

The Pure Love and Mercy of God

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Date: 05 May 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Heavenly Father, as always, we come to your word as people seeking by your strength to be humble, so that we can hear your word and then obey your word.

Lord, this morning we're talking about, we're reading about and talking about who we are in you and what that means for our lives, but also for the communities and the neighborhoods we live in.

Lord, for this, on one hand, it is a great joy to our lives, it is gas in our tank, so to speak, but on the other hand, it will require courage.

Lord, will you give us that courage that is found in the confidence in you, that above all, you are unchanging, even the things that we might put our hope and trust in, in this temporal life, can be shaken, but you alone can't be shaken.

So Lord, remind us of that afresh this morning. We pray this as your people. Amen. Amen. If you have a Bible, you can turn with me to 1 Peter chapter 2, 4 to 10.

[1 : 1 6] There's some Bibles at the back still, if you forgot yours, if you want a physical Bible, feel free to grab it at any time. Identity, it's a big thing.

We are struggling through, it would seem, multiple fronts of identity crisis in our society. People are unmoored from the past.

Oftentimes, they're also unmoored from the present. They struggle with family, not understanding their place, feeling out of place in their communities, in their schools, in their workplaces, in their bodies in some cases.

A lack of identity is a very dangerous thing. We are defined by the things we are connected to.

Our families, our workplaces, our friendship groups, our affinity groups, our hobbies that we keep. And when those things come under threat, or we put too much emphasis in them, our identities can get shaken in a very big way.

[2 : 3 3] We're unsure of who we are. It's important to consider this because our text today discusses identity, but specifically the identity that we have in Christ if we have put our faith and trust and our hope in Him.

If you remember, 1 Peter is this letter written, quite possibly 30-ish years, give or take, after Jesus' crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension.

Peter, who has written this, was one of the chief disciples. Lots of bravado. Said he's going to follow Jesus right to the end, and then in Jesus' time of need, he scatters.

He buckles under the pressure. And now he is writing a letter to a whole grouping of churches in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, and telling them, listen, your hope and your trust and your identity is in Christ.

And it's going to mean that you're going to be a resident alien, a foreigner in your own land, a sojourner, even though you are a born citizen of Rome. You are actually a citizen now of heaven.

[3 : 48] This has implications. We get to the section of 1 Peter 2 this morning, verses 4 and 10, where we start to see, Peter starts to teach us, that this identity in Christ, it is far greater than anything our collective minds in here, or our collective minds as humanity, could ever imagine.

Our greatest needs are met. Our deepest hopes and longings are found. But in Christ, Peter will share this morning in our text.

Actually, I'll share this morning in our text, but we'll read Peter in this letter. It is rooted in Jesus Christ, in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So much so that all other relationships, all other sources of identity are but a shadow of the identity we get in Christ.

For those who are Christians, our identity, first and foremost, is union with God. And then, Peter will tell us that as people who are united with God, we have a destiny towards God, for God.

[5 : 13] And then finally, all of this is the result in the mercy that God extends to us. So we see we are united with God, we are destined for God, and we receive mercy from God.

If you have a Bible, turn with me. Starting in verse 4, we're looking at verse 4, 5, 6, and then the first part of verse 7. So 4 to 7a, if you want to call it that.

This is what it says. 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. For the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

In the ancient world, a temple was the holy place. The idea of a temple isn't specific to the Old Testament. The temple motif was found across the ancient worlds.

[6 : 39] And it was a holy place where humans would interact with a god or the gods. It was an embassy of heaven upon the earth, so to speak. That helps us visualize kind of the idea that this is the place where man meets God.

The barrier between heaven and earth is thin. Priests would be the people that would do the temple things.

Priests would offer prayers, services, sacrifices designed to appease, atone, and praise the gods.

And like I mentioned, we see this in the Bible with the tabernacle first, that's in the desert, this tent of meeting, and then the temple in Jerusalem, the meeting place of God and his people.

