made a big, clean room, an A-list room in which God can dwell by his spirit.

We are A-listers, built on Christ the cornerstone, an A-list place for God's spirit to dwell in. And not just an A-list place, but we also become his A-list priests, holy priests, verse 5.

You see, priests were set apart with a privileged position for a special purpose. A privileged position because only priests had access to God.

[13 : 06] And a special purpose because only priests could make sacrifices to God. In our first reading, this privilege and purpose belonged to Israel.

Out of all the nations of the world, only Israel were a kingdom of priests. Do you remember? And within Israel, it belonged to the tribe of Levi.

Out of all the tribes of Levi, only Levi, the Levites, were the priests. Who had the privilege of working in the temple and having such close access to God.

With the purpose of making acceptable sacrifices to God. But now in Christ, it's us, you see.

We become his priests. We have the privileged position of direct access to God in prayer, anytime, anywhere. And we have a special purpose to offer acceptable sacrifices to God.

[14 : 10] Not animals, of course, but godly lives that praise his name. Like we read on the next slide on your screens there in Hebrews 13.

Where the sacrifice of praise, fruit that openly professes his name. Or as we'll see in verse 9. You see, Israel were a kingdom of priests.

And they were to live godly lives that praised God's name. So that they would be a witness to the world. Well, that's the sacrifice we're to make these days. But the point is, in Christ, we become God's A-listers.

His place and his priests. With privilege and purpose. And so while the world may ridicule us. We will never be put to shame by the one who really matters.

God. Remember verse 6. For in scripture it says, See, I lay a stone in Zion. A chosen and precious cornerstone. Jesus.

[15 : 15] And the one, the person who trusts in Christ. Will never be put to shame. God will never put us to shame.

Through Jesus, God instead gives us forgiveness and freedom from sin and shame. He forgives our sin so that before him, in his eyes, we don't need to be ashamed of it anymore.

Which is incredible. And in fact, he doesn't just give us freedom from sin and shame. He also gives us honor instead. Verse 7.

Verse 7 in the NIV is a little unfortunate. It says, Now to you who believe this stone is precious. But it's literally on your screens. Verse 7 literally says, Therefore the honor is to you who believe.

The honor is to you. The honor of being his dwelling place and priests with privilege and purpose. This is what Christ gives us.

[16 : 20] But only if we believe in him. Those who don't, well, we read in the rest of verse 7 and 8. 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. Those who don't believe in Jesus. Well, they've rejected Jesus like the builders rejected Jesus.

And because they have rejected Jesus, then verse 8, He will cause them to stumble or fall. That is, he will cause them to 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 are dog people and cat people. Have you heard of this before? There's also two types of people in the world.

There's folders and scrunches. Now, when it comes to clothes or even toilet paper. Speaking of toilet paper, on your screens, there's two types of people in the world. There's unders and overs.

[17 : 25] How you hold the toilet roll. Or there's two types of people in the world. Those who finish things and those... I hope you got it. You have to think about that one.

But here, there are two types of people in the world. Those who believe and those who don't. Which type are you?

Because it may not matter if we are a dog person or a cat person. But it really matters if you believe or don't believe. Because those who believe become God's A-listers.

Honour is to you who believe. But those who don't will fall or stumble. That is, they will face judgment. Why?

Well, the rest of verse 8. They stumble because they disobey the message. Which is also what they were destined for.

[18 : 28] Do you see that? They stumble or face judgment because they disobey the message. Or verse 7, they've rejected the cornerstone. The message says, if you believe in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, then you will have life eternal.

And so to disobey that message is to not believe in Jesus. And they refuse to believe in Jesus. And so they will face judgment.

This is their choice. But hang on, verse 8 also says, it's what they were destined for. Now I know people have problems with this topic of predestination and free will or our choice.

But here they are, side by side in one verse. In fact, in half a verse. We choose to believe or not disobey the message either way.

That's what it says. It's their choice. And at the same time, God chooses or destines who believes and who doesn't. As I've said before, it's 100% God's choice and 100% our choice.

[19 : 42] Bad maths, good theology. But because it is bad maths, it doesn't make sense to us, does it? How can this work? How can this be? It's a bit like, how can Jesus be 100% human and 100% God at the same time?

And yet these few things in the Bible that don't make sense to us are actually good for us. For lots of reasons, including because they keep us humble.

They remind us that we are not God who understands everything. I mean, are you God? I'm not. Instead, they force us to trust in the one who is God and to whom all these things do make sense.

Our job is not to be God. That job is already taken. Our job is to, well, to act on all the things he has revealed to us that has made sense to us.

As it says in Deuteronomy on your screens there, the secret things belong to the Lord, our God. But the things revealed belong to us.

[20 : 57] And what has been revealed? Well, the message about Jesus, who paid for our sins at the cross and rose as Lord.

