

Who We Are Part 3

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- [0 : 0 0] Good evening, everybody. Lovely to be here with you. Oh, thank you, thank you. My identity is very secure, I want you to know. So, no, it is wonderful to give you the last of these series on identity.
- So let me first of all tell you a story. While walking through the forest one day, a man found a young eagle that had fallen out of its nest.
- He took this eagle home and he put it in his barnyard where it soon learned to eat and to behave like the chickens. One day a naturalist passed by the farm and asked, why is the king of the birds behaving and living in a barnyard with the chickens?
- The farmer replied that since he had given it chicken feed and trained it to be a chicken, it had never learned to fly. So, since it now behaved as a chicken, it was no longer an eagle.
- Still it has the heart of an eagle, said the naturalist, and can surely be taught to fly. He lifted the eagle toward the sky and he said, you belong to the sky and not to the earth.
- [1 : 2 6] Stretch forth your wings and fly. The eagle, however, was confused. He did not know who he was. And seeing the chickens eating their food, he jumped down to be with them again.
- The naturalist took the eagle out of the barnyard and took him to a high mountain. There he held the king of the birds high above him and he encouraged him, saying, you are an eagle, you belong to the sky.
- Stretch forth your wings and fly. The eagle looked around and he looked backwards towards the barnyard and then he looked up to the sky.
- Then the naturalist lifted him straight towards the sun and it happened that the eagle began to tremble. Slowly he stretched out his wings and then with a triumphant cry, he soared away into the heavens.
- It may be that the eagle still remembers the chickens in the barnyard with nostalgia. It may even be that he occasionally visits the chickens in the barnyard.
- [2 : 4 5] But as far as anyone knows, he has never returned to the life of a chicken. So I share this story.
- Just like the eagle needed to learn to live as an eagle, we as God's people need to learn to live as God's people and to fly and soar with great freedom that God has given us.
- We can do that if we truly understand our identity and by living in that identity that has been given to us in Christ.
- We saw last week that we as believers, those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, then we are in Christ. We have a new identity.
- That Christ has given us where we have everything we need in abundance. But it's not that unusual that we might have trouble adjusting to our new identity.
- [3 : 5 8] Just like the eagle had trouble adjusting to the fact that he was an eagle. We often go back to what we know best, what we find easiest.

And sometimes that is the behaviour of our old selves rather than who we are in Christ. In today's passage, Peter is writing this letter to a group of new believers who have been scattered.

They have been given new birth into a living hope in Jesus Christ, just like many of us here. But they still need this encouragement about who they are and we still need that same encouragement.

Peter gives some powerful imagery in chapter 2. He explains that this new identity that we've been given, we have been given a spiritual house, a royal priesthood.

We are a royal priesthood. We are a spiritual house, I'm sorry. We are a chosen people and we are God's possession. Verses 3 and 4 say, How do you feel about being described as a stone?

[5 : 34] Pretty odd for us today to be described as stones and to get all warm and fuzzy about that. But for the people in Peter's day, it was a significant term.

This living stone picture would have been so real in their minds because of what they knew from the Old Testament. Daniel in Daniel 2, when he was interpreting a dream of Nebuchadnezzar, he spoke of God's kingdom being a stone.

Isaiah in a vision, he said, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious. In Psalm 118, the psalmist also spoke of a cornerstone that would bring salvation to all who believed as well as a stone that would be a stumbling block for those who reject it.

And in Luke's gospel, when we see Jesus' authority is questioned, Jesus answers with the parable of the tenants, quoting that same verse from Psalms about being a rejected stone.

And he was speaking about himself. You see, to the hearers of this letter, they knew full well what the terminology of a stone was.

[7 : 03] And Peter is saying that we are living stones being built into a spiritual house and Jesus is the cornerstone, the important rock that every other stone is aligned with so that this building that is being built will be straight, it will be secure, it will be strong because it's built with this cornerstone and everything is lined up with that one stone.

This spiritual house is the church. It's a collective. We are not individuals working at our own identities, although we do need to do that, but we are put together as part of something grand.

It is in the light of all of this rich and contested history regarding Israel's religious identity that Peter 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.

These are stunning words and elevating beyond all measure. In one sentence, Peter grasps the entire wealth of Israel's identity and he applies it not only to Jesus alone, but he applies it to every man and woman and child who comes to faith in Christ.

When we come to Jesus, we come to the living stone. When we come to Jesus, we come into God's kingdom. When we come to Jesus, we become God's spiritual house and holy priesthood.

