

New Vocation

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Date: 24 March 2024

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[0 : 00] John Updike was an American novelist, poet and short story writer. In his short story, Pigeon Feathers, he presents a jarring description of the end of life according to secularism.

It is with its secularism's belief that human history is accidental by nature. And therefore, because it's of accident, what we have in history is an accident.

Then everything is without purpose. It's without a direction in life or any ultimate goal. It is just what it is. That's it. And so in this short story of Pigeon Feathers, he has David, the character, has a vision of his end of life.

And he writes, David was visited by an exact vision of death. A long hole in the ground, no wider than a body. Down into which you were drawn while the white faces receded.

You try to reach for them, but your arms are pinned. Shovels pour dirt in your face. There you will be forever.

[1 : 24] In an upright position. Blind and silent. And in time, no one will remember you. And you will never be called. And unaltering darkness reigns.

Where once there were stars. It's pretty bleak. That is the essence of secularism's view of all things. You just end. That's it. And a worldview, whatever it is your worldview, it determines how you live now. What you do with your life now.

If the end is an unalterable darkness, then accumulating as much as you possibly can right now, whether it be possessions or experience, is the only thing in life because you've only got one shot at it.

That's it. One shot at life. Do whatever you can do to bring meaning to your life now because there is no meaning apart from whatever you do for it.

[2 : 33] That's it. In 1 Peter, which we're, our text as we've been told from John this morning, we see an equally jarring end, but it's a very different jarring end.

It's an eternally hopeful end. It's quite simple. All of history is heading towards the eternal reign of the risen, ascended Jesus Christ as Lord of all.

That's what 1 Peter, that is what Christianity declares. So 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 11. So that in all things, God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. That is what awaits the Christian at the end is being in the presence of the truly glorious one, the glorious God under the eternal reign of the merciful Lord Jesus Christ for our everlasting joy.

That's the end. That is the Christian worldview. And our vision series this year has been about what does it mean to live now with this new resurrected life in Jesus Christ.

[3 : 55] So come back next week and we'll hear more about that and the plausibility and the reasonableness of the resurrection. How does it mean now until we actually see him face to face?

How do we live? That's what our vision series. And our theme today is crucial for understanding life now. And it's a, this is part three, if you like, of a three-part series.

Not that we've been communicating it like that. Three-part series. John, a couple of weeks ago, talked about God building a new people for himself. I talked about last week about a new freedom that we have.

And it's a freedom. We're being set free from slavery to self. Selfishness in order to serve others. So a new family, new service. And now I want to just land that for us.

What does it mean for us now in the new vocation that God has called us to? So three points right there.

[4 : 53] If you want to, someone who wants to take notes. Who are we called to be, first of all? To be a Christian means, according to 1 Peter, that you are like living stones are being built.

It's a word there that means that you are being fitted together into a spiritual house. What we are being built into is built into a temple, if you like, a place where God and people dwell together. Now, to help us understand what 1 Peter is saying there, I'm going to preach the whole Bible to you. No. I'll just do a high-level survey.

I'll just do a high-level survey of what the Bible says in terms of one key theme. The presence of God. One key thing. In the beginning, God creates humanity and dwells with them face to face. It was for humanity's delight. God is including us into his eternal joy. People walked and talked with God in the cool of the Garden of Eden. I cannot imagine what joy and what love of such a relationship with the infinitely powerful and beautiful and good God, created God.

[6 : 15] I can't imagine what Adam and Eve experienced in that moment. But the Bible tells us very quickly in Genesis chapter 3 that that wasn't enough for them.

And they wanted to do life their way. This broke the relationship with God. They broke the relationship with his world. Broke humanity themselves. It cost them God's presence as God removed them from his presence.

The very thing that they were designed for to enjoy the presence of God was now, no longer did they not only deserve it, but it was also something that they could no longer cope with.

They could no longer cope with the presence of God. We cannot cope with the truth and the majesty and the glory and the beauty of God's presence as sinful, broken, flawed humanity.

And the consequence of all of this is the world that we now live in. I'm fast forwarding a whole heap here. This is the world we live in. A world that is a world of disease and injustice and violence and suffering and death.

[7 : 18] That's our world. Because God's presence was not enough for us. And the good news for us is that God refused to leave us in this mess.

His plan was to make and gather to himself a people who would experience his presence again. What we see in the early days of the Old Testament is that God's presence is manifested occasionally.

You know, it appears to Abraham, it appears to Jacob and to others. Occasionally. Comes and then goes. And then God comes down to Moses at Mount Sinai and he makes a covenant with his people Israel who he has just rescued from slavery in Egypt.

