

Relating To The People

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[0 : 00] about your conception and birth spiritually. And so Peter explains it in a very simple way.

The word of God comes out and says of Jesus that he who died is risen from the dead. And you believe it.

You believe that word. You believe the word of God concerning the person of Jesus Christ. And that process of coming to believe, which is the exercise of your intellect in part, but it's also the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart, that is the basis of new birth.

You are born again by the conception that takes place when the word of God, as the sperm, penetrates to the heart of faith, and conception takes place, and you are born anew.

So that's that you are born anew with the kind of life that Peter says isn't exemplified by the corn stalks down the center aisle, which have had it.

[1 : 28] The new life that you have is not subject to death.

You are born again into sharing, not the life that is dying, but the life that Jesus has in being raised from the dead.

So that's the first thing that happens. The second thing that happens comes in chapter 2, when, as I told you last week, you do the house cleaning.

The pattern of your life changes drastically, and before the life which Paul describes to Timothy when he says we ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and passions, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another, or as Peter describes it, chapter 2, verse 1, malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander of every kind.

That style of life gets moved out of your life, and you have, it's like throwing out a whole lot of old furniture, and you have room, and you have time to import something brand new.

[2 : 51] Like newborn babes, you crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up to salvation. Remember, that's the logical milk, the milk that feeds your mind and your spiritual strength, and it's based on the fact that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Remember, Jesus got, put one guy in trouble who said, good master. Jesus said, nobody's good except God. And that's what's meant here, you see. You've tasted and tasted and tasted and tasted, and every time there's a kind of bitter edge on everything you taste.

It has about it the taste of death, and you can pick that up. It may be glorious, and it may be wonderful, and it may be beautiful, and it may be magnificent, but there is the faint taste of death about it.

But when you taste the word of God, it is good. There is no death in it. It is uniquely good, like nothing else on earth.

You're going to be asked to vote for the Reform Party, the Progressive Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party, or several others, and all of them are good. But they have the taste of death about them.

[4 : 28] All of them. You're not good in the sense in which the Lord is good. And then it goes on and says, as you come to him, the living stone rejected by men, remember the rock, chosen by God and precious, like living stones, you are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices.

Now this is where you come into conflict with your world. You have come to the living stone. And to your great surprise, you will find that that living stone is militantly and categorically rejected by most of the world in which you live.

It is too good to be true. It is unacceptable that God could have acted in such a way.

And so, what you discover to be good, the world you live in, has rejected. What you have received, the world you live in, has rejected.

And that, you see, is where the cost begins to show in your life what you are wonderfully equipped to meet that cost.

[6 : 05] Because you've tasted that the Lord is good. And you've come to the living stone. stone. And God is at work in you, building you into that. He's chosen you as he's chosen that stone.

So he has chosen you to build you into that community, that spiritual house, to incorporate you into a holy priesthood, to be, in a sense, the priestly people among the whole of the world, all the continents, where you are a tiny minority.

But you are there to be a priesthood to the God who so loved that world that he gave his son to die for the whole of that world.

and he, of his essential goodness, has acted. And the world has rejected it.

But you are a priesthood to make reconciliation through Jesus Christ. They stumble because they disobey the message.

[7 : 21] You see, the message which you have tasted and found to be good, they have tasted and spat out. He said, I don't want it.

Now, why did you know that it was good? And why did they spit it out? I'm not sure that I can answer that question. But it would be good for you to look at your own life and see.

And then he goes on in verse 9 and says, you're a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. You see, you are chosen to be an instrument of God's purpose.

He wants a people that he can use to demonstrate his love and his essential goodness to the whole of the world.

And that's who you are. You see, you're not a victim. You're someone whom God has chosen and whom God has formed and whom God is prepared to use in order to bring the knowledge of his love to the whole world as a royal priesthood, as a holy nation.

[8 : 44] That's the nation you belong to. Your ethnic background or your geographical background may be of considerable stimulus to you and the source of pride and dignity to you, and it may be something else too that you want to cover up.

