

Worship Is A Family Affair

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[0:00] Thank you. Good morning, church. My name is Ethan. I'm a bit of a wreck right now. I'm standing before you with red eyes and a runny nose and a horse voice.

Not because I've been laid up for three days with flu, which is quite true, but because when you all started singing a few minutes ago, I became undone.

And this wasn't prepared, by the way. But I've been pouring over for weeks and certainly the last days the truths about who we are as a corporate community, as people redeemed by Christ, as individual believers who are saved and who are brought into fellowship with God.

I've been pouring over these truths and these words on a page. I've been speaking and praying these words with God and even with friends and brothers and sisters. And it's been wonderful and enriching and instructional. But then this morning I came there and these truths came to life in your song.

They were alive. They were vibrant. They were three-dimensional. They were beautiful. They were glorious. I'm not normally like this.

[1:37] You can ask my wife. I'm not normally like this at all. This is really weird. Pastor Matthews, can you talk to me later and tell me what's going on? But we'll press on by God's grace as we look at the idea of corporate worship.

Would you please turn with me to the book of 1 Peter? 1 Peter 2. With luck I can find the slide. 1 Peter 2. We're going to focus today on verses 4 and 5. That's going to be our meat.

But I'd like to read 4 through 10 just to give a little bit of a wider setting for our scripture. Do you hear me okay? Can everybody hear me okay in the back? Okay.

Let's read. I'll read. 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.

[3:10] 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.

So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.

They stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do. But you, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are a people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. One beauty of the Bible is its endless depth.

This might be something you would expect from a book whose source is infinite himself. And buried in the very first two verses of today's text lies enough fodder for 10,000 sermons.

[4:29] So my challenge today is not to drum up enough calories for us to be fed, but rather to choose only the ripest morsels. To choose only that which is perfect for the season at hand so that we may be nourished and built up.

And your challenge, because you do have one, both the preacher and the hearer stand accountable to God, is to discern the words of God and to be doers, not merely hearers of the word. Would you pray with me? Lord of grace, grant us faith today. Make my words be true, resonating with your word.

Make our hearts eager and hungry to receive them. Make our wills swift to respond in obedience. Help us this day and glorify your name.

In Jesus we pray. So as we dig into our text with an eye towards corporate worship, what I endeavor to show you is this. Now forgive me, I'm a new preacher, okay?

[5:45] So I had to come up with a pithy little thing for you guys. Okay? It is this. Now having our identity in Christ to worship God is the purpose of our life.

Yeah! Okay? You know, cheer for the truth, not the quality of what I've done here. Alright? It almost kind of rhymes, but you know, maybe it'll stick with you and be a little memorable. Now having our identity in Christ to worship God is the purpose of our life.

Alright? There's two major themes that we're gonna pull out of Peter today. The first being identity and the second being purpose. We're gonna cover the individual level and the corporate level of each of these to understand who we are alone and together and to understand what our calling is alone and together.

together. So, enough introduction. Let's move forward. Let's get into the meat, shall we? Alright, now if you would, can you guys see this?

It was a little smaller. Okay. So, read with me from verse 4, okay? We're gonna look for our first point here about our identity as individuals in Christ. Ready? Read with me. As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in sight of God, chosen in the precious, you be yourselves like a living stone.

[7:13] Stop. There it was. There was our first teaching point about our identity. Did you catch it? Verse 4.

What does Peter call Christ? A living stone. Verse 5. What does Peter call you? A living stone. So, our identity is that we are like Christ.

How have you longed to hear that from your spouse? You are like Christ. You are like Christ or from your manager or from your superior. You are like Christ.

But no, here we're hearing it from Peter. But lest we get too hasty, we need to make one quick check here. because there's great risk in grabbing things out of the Bible and applying them to our life, right?

There's great risk in believing promises that were made to somebody that were not necessarily applicable to us. So it's critical that we understand who Peter is talking to. And if we can be counted among that group, then wholeheartedly we can embrace what he's saying.

[8:22] Thankfully, Peter makes it very clear who he's speaking to in verse 1. First, he says he's speaking to those born again to a living hope through Christ's resurrection.

That's verse 1, excuse me, chapter 1, verse 3. Born again to a living hope through Christ's resurrection. This is the means of our new birth through faith in Christ's resurrection.

He's also talking to those who love Christ. That's chapter 1, verse 8. Though we do not see him, we love him. He's speaking to those who are ransomed with the precious blood of Christ.

This carries the idea that we were bought back. That our lives were captive and possessed by another, but that God in Christ bought back our lives.