[9 : 14] These phrases applied metaphorically here to Peter's early readers represent the most exalted ideas within all Judaism.

After all, the spiritual house was the temple. If God was going to dwell anywhere, it's going to be in the temple. In addition, the royal priesthood consisted of those honoured ones who had the privilege of standing in the very presence of God.

Yet now, following Jesus' example in usurping these ideas, Peter claims that in Christ, these truths are likewise transferred to each and every believer.

Every person who is a follower of Jesus, we have those same truths applied to us. In essence, the church has become God's people and God's place in the world.

Truly with these phrases, a spiritual house and a royal priesthood, Peter is raising the identity of his early readers to unimaginable heights.

[10 : 34] By way of a single metaphor, Peter proclaims that they are at the very heart and centre of God's activity in the world. They are God's building and in Christ, they are being built up into a residence intended for God's very presence.

They must have been thrilled to learn that their identity was secure. They were God's special building project. We are God's special building project.

How inspiring to be reminded by Peter that if you come to Jesus as God's living stone, you are at the centre of what God is doing in this world.

We are God's spiritual house. The second new identification that Peter gives to the readers is the priesthood.

Now Peter mentions it in verse 5 and also in verse 9. The priesthood, of course, began with Aaron and it was Aaron who stood before a holy God and on behalf of the sinful people.

[11 : 51] In some respects he functioned as an intermediary between God and the world. As such, the priests were the ones most intimately acquainted with God.

Now consider the impact of this verse in the light of Israel's priestly history. Peter calls all believers holy, royal, priesthood.

This means that every Christian is the ultimate insider. We're not merely representatives of God in this world.

We serve as God's priests before the world. No wonder Peter closes verse 10 by saying 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. What an encouraging word for those who were identified as those exiles in chapter 1 verse 1.

[13 : 03] The ones who struggled with a sense of being outsiders. They now see in a fresh way that they are really very special to God indeed.

I hope that these awesome truths that are put forward by Peter encourage you in your faith. Your identity in Christ is an exalted one.

How did we get to be in that position? Well, verses 6 and 7 or parts of them, whoever believes in him will not be put to shame and in verse 7, so the honour is for you who believe.

Remember one of the consequences that I spoke about two weeks ago? One of the consequences of the fall was that we inherited shame on our lives?

Here, we have clearly written out for us that we will not be put to shame. This new and exalted identity is held out for all who believe that Jesus is God's ruler.

[14 : 14] Conversely, anyone who rejects Jesus as God's cornerstone shall stumble and fall. That's also made very clear. Put simply, what you and I do with Jesus will mean everything to our standing and our identity before God.

Jesus alone is the full expression of God in the world. And by this, his sacrifice, he has brought us close to God. What will you do with Jesus?

May you come to Jesus as God's living stone and may you experience in fresh ways your new and treasured identity in Christ.

But there is more. You are a chosen people, people, some Bible versions might say that you're a chosen race. This is a corporate identity.

He's talking about the church, the true Israel. But the implication is also individual because the race is not racial. The chosen race is not black or white or red or brown.

[15 : 29] the chosen race is the new people from all peoples everywhere. All colours, all cultures who are now aliens and strangers in the world.

You and me. What gives us our identity is not colour but chosenness. Out from all the races we have been chosen, one at a time, not on the basis of belonging to any group at all.

That's why this amazing phrase is individually very crucial for you and for me. You are part of the chosen race. So your identity is that you are chosen.

God chose you. Not because of your race or for any of your qualifications. Who I am and who you are, we are chosen. We did not earn it or merit it or meet any conditions to get it.

It happened before we were born. We stand in awe of it. We should tremble with joy for it. We should bow and accept it and we definitely should be living to be faithful to its purpose.

[16 : 50] We are chosen. So we are a spiritual house. We are a royal priesthood and we are chosen. But wait, there is more still?

Just like the ads on TV. This is expressed in verse 9 that we are God's possession.

You are a chosen people, a people belonging to God and now you are the people of God. God takes you to be his possession. You are God's inheritance.

You are the ones he will spend eternity with and we with him. When God says in 2 Corinthians 6, 16, he says, I will be their God and they will be my people, my possession.

What it means is I will dwell in them and walk among them. When a person comes to faith in Christ, his or her identity is not the only thing that changes.

[17 : 56] Our text says that one's calling to life does too. The latter half of verse 9 says, all this occurs so that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Wow, what an exalted calling that is. What an exalted purpose. We now exist to proclaim the praises of God.