It was, in the Bible, the physical representation of God's presence amongst his people, and for all people, really, who sought to worship the one true God according to his revelation and his good design.

[7 : 46] But by Jesus' time, in the first century, the temple became an industry for monetary gain under the guise of spirituality. Think about Jesus cleansing the temple.

He sees what bothers him, this trading that's happening, the type of usury and exploitation, and it was a horrendous sight, and he flips over the tables, and he says that the temple, the house of God, has become a den of thieves.

The temple no longer functioned as God intended it to function. It's actually a very sad state of affairs. God, through first David and then Solomon, the first temple was created, and it was a sight to behold.

Sin happened, the people were exiled, the first temple destroyed, the second temple was built, and the hope was with the second temple. Eternal reign of God's people would happen in Jerusalem.

Rome would be destroyed, all other powers would be destroyed. Jerusalem, according to their reading of scriptures, God's people, the Israelites, Jerusalem would be the HQ of God on earth.

[9 : 08] But the second temple was never, that never happened, it was never realized. Jesus instead sees the temple as completely, completely perverted.

The great irony is that, well, Jesus was killed for this. I mean, among other things, for claiming to be God, of course, but messing with the temple, he was killed for this.

And the great irony is that he was killed, among other things, for cleansing the temple by people seeking to protect the temple, and by doing so, through his death and resurrection, Jesus built the new and eternal temple, which is the church, where God's presence now resides on earth, but not in a house built with stone, but in his mystical body, the church.

So, what on earth does this mean? What does this look like? When we receive Christ's salvation, we become so associated with Jesus that we are united to him.

The biblical language, interestingly, of the Christian, by far, the most widely used term in the New Testament is in Christ.

[10 : 30] Christian, the term Christian is used three times. It doesn't mean we should change, not be called Christians. I think Christians, it points to being in Christ, but the Bible wants to hammer home the reality that we are now united to Jesus.

We are in him. We're not a part of him. We're not buddies with him. We're not, we don't have greater access to him like if we knew a celebrity and we could have dinner at their place.

that is like a, that's like an adjacent relationship. Like, it says that in scripture, we are in him. It's hard for us to understand.

So the Bible uses analogous language like a head and a body. We can understand that. A head and a body is one.

A bridegroom and his bride. They become one flesh when they are married and there's consummation. Talks about a vine and a branch. Also talks about a temple and stones to describe this idea of union with Christ.

[11 : 40] And the idea of temple and stones being this analogous you know, language used to describe our now new identity connection with Christ through his life, death, and resurrection.

It's very helpful for us today. Because this is what Peter will get at. So when we see, when we seek the Lord and come to him by faith, Jesus is described as this living stone that was rejected by mankind.

We become a part of the very temple of God that he builds, that he is the cornerstone of. The cornerstone being the piece of stone perfectly cut rock solid and not because it is a stone but because it is a very high quality tough material.

We're not talking lime so to speak where it's crumbly but the chief cornerstone that if it is not set right the rest of the building is not going to be foundationally sound or it's going to be off off its foundation it's not going to function the way it ought to.

If you want to talk about this stuff a bit more, Steve is our resident engineer. He could help you understand it. I don't have my PhD in engineering. I don't have a PhD so the capstone though is an important, it's an important feature of the temple.

[13 : 09] Without it the temple doesn't exist. And it says here that this chief cornerstone which is Christ is the capstone upon which then we are built.

Christ is both the presence of God that resides in the temple but he is also the chief cornerstone upon which we are then built upon which interestingly speaks to both Jesus' divinity him being where his presence resides but also his humanity that he is also a part of this church.

Notice the language used to describe Jesus is also applied to us. Living stones we are also called living stones. Jesus is called the temple we are called the spiritual house.

Jesus is chosen by God and precious if you read down in verse 9 it says that we are chosen by God. Jesus is honored by God and by virtue of him being honored by God the Father we are honored as well.

We will not be put to shame. Friends God in Christ has so deeply associated himself with us not us associating ourselves with him firstly but him associating himself with us so much so that he joined the human race and chose us to be his very temple the place where his spirit will reside.