Even as we read earlier, bringing us from light into darkness. And fourth, he's speaking to those who received the good news that was preached to them. That's verse 25 in chapter 1.

[9:35] Can you count yourself among this group? This is a critical point in the message. Can you count yourself among this group? have you been born again to a living hope?

Do you love Christ? Can you say you were ransomed and purchased by the blood of Christ? Have you received the good news of Christ's resurrection?

If you can say yes, then rejoice, and the rest of this message is for you and will, by God's grace, benefit you very much. If you cannot say yes, then this message is not for you, but there is another message that I ask you to hear.

This is the message of the gospel, the very first message, square one in the Christian life, and it begins like this, that Christ died for sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

That you have sinned before God and you've fallen short of his plan and his intention for your life.

[10:51] And that by your sin, the gap between you and God is completely irreconcilable. Completely unsurpassable. That there's a canyon that cannot be crossed by our own means, by our own goodness.

There's a debt that can never be paid, that can never be satisfied by our own works. There's only one thing that can cover the gap.

There's only one thing that can pay the debt, and that's a perfect sacrifice. Because according to the Bible, there's no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood. Okay?

This may seem kind of archaic. Granted, blood sacrifice for sins. Okay, if that's how you feel, you're not alone. But don't dismiss this idea just because it seems barbaric.

Don't dismiss the central truth of the gospel, the very message of Christ, the most prolific human in history. Don't dismiss it just because it seems barbaric.

[11:53] Please engage with it. And now is not the time, unfortunately, for meeting to unfold this fully, but I ask that if you are the person who's here today, and this doesn't seem, this isn't sitting right with you, and you just can't accept this, speak to us.

Speak to me after. Father, please, speak to Dave Moser. Speak to an elder after. Let us talk to you about this because those in this room who claim the Lord have reconciled this, and we have found that it's true and that it is harmonious with what it means to be alive and with truth.

So please, don't dismiss it. Consider Christ, believe in Christ, and receive His sacrifice for the forgiveness of your sins. If you do, then Peter is speaking to you in this epistle.

Yes, Peter is speaking to the faithful when he says that we are like Him. We are living stones like Him. How are we like Him?

We are like Him in that we are living. We are like Him in that we are alive. No, not alive merely in the mundane sense of having a pulse. No, not alive in some thrill-seeking, extreme sports sense of living on the edge of our seat.

[13:13] No, not alive in this pleasure-driven, hedonistic sense of making every experience count to the maximum with no restraint. We are alive in the fullest and truest sense of the word.

we have eternal life. Today's the Super Bowl, right?

Anybody know that? Yeah, okay. We should be done by then. Today's the Super Bowl and you can bet you'll see somebody in the stands holding up a big sign.

What's it going to say? Pardon? John 3.16, right? When I was a kid, this was, I didn't really know what this meant. I sort of was like a thing on The Simpsons. I would see and, you know, I was like, oh yeah, but I didn't know what it was or meant.

John 3.16, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have, say it, eternal life.

[14:28] Yes, we share a likeness to Christ in that we have eternal life, but our likeness actually goes farther than this. Actually, it comes nearer because his promise is for today.

And this is his promise, that as we worship God, we become more like him. Our very identity, after all, we've been speaking about identity to begin, our very identity changes and becomes more like God as we worship him, as we fix our attention on God, as we ponder God's vastness, as we consider his loving kindness, as we call on his mercies, as we trust his power, we become like him. As we dwell under his forgiveness, as we contemplate his justice, as we rest upon his faithfulness, we become like him.

We trust in this saying that we all with unveiled face, 2 Corinthians, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, the very image of Christ, from glory to glory.

For this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. Yes, as we behold God, as we worship God in truth, we are transformed after his likeness. But beware, beware, because the opposite is also true.

[15:59] It's a double-sided sword. when we believe false things, we also take on those traits. As it says, those who make idols become like them.

So do all who trust in them. Could it be that there's any falsehood in our worship? Could it be that we believe anything about God that's false?

could it be that that's influencing our decisions? That that's influencing the way we're living life and our priorities? The way that we're using our time?

The way we're treating people? Could there be falsehood? But know when we behold God and his truth, we are renewed day by day and we become like him.

So, until here, we've seen that our identity is one like Christ's and evermore becoming like him as we worship him.

[17:05] But let's be careful because, after all, he is our heavenly brother, but he's the king of kings and he's the judge of judges and he's the founder and perfecter of our faith.