And when God enters this covenant relationship with Israel, he promises that I will now dwell with you. And he calls them, gives them plans to build a temporary temple, a tabernacle is what it was called.

And in the centre of that tabernacle, in a thing called the Holy of Holies, God's presence dwelt. But only once a year, only once a year was the high priest and only the high priest was allowed to go in there into the presence of God.

[8 : 46] A little bit later in the prophets in the Old Testament. They look forward to a day when God's presence would be significantly greater and manifested amongst his people.

Isaiah 4 is one example. Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy. And then the Lord will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night.

Over everything, the glory will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and a shade from the heat of the day and a refuge and a hiding place from the storm and rain.

What that prophecy sounds like is that everyone amongst God's people is going to have the glory of God on them.

God's presence and glory won't be restricted to the tabernacle or the temple anymore. And what's more, Moses asked God for a full display of his presence in Exodus 33.

[9 : 52] And God said to him, no, I can't do that to you because you mere mortals cannot look upon the glory of God and live.

My presence is too much for you. And Isaiah 4 strangely says that God's glory will be a shelter, a refuge, a hiding place for his people.

How would that be? How can God's presence be a place of joy rather than a place of fear? Well, the very end of the prophecy of Zechariah, which is right at the end of the Old Testament, it says this in chapter 14, verse 20.

What Zach is saying there is that the day is coming when holy to the Lord will be written on every source, on every pepper grinder, on every thermomix in Jerusalem and Judah, on all of it.

It used to only be written on the items within the temple. God's holiness will break out and it will empower his people rather than kill them.

[11:26] When's that going to happen? Got to fast forward to the New Testament. And what we're celebrating on Friday and remembering on Friday, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on a cross just outside the city walls of Jerusalem.

And when that crucifixion happened, the veil of the temple that separated the Holy of Holies from every other part of the world, the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom, signifying an act initiated by God himself.

The veil was this huge piece of fabric that separated the Holy of Holies from everyone else. It protected them from God's power and his presence and his glory.

And with the crucifixion of Jesus, it broke open. Why? John chapter 1 tells us that the word became flesh, we're speaking about God, and made his dwelling amongst us.

Literally, he tabernacled amongst us. God's presence was amongst us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

[12:44] God wouldn't let Moses see his glory because it would destroy him. But in Jesus Christ, we get to see the full unveiled glory and fullness of God.

In fact, 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 3 says that when we become a Christian for the first time, we see his divine glory in all its fullness as we gaze upon the crucified, resurrected Jesus Christ and come to him.

And we also, in that moment, partake in his divine glory. Because of the work of Jesus Christ to forgive us for our sin and rejecting God's glory, because of that work, we are called back into the presence and glory of God.

I traced all of that really simply, high levels, just to say that the Old Testament saints of old would be astounded.

They would be astounded by what we have in Jesus Christ and the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

[14:05] The glory of God, the presence of God, and nothing less has broken out into our lives. If you are a Christian, you are a living stone in the temple of the Holy Spirit.

What does that mean? Chapter 2 verse 5 again. You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit comes into us as we are being built into. It's a statement that means that we are being fitted together.

As we are being fitted together, we have access to the holiness and the power of God. The imagery of the living stones being built into a single unit implies the significance and the purpose of individual Christians cannot be, cannot be realised apart from the community with other believers. We have access to this incredible glory as we are fitted together with other living stones.

[15:45] In fact, it says that God inhabits us as we are fitted together. So here's one implication of this. You can stay at home, away from the gathered people.

You can turn on a live stream, and you can say, God, change me. God, change me. I don't want to be part of the Christian community.

Please change me in the privacy of my own home. It makes perfect sense for God to come into our lives and bring about changes as we are fitted together with God's new society, the church.

And the problem with staying isolated and asking God for change you is that you didn't get the way you are by yourself. Of course, you made some stupid decisions in life.

But most of it is because of other people in your lives. It's because of the relationships in your life that you're as screwed up as you are. Screwed up as I am.

[16:59] As you come into the community of the church, you access the glory and the presence of God. Listening to a sermon like this in the privacy of your own home, and I'm very mindful that there are some categories of people where this is crucial for you right now.

You're sick. You're unable to leave your home, so on and so forth. COVID was a great blessing to have a live stream. But listening to a sermon like this in the privacy of your own home or to your commute to work or while you're walking the dog is nowhere the same as experience of sitting amongst the gathered people of God.

Not even close. The imagery of the living stones being built into a single unit, I'll say it again, implies the significance and the purpose of individual Christians cannot be realised apart from community with other believers.

And so if you're of the ilk that says, I've got the Holy Spirit in my life and that's all I need, the New Testament and God does not agree with you.