[14 : 45] This is our new identity we are in Christ we are united to him but I mentioned before about the nature of temples they're a place where people do business with God and a part of that is sacrifices so what's the deal with sacrifices are there sacrifices in this spiritual temple we look here in verse sorry in verse 5 it says you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood interesting here to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ we believe that Jesus sacrificed himself once and for all on the cross of Christ there is no other penalty to be paid that Jesus didn't pay there's no more sacrifices we need to do except that we are a temple temples are the places where sacrifices go down and here Peter is saying yes you're a temple and sacrifices are going to happen but listen sacrifices have changed now you sacrifice not an animal not at a certain time of the year but all the time by sacrificing your very lives in what submitting yourself to God and we see what the sacrifice looks like the second part of verse 9 it says this read all of verse 9 but you are a chosen race a royal priesthood a holy nation a people for his own possession here it is that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light the sacrifices that we give are sacrifices of praise of thanksgiving of service of obedience from a place of being united in Christ verse 9 it says we are we are the new priesthood we are the people now that do business with God directly

I'm not an intermediary for you I have a special role in the church but you don't confess to me and then I go to God you go to God because of Christ we are priests in God's kingdom and we offer sacrifices of praise to him we have this new identity as priests as the temple as the living stones all because we are united to Jesus and all of a sudden we start to realize that Jesus' life and death and resurrection his ascension that becomes normative for us now I'm not saying that we become little Jesus's but we can't speak of Jesus as the head without also talking about his body which is the church I mean there's like infinitely more to say about this but understand that now your lives are so in a good way tangled up with Christ the very idea is where again there's a place of differentiating us and

Christ of course but but it's so tangled up where does he begin and where do we end it's everything he does we do his destiny is our destiny his very spirit resides in us his ministry is our ministry we are united to Christ it's our new identity and it supersedes all other identities we have a new lineage so to speak we have been made citizens of heaven and that is going to change our earthly relationships it has to it doesn't mean as we've seen in previous weeks that we do away with our earthly relationships but our earthly relationships become properly ordered and we live lives of service proclaiming the good news as we saw the second part of verse nine proclaiming the good news the excellencies of Christ wherever we go but this brings us to our second point what does it mean to live as people destined for heaven here on earth so look with me at verses seven and eight so the honor is for you who believe but for those who do not believe the stone that the builders rejected has become the corner stone and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense they stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do as

God's people united to Christ we live in an unbelieving world and so we feel that we are that we belong but we don't belong we have a place but we are out of place and as such we are destined for eternity and we pray your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven and we seek by God's strength to see that come to pass we proclaim the goodness of God we fight and advocate for the virtues of heaven we fight for life we fight for truth we fight for justice we fight for those that cannot fight for themselves but we will get pushback here in verses 7 and 8 Peter is insinuating that either you are for Jesus or you are against

Jesus that there is no neutrality there is no neutral stance with Christ he is either the chief cornerstone in your life or he is a stumbling block either you accept Christ as your Lord and Savior and are honored or you reject him and are shamed rejection of Christ here is not an amoral decision it is sin it is disobedience and will result as it continues in eternal shame and this is hard to stomach even for some of us here today because we have fantastic friends and even some family who are lovely people that just reject Jesus and seem to be kind of immoral about it they support us but it's for us and not for them and it's hard to stomach this a big part of that is because well we love the people that we are connected to but we are also conditioned thoroughly in a culture that is pluralistic and overly tolerant but just know that

[21 : 31] Peter is writing for a society that was equally that this was equally unpalatable towards in the first century there wasn't a pluralistic secularism but there was polytheism and the call here is when you come to Christ in faith all of the family gods are put away forever you have to forsake them it's not just you have your family gods and then you can tack on the worship of Caesar or of Jupiter or Aphrodite or whoever you just kind of add another god to your prayers it's fine what Peter is saying is a very unpalatable thing in the first century as well as for us today and it may be even more difficult to stomach because verse 8 seems to imply that those who reject Christ were somehow sovereignly appointed to eternal shame and this begs the question or or the the frustrating exclamation that is not fair it is not fair that that verse 8 would somehow imply that God has sovereignly sent people to eternal damnation can someone be held truly accountable for their actions for rejecting