As the psalmist wrote, which Peter quotes in our scripture, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a chosen cornerstone. Excuse me, a cornerstone chosen and precious and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

You see, Jesus is no ordinary stone. He's a cornerstone. The difference is not trivial, I promise.

Yes, he is a stone like us but totally unique among us.

There's a beautiful picture here of a theological concept. Okay, guys, can I go deep for a minute?

All right, you guys are back in your chairs. I don't know if you're ready to go deep.

Usually when you're leaning forward, that means you're ready to go deep. I don't know. Pastor Matthew's already ready. You guys got to respond to me here.

[18:13] Come on. Yeah, all right, all right. He's a stone like us yet not like us.

Okay? That's the image that we're getting from this scripture in Peter. He's like us yet he's not like us. He's like man and yet he's different, more important, more supreme.

You see, there's a thing in theology called the hypostatic union and this is a very fancy way of saying that Christ has in one person two natures, a humanly nature and a divine nature combined in one.

So while he is man, he's yet God. While he's born of a virgin, he's yet son of God. While he is a living stone like you and I, he's the cornerstone.

Now this is a deep and weighty idea, one that this young preacher will leave to Pastor Moser. For now, I'm going to stick to stuff I know.

[19:26] Bricks. No, seriously, I sell bricks for a living. I'm not kidding you. Now, they're highly specialized technical bricks used in metallurgical furnaces.

Okay? Best in the industry. But they're bricks. But they're bricks. Okay? So let me stick to bricks for a minute because there's another great truth that perhaps is lower hanging and maybe we can access through looking at masonry.

Okay? Don't worry, not free masonry. Masonry. Okay? So let's explore this. Let's explore this picture that we have of the living stones in relation to the chief cornerstone.

Okay? Just as all of the stones in the structure depend on the cornerstone to stand upright, we living stones depend on Jesus to stand morally upright.

Do we? Amen, say. Amen. Amen. Just as the stones in the wall depend on the cornerstone to be aligned one to another, straight and square, the church depends on Jesus to make us aligned and unified as a church.

[20:48] Amen? As the stones in the wall depend on the cornerstone to be strong, enduring wind and wave, we, the living stones, depend on Jesus to withstand trials and temptations.

Who can say that that's true from experience? For after all, Jesus himself said, Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house. But it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock. We have seen then that the identity of the Christian is this.

Like Christ, becoming more like Christ, altogether unlike Christ, utterly dependent on Christ. Say it again.

The identity of the Christian we've seen we're like Christ, becoming more like Christ, altogether unlike Christ, utterly dependent on him. Now we move forward from individual identity to corporate identity and we're going to pivot on a word that Jesus uses in this very verse.

[22:05] It's a word we'll also encounter with 1 Peter. It's the word house. Jesus' words here are found at the close of his famous sermon and

they're directed at the individual.

But Peter uses the same word to paint a slightly different picture. He says, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood.

Peter calls us a spiritual house. Now what Peter calls a spiritual house, you engineers out there, might call a multi-phase composite structure.

You submariners out there, any? you might call it a fleet. I only know that from Battleship. You musicians might call it an ensemble.

Or if you went to grad school, you call it ensemble. You moms might call it a big old family. And moms, you've got it right because that's exactly where we're going next.

[23:19] this spiritual house God is building is a family. Yes, a household. An entity that is simultaneously singular and plural, made up of persons unified under one name.

Let me read that, let me just read that again. An entity that is simultaneously singular and plural, made up of persons unified under one name.

Let's do a little experiment in your seats. I'm going to name some families. Just think, what do you call that game where you say word association?

Just be aware of what you think of when I say this. The lads, the benders, the rioses, the spiveys, the jacksons. Okay, that one was for fun, but when I name these families, don't you simultaneously, assuming you know them, the loosest, right?

Don't you simultaneously think of the unit and the individual? Can't you see the faces and you can see the clan together at once? This is a picture of the church of God in Christ.

[24:28] Many souls made into one family in Christ. Our corporate identity is a spiritual family and we didn't enter this family as natural children, but as those adopted.

As John chapter 1 says, to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Children who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Let's let that truth settle in for a minute. He gave you, if you believed and received him, the right to become children of God.

This is quite a right. Privilege, if you ask me. Let's, the question is, what will we do with this right? Will you allow me a few parables to explore this idea of what will we do with this right, this great and honorable right that we've received as members of the family of God?