It's a fallacy that you have built for yourself. So that's who, what we are called to be.

[18 : 22] What are we called to do? Second half of verse five again. To be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The language Peter uses here is that of priesthood. Again, he's looking back into the Old Testament. We are not just a temple being built, but we're also the priests in the temple as well. Looking back to the Old Testament, God's glory and his presence was in the temple. And in those days, Israel had priests who pretty much did everything. The people were by and large pretty passive in Old Testament Israel.

Only the priests offered the sacrifices. And what he's saying here is not now, not now. Because of Jesus, no longer. Hebrews 13 is making a similar point of 1 Peter 2, where it says, Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that openly profess his name, and do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Basically, what Hebrews tells us, as you track the theology of Hebrews, is that Jesus is the priest to end all priests, and he's the sacrifice to end all sacrifices.

[19 : 41] He is the priest who sacrifices himself for our sake. He gave his body to atone for our sins once and for all. And all who are in Jesus now, who come to him, become priests, who are empowered to do ministry that is pleasing to God.

That is, ministry, service of others, is the new vocation of all Christians.

Of all Christians. God delights in it, and he honours it. Hebrews 13 refers to ministry that involves the word, the fruit of lips that confess his name.

When you sit with a grieving person and just share out of your heart biblical truths about God and Jesus and grace and forgiveness, or you're teaching in kids' church, which some are doing right now, or share your faith with a friend, if you confess Jesus' name, God empowers you as a priest, and it is pleasing to him.

Regardless of whether people respond in the way you want them to, it is pleasing to him. Hebrews 13 verse 16 also refers to deed ministry. Do not forget to do good and to share with others for with such sacrifices, God is pleased.

[21 : 14] Some of us are specialists, you might call it, in word ministry. There are others set aside who are specialists for deed ministry, but all of us are generalists to do both.

Because of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, even the weakest and newest Christian are more empowered than the Old Testament prophets and priests.

that's phenomenal. Every Christian, every single Christian, even if you became a Christian yesterday, has the ability to change lives in a way that the Old Testament priests and prophets weren't able to.

I'll push it in a little bit further. One Corinthians, sorry, 1 Peter 4.10, which Jackie read out for us, tells us that every single Christian has got a gift. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

Every single Christian has got certain talents, certain experiences, experiences, aptitudes that make you as unique as a fingerprint in regard to ministry.

[22 : 43] There are some people in your life that pretty much only you have an opportunity to reach, to comfort, to serve. And I want to say to you, for you who are gathered here right now, online, or right here, you are not here by accident.

It is by God's design. In God's providence, you are here because he wants you to be part of his eternal plan.

And there are certain things that he wants you to do. So, if you are only, if you like, taking and not giving, not serving, not praying, not being trained in any way, it means there are some things that God wants us to do as a church family for our neighborhood that we are not currently able to do.

We are all priests here to offer spiritual sacrifices and you are needed. God is calling you to minister. And as we consistently call you week in and week out to take your next step, we are

calling you to step into your design.

We are calling you to step into your vocation. prioritizing God's people, his eternal spiritual house over our temporary dwellings and personal improvement projects are often too much for us though. [24 : 33] Expressive individualism, which I talked about last week, says, you do you, I'll do me, I need to do this for me.

And it does not tolerate sacrificing of self for the sake of others. It might occasionally for immediate family and for some friendships from inner circle, but really not anyone else.

We even read suggestions in our day and age that we would be significantly happier in life if we cut out all the negative people out of our lives.

And so even the Christian finds it so much easier to justify curating a circle of acquaintances who confirm for us our biases, never challenge us, and whose lifestyles and circumstances fit perfectly with our own.

We pursue personal preference consistently in life. And we are called by God in his providence to do exactly the opposite.

[25 : 44] And not just that, he's empowered us by his Holy Spirit to do exactly the opposite. Jesus went to the cross for those people, for all people. That's the level of commitment that he requires for each of us and he's calling us into.

We are to cultivate Christian communities in which our common characteristic, our cornerstone, our foundation is Jesus Christ and his service of all people.

As society fractures into toxic tribalism, it is essential for churches to form deep, thick communities based around a lot more than my personal convenience.

Our world needs it. Do not choose churches where there are people just like you.

in fact, a surefire test for the gospel-centeredness of any church is its ability to create deep community across social and cultural barriers.

[27 : 00] And it will cost us. It will cost us dearly as we launch into our vision in the coming years. prioritizing long-term church relationships may mean foregoing career advancement in another city or stopping the entertainment, the cultural or the sporting activities that clash with the gathering of God's people.

It may mean sidelining relationships that merely reflect my own interests and preferences for the sake of the weaker, the more needy or the culturally different from me.