Christ if God fated them to do so well why don't we take about five minutes and jump right into it right into the weeds let's see what we can pull out of scripture say this right off the bat there's a huge difference between destiny and fate fate the idea that everything is predetermined and choice is only an illusion think of the the the Greek writings of Oedipus the king Oedipus is told that he will he will be with his mother and murder his father and he goes to a distant land and it turns out that he does exactly that he was fated to there's nothing he could have done to avoid his fate but this is not a Christian belief this is a type of determinism that the

Bible just does not authorize in any kind of way rather the scriptures speak of destiny that certain people are destined to do this or to believe that so an example if I eat a sleeve of Oreos bag of chips wash it down with a two liter of coke every night I am destined for diabetes I am destined for cardiovascular disease I am destined to not live a healthy life and you say well you know my great uncle lived to 95 doing that well good for your great uncle it's not the case for all of us we are destined to suffer for that but it's not fate we're not fated we turn it around we there's some intervention we start eating healthy and exercising we try our best I mean there might be some irreversible damage but by and large we can we can get out of ruts we are not fated for a specific end likewise a life of disobedience of

God's law a disregarding of the morality and the eternity that he has placed in our hearts and the rejection of his son will destin us to eternal shame by the way Peter isn't here saying that listen one time you reject the son it's over he's not making a comment about about the the quantity of rejections we may know people that seem to have been wayward for years and then it's like not overnight but maybe overnight they come to faith and their destiny has shifted but nevertheless if there is an ongoing rejection of the son the destiny is hell the scriptures say it's damnation it's eternal shame and friends this is our destiny all of us apart from Christ in fact if it were not for

Christ this would be our fate because if fate is this predetermination sin had so thoroughly corrupted and bent our souls that there was nothing we could do in ourselves or in the outside world to do whether it be merits or good deeds or whatever it could to change our fate but through Christ dying on our behalf he changes all of that we should we should be predetermined to live out this moral life and then be shamed forever and yet God changes that for any who would put their faith in him and yet to believe in God and to accept his son as Lord and savior is not merely a rational decision I mean it takes our intellect of course but it's not merely a matter of human agency but it takes

[27 : 15] God's very spirit to awaken us why because the scriptures make it clear we were dead in our sins it's Ephesians 2 the big thrust of Ephesians 2 that we had no ability to choose or to embrace God in and of ourselves we needed his help and his prompting to give us new life and help us to believe but still does that answer the question about it being fair because it would seem then that if God has awakened me but not my family member then he is still in a sense damning them to eternal shame so what's the problem with that line of thinking of saying it's not fair God the son of God takes on human flesh he dies and rises again to show us what eternal mercy looks like and he does this out of pure love as an expression of his mercy and if it was to make things fair then it wouldn't be out of pure love if it was because of your pedigree or the family you came from or the good things you did it would not be because of love it would be because of compulsion or obligation but God does not have obligations friends to rebels he does not have favorites he is not in anyone's debts he needs nothing and is complete in every way what we have here is something altogether different

God has chosen his precious son to be the vehicle of salvation of the human race so that he honors those who honors his son and ultimately those who continually reject his son will be rejected and if you believe you are destined to obey and enjoy eternal honor but if you reject his call on your life then friends there's nothing that can be done what this text is not implying is that God fates people to damnation but rather those who reject God are destined to damnation so if you still feel this is a raw deal and it might be in your mind that's totally fine and you feel an uneasiness about the matter it might be a good sign that the Lord's at work in your heart two reasons real quickly the first you're wrestling with the mystery of God's salvation that is extended and that's a good thing it is a good thing for the human race to do to try to come to grips with mystery is always hard and difficult to figure out and will remain by and large a mystery we can't exhaust the knowledge of God why he picks some and he picks others it's not we know it's not based on favoritism it is not based on obligation it's based on pure love but why this one not this one