[25:51] Will this right make you spoiled or entitled like a princess who insists on her own way, who insists on being served, never serving another, who raises her nose to the poor and needy or is simply indifferent to their cause, who regards their condition as self-inflicted or worse, as a judgment of God, while her own high estate is plainly deserved given her own merits, never mind this talk of God's grace?

Church, how often do we resemble her as inheritors of the rich promises of God? Or consider another parable. Will you squander your rights by neglect and misuse like a jaded citizen who throws his hands up at the woes of government, who refuses to volunteer, register, or even vote as though such things were a labor and not an honor, while he carries in his breast a smugness that isolates him and chokes his own prayers?

Church, has any of this been true of our attitudes in the body of believers in God's church? Or, instead, will you invest your rights wisely like a shrewd banker who manages risk and balances priorities, who takes losses in the short term to achieve greater gain in the long, who serves his benefactor faithfully, always stewarding his resources with great passion and care?

didn't the Lord applaud such a steward in his parable of the talents? How will we steward the rights that we have as adopted children of God?

up until now, we've talked about our identity in Christ.

[27:59] We've talked about it individually. We've talked about it corporately as a spiritual house or family, having been brought in by adoption. You may be asking at this point, Ethan, this is a series on worship.

Can we get to the worship part? Yes, absolutely. That's exactly where we're going. You see, the identity is the soil from which we rise.

The identity in Christ is the soil from which we rise and grow. And our worship to God and our purpose of God flows out of that identity.

So far, mostly what I've spoken about is identity. While it's important to understand, if this becomes our whole focus, we'll end up completely self-centered and worse yet, completely useless to God. God forbid that should happen, so let's move quickly to Peter's clear words about the purposes of this spiritual house. Would you look with me at verse five?

[29:06] Do 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?

Do you see the statements of purpose there? Do you see the statements of purpose there? I put them in bold just to make it easy. To be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

To really understand this takes a little bit of background in the Old Testament, but I trust that we all have a cursory understanding. What is the main purpose of the Old Testament priesthood?

Well, simply to render worship to God. What did this worship consist of? Mostly animal sacrifices.

Under Old Testament worship, the priests were the only ones allowed to minister to God, and they alone could stand between God and the people. Without the priest, no ritual worship could happen.

[30:21] That's kind of unthinkable now, right? With how simple worship is now. I mean, we turn on the television, there's a church service, people singing to God.

Imagine what it was like in the Old Testament times when approaching God required you to make a long, slow pilgrimage to the temple, to bring along animals or to pay considerable money to buy them to be given as burnt offerings.

All this in order to express your thankfulness to God or to atone for your sins or to carry out your basic duties as a Jew, etc., etc. And in all of this work and labor to worship, you were still far removed from God because each element in this worship was carried out by who?

A priest. Yes, right, not even yourself, not the worshiper, but the priest. And of course, the priest himself, even the priest's worship was yet mediated by a veil.

So the individual worshiper was separated considerably from the presence of God. Today we rejoice because through Christ's death, God has torn down the temple veil.

[31:40] That's where you guys roar. Now let's try it again. Christ has torn down the temple veil. Yeah, yeah, that's a big deal. That's a big deal.

I mean, maybe it's because we never had to do that animal sacrifice stuff that it's normal, or maybe we didn't drink our coffee. What's going on, guys? Like, this is a big deal.

I know most of you, many of you believe this and cherish this. It's okay to rejoice in it. We rejoice that through Christ's death, God has torn down the temple veil.

That which separated God and man is gone because Christ has shattered the wall of hostility between us and God. He has dealt with our sin. So now, with this access to God, we become a new kind of royal priesthood worshiping God, with access even to the holy of holies.

This access to God is so unhindered that many Jews could not and still cannot believe it. But we don't have to worry about that, right?

[32:52] We believe it, right? We don't have to worry about getting over that hurdle, the cornerstone, believing it, right? We got no worries. Or could it be that maybe we have another problem?

Could we maybe take for granted this access to God? Could we maybe not recognize the honor that we have in being this holy priesthood?

Do we really take seriously enough the responsibility of being a priest to God? Do we know that we are a priest to God? Well, you know now, you've been told, this involves ministering not only to God, but to people.

Do we treat this with the respect that it deserves in our corporate worship, in our individual worship? As we come nearer to close, quite near, let's envision what it would look like to fulfill our identity and purpose as the holy priesthood of God.

Let's give some best case amazing scenario. What would it look like if we, as God's people, were walking in his grace, and fulfilling our purpose, offering spiritual sacrifices to God and serving as a royal priesthood to God.