Could anything be better than that? Are you doing that each and every day? Are you proclaiming the praises of God?

I don't mean are you preaching to every person that's in your eyesight, but are you living your life with a grateful heart knowing that in everything God has blessed you with great abundance?

is your heart thankful? Are you aware that you are the Lord's ambassador each and every day? Do you show humility and grace in all you do?

[19 : 16] Does your life point to Jesus? I know that I fail very frequently, but I am learning as I mature as a Christian that my identity is not shaken when I fail.

I know that I'm a work in progress. I know that perfection will only arrive when Jesus returns and makes me new and fit for God's presence.

In the meantime, I am very aware of what my weak spots are, and I would really encourage each of you to examine what are your weak spots, because I can guarantee you, wherever your weak spot is, that is where you're going to be tempted by Satan.

So what do we do when we fail? Because we all will, this side of heaven, or what do we do when we realise that we have believed the lie that the world has told us about who we are, that we have succumbed to believing that our identity lies in things, in achievements and the like.

How do we make things right when we know that Christ has given us everything in abundance for us to be secure, significant and accepted?

[20 : 45] If you catch yourself returning to the world's view of who you are, then I would encourage you, you repent immediately. Keep very short accounts with the Lord.

Repent and believe the truth of who God has made you. Just like the eagle in the story at the beginning who looked back towards the barnyard, we too look back sometimes.

But looking back will actually confuse you. Our eyes are to be fixed on Jesus and we are to grow and to be Christ-like in our growth.

Verse 2 says, like newborn babies, crave spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. This refers to the very things that nourish the Christian community in its growth.

Knowledge of God, prayer, instruction in the gospel, faithful obedience, hearing God's word preached. The desire for spiritual nourishment needs to be the desire of the church that wants to know the Lord and to grow and to live by his will.

[22 : 10] This desire is accompanied by learning to rid yourselves thoughts of all malice or deceit, hypocrisy and envy and slander of every kind.

All of these things are very common problems that arise in Christian communities or churches when spiritual things are not the desired priority in individuals' lives.

things. We have been given so much in Christ and as one of my community members said this week in our group, we need to exercise our muscles.

We need to have spiritual muscles and get strong. By this, we need to not only be in the word, but we need to be encouraging each other to be in the word.

We need to be encouraging each other to grow spiritually, challenging each other when we sense that we have taken on a worldly view of our own identity and to grow together to be the spiritual house of the Lord.

[23 : 23] We are in a highly privileged position that each of us are individual bricks or individual stones.

of the temple of God. And yet, one brick or one stone cannot sit out on the grass in the sun and build something all by itself.

All of the bricks, all the stones need to be brought together with Christ as the cornerstone to build something strong, to build God's temple.

people. When we look at our 2020 booklet, which Tashi has, the red book, that each of you should have, and if you don't have one, I have plenty spare.

But when we look at that 2020 booklet that has our core values in it, it is by no accident that our core values are directly related to this community of believers being built up in Christ.

[24 : 33] Why are we so passionate about every one of us having a secure identity in Christ? Well, I think it's twofold.

Having a secure identity in Christ will confirm in yourself, but also to others that you belong to the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords.

And the way that you respond to what the world throws at you, all those difficult scenarios that come in life, because that's what life is about, the way you respond will also tell people, and it will be dependent upon what your identity is.

problems won't go away, but you can be very, very confident and secure in knowing that Christ is with you.

The second reason why we would be very passionate about us understanding our identity in Christ is that collectively we reflect the temple of God.

[25 : 48] I've already said this. But we can't be God's people on our own. So it's extremely important that we encourage each other in our faith.

We can do that by meeting together, by being on time when we come for corporate worship. It's important that we challenge each other when we think that there is ungodly behaviour.

it means giving each other permission to speak into each other's lives life words. Not negative words, but life words.

If you have a brother or sister in Christ in this congregation that needs life words, you are the one. If you know that, you're the one to actually speak those words into their life.

in so doing, as scripture actually tells us, they will know us, they being the community outside this fellowship of God's people, they will know us by the way we love each other.

[27 : 03] This is an awesome responsibility, but a necessary one for God's church to grow. identity in Christ.

Our identity is in Christ. We are being built up into a spiritual house, a royal priesthood. We are chosen people and we are God's very precious possession.

All of this has been given in abundance so that we can be very secure, significant and accepted. As a church here in Chatswood, just part of God's kingdom worldwide, may we live to glorify God in who we are, in what we say and in what we do.