But essentially you are a member of a holy nation, which is a nation that God has chosen to be his people.

And ethnic divisions make no difference. And the culture you belong to makes no difference. You can belong to any one of many, many cultures. That doesn't make a difference.

What makes a difference is that God has chosen you as a people, and he's made you a holy nation. And you belong to God.

That's, you know, you know who you belong to. that's in contrast to not knowing whether you belong, and if you belong, who you belong to.

[9 : 56] You know that you belong to God, and that your business is to declare the praise of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

In other words, you're to sing the praises of God, to praise his name. one of the, I mean, you know this, I want to tell you because I want to tell you as though you don't know, but pretend you don't know so that it's exciting when I tell you about it.

You know that the business of your life is to offer praise to God. There's a lovely book down at the Vine and Fig Tree called Why Catholics Can't Sing.

the reason is that they, I won't tell you the reason as a matter of fact, because it's not that significant.

But anyway, it's, the thing is that you are meant to sing, to sing the praise of our God. That's what you are to do. That's when, that's why you shouldn't ever miss the opportunity to take part in that, to praise, to declare the praises of him who's called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

[11 : 18] Once he says you were no people, but now you are a people. You know, I mean, that strange pilgrimage, that quest, that earnestness for people to look at their genealogies and to look back at their cultural roots and to look at their background and to find out who they are, to try and find some identity.

You don't, as a Christian people, you don't look back to find out who you are. You look ahead to find out who you are. It's not where you come from that's ultimately important, it's where you're going to that is ultimately important.

And that's why, in term, and I mean, the scramble in North America must be immense, even in this congregation, congregation, you know, that here are seven continents represented in this

congregation.

Who on earth are you, people? How would you ever, well, it's not a matter of who on earth are you. That's only a coincidence as to who you are on earth, but who you are as God's chosen people. Once you had not received mercy, mercy, and now you have received mercy. Before you received mercy, you were under the just judgment of a holy God, but that God has shown mercy on you in Jesus Christ.

[12 : 47] So he says in verse 11, dear friends, I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from sinful desires desires which war against your soul.

Now that's part of the battle. He's beginning to tell you what the battle is going to be here. And part of the battle is the sinful desires to which we are all subject.

The vast range of forms of immediate gratification by which we can satisfy these desires that scream to be satisfied and we are willing to give up everything to satisfy them, it would seem.

I mean, that's what it is to be a human being. But he says, because you belong to another country, because you are aliens and strangers, desires, the satisfaction of those desires, is not what your life is all about.

That's all there is to it. They're there, they're God given, but the satisfaction of them is not what life is all about.

[14 : 15] You are to abstain from them so that you don't lose hold of what life is all about. To abstain from those because of sinful desires, because they war against, a war of attrition, beating you, discouraging you, deflating you, depressing you, flattening you out, so that you move over into a victim mentality.

I've been given all these desires and no opportunity to fulfill them. That's my problem. Well, you move over into that. And, and, Peter says, you're to abstain from those because they carry on this war of attrition against who you are as born anew, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people chosen by God.

and so he says this to them, live such good lives among the pagans, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good days and glorify God on the day he visits you.

And what, again, that means is that you live your life in a pagan world. you know, you are exiles and strangers, you're, you're part of the, you are resident aliens, so to speak.

But, but you're to live your life among the pagans who have rejected the stone which God has made the head of the corner.

[16 : 05] And so they reject you because of your relationship to that. But then when they see how you live your life on this earth and in the circumstances of this earth and this city and this time and this culture, when they see you doing that, then they will know that because of your good deeds you are glorifying God and you are acting in accordance with something which is higher than anything they know.

And one day they will recognize it on the day that God visits, God makes known his purpose. They will then understand. A lot of people already understand but they won't let on.