[34:22] This is our purpose. What would it look like? Well, one thing it would look like is we'd be loving the Lord our God with all our heart, our soul, and all of our strength, right? That's what we would be doing.

The greatest commandment, we would be carrying that out. No, not perfectly, but yes, with vigor. Yes, with intentionality. we'd be encouraging one another to do the same.

We'd be seeking to love God with our heart as we stir up affections to him, with our soul as we meditate on his depth and drive the gospel deeper down into our being, and with all of our strength as we labor for him, as we rise early, as we test our physical body, sacrificing for the name of God. Yes, it would look like that, but not that alone. It would look like rejoicing with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. Rejoicing with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

I have the pleasure of playing guitar up here in leading worship sometimes, and some of us have this inexpressible thing down in the sense that we don't do much expressing.

[35:52] And that doesn't mean, look, I'm not judging any external things here, right, because God sees the heart and that's where the true judgment is. But there is a harmony that comes when our external and our internal collide, yeah?

And with when the worship and the ruminations going on in our heart work themselves out into our bodies, into our voices.

That's something beautiful. And that act does not only benefit you. That act is not only a blessing to God, that act is a blessing to the people around you. because when Dale is sitting there, for example, and he looks over and he happens to see Wendy sitting there and Wendy is engaged in worshiping God, I know this is true for me, Dale is encouraged to worship God.

That's what happens to me. Does that happen to you all? And my joy becomes a little more inexpressible, right? And a little more filled with glory. So as we pursue our purpose in God, let us pursue this as well, to rejoice with joy that is inexpressible.

Okay, what else would it look like? It would look like longing for pure spiritual milk, right? We'd all be on the front of our seats. We would be longing for the pure spiritual milk.

[37:23] We would be coming to service eager and hungry for the teaching of God's word. As the book of Acts says, the teaching of the apostles. Of course, we are not the apostles.

The elders are not the apostles. But they carry on the teaching of the apostles, which is effective for building up the church. So we would be longing for that. What else?

We would be constant in prayer, Romans 12. Constant in prayer. Does this characterize our meetings? Does this characterize our week? Does this characterize our lifestyle?

Does this characterize our small groups? does this characterize our attitudes during our workday? What else would it look like?

It would look like loving one another earliest, excuse me, earnestly from a pure heart. It would look like visiting your sick friend when he was doubled over with flu to lay hands on him and pray two days before he preached, as my friends did for me this week.

[38:38] It would look like contributing to the needs of the saints and seeking to show hospitality, which may be, even as we had the government shutdown recently, reaching out to our Coast Guard family to support them.

I know many acts were done in that regard. And certainly, according to the book of Micah, it would look like this through all. It would look like doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God.

Doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God. So we're drawing now to a point and to a close. having our identity in Christ to worship God becomes the purpose of our life.

To recap, we spoke about identity. We spoke about the individual identity being like Christ, yet unlike Christ, being dependent on Christ. We spoke about the corporate identity being a spiritual house and a family adopted by the grace of God.

We spoke about the rights that we have in that and the responsibility that comes in that. And upon that identity springs our purpose to worship God, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices to God, acceptable through Jesus Christ.

[40:17] I don't have a fancy closing. I'm not savvy enough to do that at this point. But what we are going to do is give a chance to respond.

And what I don't want to do is this. When we hear preachers a lot and we hear God's word taught a lot, it's very easy to see how far short we fall from where we ought to be, right?

And that's not the message that God wants us to have. God wants us to have the message that he is bringing us, he is transforming us, and that yes, there will be a day when we will be this perfected, holy, and sanctified body, individually and corporately, that he will make us spotless, without blemish, and we will be that bride of Christ, okay?

And yet, while now we are not there, we stand justified before God because of the blood of Christ, and we are being transformed, right? So let's cling to that.

We're moving to communion in the service, and I'm going to offer a, just read a scripture for us to reflect upon. We're going to take more time than usual for communion.

[41:35] We're going to give you plenty of time and space for prayer, for confession, to receive God's grace, individually or together, okay?

You have freedom to do that. I'm going to read this scripture, but I ask that you just take this, at least let this be your guide, this idea that our identity in Christ is giving us this purpose, and what will we do with it?

So, finally, I'll read this text, and then, as I said, we'll go into a period of reflection. The elements are over here, so here's how it will go. When I finish reading, I'll sit down, take some time, gather the elements of your communion.

Pastor Mike will come up in a little bit. Mike, are you here? Thank you. Mike will come up after a bit, and he'll lead us through as we eat.