I don't know I don't know we wrestle with that mystery and that's a good thing it is a really good thing to wrestle with it it recognizes that there is a God and you are not him the second thing God may be opening your eyes to the utter fallacy that we are entitled to salvation we are not entitled to salvation again if we were it wouldn't be an act of love that God extends to us and we would have the ability potentially to save ourselves to bring salvation by our own doing this means also this idea of fairness is is just not something the Bible communicates God extends love and pure love and a pure love that he extends and the pride that so quickly bubbles up in our hearts cannot be bedfellows they can't be they can't be married they can't be connected so this is the process of

God making you and I humble to both accept his salvation and bend a knee to his word no matter how difficult the process may be and this friends it is a sign that he is at work in your life we wrestle with God it's the God we worship we wrestle with him I'm sure there's more to say and if you have questions or pushback I honestly I broad shoulders talk to me about it after the service or send me an email I'd be happy to talk more but we'll move on a verse like verse eight can make God seem like a moral monster but God's mercy and love friends it's far greater and more expansive than we could ever fathom why because he's made rebels his friends he has united people that have no business being in his presence he's united them to his very son his precious and chosen son and this is because of mercy so God extends mercy towards us and this will be our last point and we'll wrap it up with this look with me at verses nine and ten but you are a chosen race a royal priesthood a holy nation a people from for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light verse ten 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 we are described with five titles here chosen people a royal priesthood a holy nation a possession for God and recipients of God's mercy five week study five year study we can't go into it but we're given five titles and what I want to draw your attention to is that these five titles these five things that we are now called for those that are in Christ it is what God's people have always been called the ancient Israelites that have put their faith and followed God well they were they were supposed to be the chosen priesthood a nation of priests holy to the Lord God called them his own possession and constantly extended mercy towards them Peter is saying that if you are in Christ you are now a part of that lineage you are part of that people we are ambassadors of Christ we are resident aliens on earth acting on his behalf as people who have no business enjoying his mercy but have received his mercy because of pure love and so we learn then to proclaim that pure love and mercy towards others friends this is what will change our neighborhoods change our lives and our families this is how the kingdom expands but it's all because of the mercy of

[34 : 28] God verse 10 here it says once you are not a people but now you are called a people we can't really catch the drift the gist of this in the Greek but in the original language sorry Peter is quoting from Hosea here but in the original language it's like God is saying your people group was literally called the no people like you were you were you didn't have a people group he's calling ancient Israelis in Hosea you're not the Israel you weren't the Israelites you were the no people but now you are my people and why because of mercy and that's what he's saying to us you all of us here were no people I mean you come from specific ethnicities and specific towns and families but really in God's eyes in terms of being a part of his family you were not a part of his family because of his mercy what does he do he says that you are now a race of people but a race made up of different races you are a family but a family made up of different families you are now the temple of God but you are all our separate stones and friends

God extends that mercy because he just wants to and he loves us and he is not compelled out of fairness out of doing the right thing to get in your good graces but because he is a God of love that is always love from the beginning of time and he extends that love towards us I'll end with a collet that I think really captures this idea of the mercy of God being extended to us and how he is so willing and eager to hear our prayers and to act upon them it's from the 12th Sunday after Trinity we'll pray this I guess I don't know maybe in like four months five months but this is what it says almighty and everlasting God you are always more ready to hear than we are to pray I'll just pause really if you can remember that friends that is that is that is a deposit in your bank that is that is cash for you that God is always more ready to hear than you are to pray alright

I'll take a step back I'll go back to it got a bit excited almighty and everlasting God you are you are always more ready to hear than we are to pray and you constantly give more than we desire or deserve pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy by forgiving us those things of which our consciences are afraid and by giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ your son and our Lord let's pray m we we will