And so which type of person are you? A person who believes or not? And for us who do believe, then do you realize that we are A-listers in God's eyes?

Honour is to you who believe. For built on Christ, we are God's place and priests with both privilege and purpose.

What an honour is that? And 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, but in different words.

Well, actually, some different words. So point three, verse nine. But you who believe 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.

[22 : 09] 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. Notice here the similar language that Peter has already used.

Chosen, holy, priesthood. Here is his summary. Here is our true status as Christians. The celebrity or sporting A-lister may be the world's chosen ones, but we are gods.

And doesn't God trump the world? We are the people of God himself. And in fact, we are a royal priesthood too.

You know, Meghan Markle didn't have to marry Prince Harry to become royal and then fight for her privacy from the world. She could have just believed in Jesus and been given even greater honour.

What's more, we are God's special possession, it says here. Like Israel in our first reading, where Israel was God's treasured possession.

[23 : 19] Or like Michelle's teddy bear, both my Michelle and Michelle Carolina's teddy bear, they're treasured possessions. Or better, like Christ is God's treasured possession.

That's what we are now too. We are as special to God as Jesus is. Is that extraordinary? Now this shouldn't make us arrogant.

Because we need to remember that we are only God's A-listers because of Christ, aren't we? As verse 9 says, we've been called out of darkness. We didn't find our own way out of darkness.

Or verse 10 says, we received mercy. We didn't earn the status. But God has given it to us mercifully through Christ.

And I think that's why Peter kind of chops and changes between talking about Jesus and talking about us. So on your screens, verse 4, he talks about Jesus. Then in verse 5, he switches to us.

[24 : 18] And then verse 6, back to Jesus as a cornerstone. And then the rest of the passage back to us. This back and forth shows our lives are intertwined or bound up with Jesus.

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, is this how you see yourself?

Because God does. You know, is this what you see when you look in the mirror? Do you see yourself with this status? Or do you see yourself as the world says we are?

When I was on leave, I grew a bit of a beard. But there was almost as much grey hair as there was brown hair in it. And so when I looked in the mirror, I saw someone who's getting on.

And my kids helpfully pointed it out too. Thank you very much. I don't know what you see when you look in the mirror. But the thing that determines our true status, our true identity, it's not grey hair.

[25 : 31] It's not body weight. It's not white teeth. It's not the job we have, the house we live in. It's Christ. He determines our primary identity, our true status.

As God's place and priests with privilege and purpose. God's chosen, royal, holy, honoured, precious people. How many more adjectives does Peter need to use to get the point 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 might keep coming humbly to Christ.

We won't believe what the world tells us when they call us quaint, outdated nobodies or intolerant, bigoted traditionalists.

But instead, we'll keep coming humbly to Christ who's given us our true identity. Even when we suffer rejection and ridicule from the world.

[26 : 46] And even if we suffer from busyness or fatigue under COVID. For the world only offers us moral darkness and judgment with confusion over identity and a status that is very fleeting.

I mean, as soon as you get old or you lose your job or you have mental health issues, whatever status you had in the world often gets lost, doesn't it?

I've sadly seen it happen. But God gives us a permanent A-list status in Christ with light and hope.

And so how can we not keep coming to Him? And thirdly, we're to remember our true status in Christ that we might declare God's greatness.

Remember verse 9? That's our purpose. Or even verse 5, that's part of our purpose. The sacrifice, part of the sacrifices we offer. We are made His precious people, verse 9, to declare God's praises.

[27 : 55] Literally, His excellencies. His greatness. I mean, God gave His precious Son to die for us sinners and make us His treasured possession.

Make us as special as Christ. God's praises. He's as special as Christ. Which means, like Michelle and her teddy, He will keep us safe, even from rabbits, until He brings us home to heaven.

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

Before the second lockdown, a guy from church was lamenting with a colleague at work about the COVID situation. But he also added, I'm finding my church really helpful.

By which you meet God. I mean, that's what non-Christians think of church. It has to do with God. And rightly so. For when he tuned into church, he was reminded of God.

[29 : 00] Now, the comment wasn't more than that. And he wasn't even trying to convert his colleague, actually. It was just a simple and genuine declaration of God's greatness that helped him cope during COVID.

This is what we are to do as the opportunity arises. Or another person who's telling their Christian friends about how encouraging they've found online church because it reminded them of God's greatness.

Like His control over evil, which we saw a lot of during our series through Genesis and Joseph. And they declared God's greatness so much so that their Christian friends have even started tuning into the service.

Welcome, if that's you. But the point is, here is another person who is reminded of God's greatness in Christ and so declared it. Whether it's to those inside the church or those outside the church, we are to simply and genuinely declare God's greatness.

And we are to keep coming to Christ each day who has made us God's A-listers. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for whom you have made us to be in Christ.

[30 : 20] 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 when we can. For we ask it all in Jesus' name.

Amen.