Then in verse 13, look at it, it says, submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men, whether to the king as supreme or to the governor who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

it's interesting that in the first century A.D., one of the Roman officials that lived in the area to which this letter of Peter was sent writes to the emperor, the Roman emperor Trajan, to explain the Christians to him.

So here is Peter explaining the emperor to the Christians. The next step was explaining the Christians to the emperor. that came a little later. And you see, there is no doubt about it that there was another king, Jesus, whom they were to obey.

[17 : 45] But obedience to him did not mean rebellion against human authority, not against institutions, kings and governors who have their responsibility and you have to live under them as good citizens.

look at verse 15. It is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Again, these are the people, you see, who have rejected the one that God has chosen and the people that God has chosen.

And in their ignorance because they don't see what God is doing. You see, one of the difficulties in our world right now is that people are ignorant of what God is doing.

And so they're making all sorts of preposterous claims about things in our world and in our life which seem to be at root a defiance of the authority and purpose of God. He's saying to the Christians, you recognize the authority and purpose of the kings in order to bear witness to the king of kings. But those who are under the authority of the kings are saying, you're foolish.

[19 : 08] You don't understand. And I think that, you see, Christians nowadays and the church is regularly defeated in arguments. They're regularly defeated by the thrust of opinion.

they're regularly defeated by democratic votes. They're regularly defeated in terms they think, in values they hold. Regularly, this is happening in our world. And the reason that it's happening is because Christians are in possession of an awareness and understanding which the world doesn't have.

and so you are, you know, you're standing up arguing with a steamroller and it's hard work. It's discouraging. It's flattening.

That's sad. It is God, in 16, live as free men but do not use your freedom as a cover up for evil. Live as servants of God.

You see that exchange between living as free men and then living as servants. The way you exercise your freedom is to give yourself utterly to being the servant of God.

[20 : 26] That's the only way you can exercise your freedom. That's what your freedom is given to you for. I don't know if this is an apt or foolish illustration but if you are young, eligible, and 24, half the population of the world is potentially a spouse to you.

Right? And some guys don't like to reduce the odds. But what he's saying here is that a choice is necessary.

You can't live with that kind of freedom. You've got to make a choice. And so when he says you're to live as free, use your freedom to live as servants of God.

That is, your freedom is to pick the one you will serve. And then this statement, show proper respect to everyone, love the brotherhood of believers, fear God and honor the king.

it's a totally radical statement. You see, it doesn't recognize cultural boundaries. It doesn't recognize ethnic origins.

[21 : 49] It doesn't recognize skin color. It doesn't recognize language groups. It doesn't recognize cultural ghettos. It says, you respect everybody because you are living with the knowledge of the purpose of God for the whole world.

And you must bear that respect to everybody because you know God's purpose for everybody. You're to show respect to everyone. You're to love the brotherhood of believers because they are the instrument by which God wants to demonstrate his love for the whole world.

The brotherhood of believers. Did I tell you last week that brother and sister are so alike as words in Greek that I think, I mean, I worry about inclusive language when I come across a statement like love, the brotherhood, and half the congregation are sisters.

And I don't want to apologize to you or squirm under this, even though I am squirming, but I want to just say to you that in Greek you don't get that kind of strong distinction between brother and sister. The word is almost the same in both cases. brotherhood. And it would be easy to accept it without feeling that it was being uninclusive. So you're to love the brotherhood.

[23 : 29] You're to fear God and honor the king. Those are the four levels of your life and those are the four levels of citizenship by which you live in the world.

And then it says, look in verse 18, slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only of those who are good and considerate, but also those who are harsh.

It's a strange and very demanding statement. But you're not to be the victim of your master. You may be his slave, but you're not his victim because the one whom you serve is the Lord Christ.

And he has vindicated you and he has justified you and he has claimed you and you belong to him. So out of love for him, you can submit yourself to your masters with all respect.

If your master is good and considerate or even if he's harsh. Then he goes on to say, it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.

[24 : 37] You know, I mean, what we do in our victim world is wherever we suspect that there is unjust suffering, we scream at the top of our voices, generally to no avail.