Right now at St. Paul's we have got lots on and we are taking some pretty major steps as a church family. And there may even be an assumption amongst us well they don't need my gifts, they don't need my financial resistance, they don't need my prayers, they don't need my service.

I want to say that is a deadly assumption for you. For you. If you are too timid, too busy and I say this gently, maybe too selfish to do input and output then that is bad for you.

It is bad for you. It is also bad for us and it's also bad for our neighbourhood. We have 20 people right now signed up and progressing through Arthur.

[28 : 31] We are starting a Thursday night congregation next term. Big next steps. The submission for building affordable and social housing on our site has just been submitted and right now in the next week even I think it is we are seeking to raise \$68,500 to see God's spiritual house continue to be built in our neighbourhood and beyond us.

That's what we're doing right now. so far we haven't even hit 15% of that. This is what God is calling us to do.

This is what he is calling you to do. Give, serve, pray, commit to seeing God's presence built.

You've got one card on your seat which I'll talk about in a moment another one that's coming in the next couple of weeks.

It's about you taking your next step for your joy. So how are we enabled to do this? Where do we get the power, the motivation, the confidence, the freedom to do all this?

It's right there back to 4 and 5 again. That's my text for today. As you come to him, the living stone rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

[30 : 04] As you come to the living stone, Jesus Christ, the living stone, is also the corner stone, the foundation.

He's the thing that connects us all and holds us up. He is the cornerstone of what God is eternally building in his people. In verses 6 and 7, if we relate to Jesus Christ as our cornerstone, we then will have the amazing power to see change in our lives, the power to serve people and see other lives changed.

How do you relate to him as your living stone? Four things, very briefly. Firstly, he is your foundation. The cornerstone is the foundation stone of the Old Testament temple.

It's the main stone from which all other stones are measured and set. It had to be perfectly placed and perfectly true in order for the building to be built.

friends, it's not simply enough just to believe in Jesus. What I mean by that is it's not simply enough just to give some sort of intellectual assent to him existing and being God.

[31 : 23] He needs to be who he says he is to us, the operating foundation of our very lives.

Our entire life is to be built on him. Every human heart has got its uttermost foundation from which we get our sense of value, worth and self.

Every single human heart has got a foundation and from that foundation our lives are built and our eternity is governed and our decisions are made. Whatever it is for you, and I've preached about this twice already in this series, whatever it is, it must be displaced by Jesus Christ.

He has to be there. And when Jesus goes to the foundation, he removes or he weakens every other identity marker of our life.

life, if you want to know what the identity marker is in your life, the deepest foundation in your life, see what quickly replaces the community of believers.

[32 : 44] See what quickly replaces your engage with him in your Bible and your prayer. And you're getting an idea of what the identity marker, the strongest foundation of your life is.

Secondly, for Jesus to get to that place in our life, he has to be precious to us. See verse four, rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him.

Jesus, his grace and his mercy has to become more precious to us than anything else, otherwise he will never become our cornerstone. He becomes our foundation when we see him and regard him as the pearl of great price, the greatest treasure.

Thirdly, he becomes precious to us when we see him, when we see him as, that we are precious to him. He was rejected by his closest friends, he was rejected by his family, he was rejected by his society, he was rejected by his father, he was rejected, he went to the cross for our sin.

Why would he be so rejected? Hebrews tells us it's because we were precious to him.

[34 : 06] When we see ourselves as being so unworthy and yet so precious to him, that will turn him into being so precious to us.

And that is when he starts to become the cornerstone in our life. When we see that cornerstone, that foundation, we are set free and empowered to serve others. Lastly, to swing us right around back from where I started at the beginning, he is the goal of all things.

At the end of the Bible, Revelation 21, we read of the new heaven, the new earth. It's a new city and we are told God's dwelling place is now amongst the people and he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away. And it says those who are victorious will inherit all of this.

And I will be their God and they will be my children. what you see in Revelation 21 and 22 as it describes the new heavens and new earth, there's no temple there.

[35 : 26] There's no temple. In fact, Revelation tells us the entire new heavens and new earth is the temple, the perfect temple where the throne of God is in the middle.

God dwells now with his people forever in eternal bliss. That is the trajectory of all of God's plans to build his people in Jesus Christ, to eternally dwell with them.

And the church is the only glimpse of that that we have right now. And so I ask you, call yourself a Christian?

God has called you into a new community and here's a community that he's building for his glory to permanently dwell amongst them. Does your life reflect that goal?

purpose? Are you taking your next step to pursue that purpose in your life?

[36 : 52] God's purpose for all things. best one God's mother have a love to not but go to allowance for all and more in the life you