But that's what we do. But Peter says, as Christians, if it is a matter of conscience toward God that you suffer unjustly, then don't bother screaming.

In verse 20, the wonderful verse, how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? That's what I've done all my life.

I feel like my life hurts, you know. I've been stupid and ignorant and foolish and disobedient and felt heroic about it. And that's, that doesn't work.

You know, there just aren't any medals given out. And that's what Peter's saying. And so many of us spend so much time receiving a beating we richly deserve and then thinking we're going to be rewarded.

[25 : 57] If you suffer for doing good and you endure this, that's a different story. quite totally and categorically different story.

And that brings you into line with the end of the chapter. You see how he does that in verse 21? To this you were called. You were called to suffer.

You were called to suffer and endure unjustly because Christ suffered for you.

And your purpose is to fulfill Christ's purpose in the world. And that's how you are to live in the situation in which you find yourself. Okay, now, I have three sermons to preach on, 1 Peter 2, and I'm not going to be here next week, so whoever has the third sermon, I'd like to suggest this is what you say.

No, no, this is simply a praisey. Whoever comes here next Sunday night, you make sure he covers all this, will you? From verse 21 on, you have what in the New Testament is one of the most magnificent pictures of the person of Jesus Christ.

[27 : 23] You see, just remember this, though. that when he talks about malice and slander and envy and desires, when he talks about suffering unjustly, when he talks about submitting, when he talks about all that, why do you do that?

Because it's good in itself? No, because of Jesus Christ. He cannot write this chapter without relating it to the person of Jesus Christ.

And so, having made all these claims on those whom God has chosen and God has called and God has brought to new life to share the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He's done all that. And you are to live in obedience and in submission and to suffer unjustly, all those things, because of Jesus Christ.

That's why. And you see, all those people who think that you can behave well just out of the altruism of your own heart, they founder hopelessly.

[28 : 29] Wonderful article in Atlantic Monthly about the only way we're going to save the world is to be able to appeal to people's innate selfishness. That's, well, what, what, the alternative to that, which the Atlantic Monthly didn't cover for some strange reason, the alternative to that is to do it because of Jesus Christ, through whom you have been born again unto a living hope, whom you have been incorporated with as a living stone.

You have come to him. And so you see that the chapter ends necessarily with the magnificent picture of the one that has been rejected.

the tyrant to whom you owe absolute unswerving obedience and who meets your faltering attempt to do that with grace and forgiveness, renewing and encouraging of his Holy Spirit.

And who is that one? Well, I will put the picture before you and somebody next week may explain to you all the wonder of the detail of that picture.

But look at it. He committed no sin. No deceit was found in his mouth. They hurled their insults at him.

[30 : 05] He did not retaliate. when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness.

By his wounds you have been healed, deeply and profoundly healed. By his wounds you have been healed.

You were like sheep going astray, wandering foolishly and aimlessly, but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

You come back to him, he who created you and he who redeemed you and he who has now called you back to him, back to faith in him, back to trust in him, back to the hope which belongs to you through him.

[31 : 25] Because of him, you are to respect the whole world. Because of him, you are to love the brotherhood unlovable as they may be sometimes.

Because of him, you are to have a profound fear of God at the very heart of your being so that you don't draw a breath without the consciousness of the God who has created you.

And out of him you live in this world and honor the structures and the institutions of this world which will inevitably pass away.

And that holy nation to which he has called you, that holy people for which he has chosen you, that will emerge.

And that will be the demonstration to the whole of the world that God is good, unmistakably and deeply good.

[32 : 44] The one who has been rejected, this is the one that is exalted in 1 Peter 2 as the chapter ends. And I would like you to think on him and to see how the whole of the chapter relates to that one, even Jesus Christ, our Lord.

You are not the victims if you want to feel sorry for yourself in the 20th century. may God forgive you because of what he has done for you and what he has called you to be.

What a fool you would be or I would be to ignore what he has done. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.