



If you had to describe yourself in three words, what three words would you choose? It's a big question and one that gets asked a lot—in job interviews, on personality tests, on first dates, which are kind of like job interviews except terrible!

I remember getting asked that question and thinking, “I don't know!” It's a question of identity—who are you, at your core? And it's a question we all ask ourselves. It is the question that defines your teenage years and early adulthood, which is why it is at the center of every young adult fiction book. But it isn't just teenagers. The older I've gotten, and the more I've talked to people, the more I've realized how many of us spend our whole life asking this question, sometimes trying on a new identity every year, month, or week. Or trying a different identity in different situations and around different people. We are all trying to answer the question, Who am I at my core? What three words would I use to describe myself? This morning Peter is going to help you answer that question. He is going to give you three words to describe yourself.

We've been walking through the book of 1 Peter together. It's a letter written by a guy named Peter, one of Jesus' apostles, writing to Christians in Asia Minor around 60 AD. Christians who are looked at a little weird by their friends. Christians who quite fit into the pluralistic world they find themselves in. Christians who are feeling the shame of being awkwardly out of place, with a significantly different worldview than most of the people in their day-to-day lives. Maybe you can relate to that. And it is in this context that Peter declares to these Christians, and declares to you, what three words describe you.

In our passage this morning Peter tells you that at your core you are the People of God. But he doesn't just say that. Instead Peter gives us two loaded images to tell you that you are the people of God. First he says that you are a spiritual house, and second he says you are the children of Abraham. Let's look at those together.

You're a Spiritual House

The first image that Peter uses for you, for us, is a spiritual house. Look with me at verses 4–8.

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. For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and, “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that

makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

Peter says that you are a spiritual house and there are four characteristics of that house. Your first characteristic as a spiritual house is that you are built on Jesus Christ. Peter says that this house is built on a chosen and precious cornerstone, and that cornerstone is Jesus.

Peter is referring to an architectural feature here in ancient building. When a builder would start to build a house or any kind of building, the first thing they would do is go find the perfect cornerstone. This was a stone that would sit in one corner of the building on the ground level, and the rest of the building would be built on it. Its lines would define the lines of the building, so if you had a rectangular stone, you got a rectangular building. If you had a triangular stone, you had a triangular building.

It also had to be the strongest stone, because the weight of the building would rest on this stone. If this stone cracked or crumbled, so would the whole house crumble. Because of this, builders would often spend up to half of the building time at the quarry searching for the right stone, and then spend half of the expense of the whole building on this one stone. It was the most precious and perfect stone.

Like a builder who spent day after day at the quarry searching for the right stone, God has chosen Jesus to be that cornerstone. So the first, and the most important part of the spiritual house that God is building, that God says you are, is that it rests on Jesus. He defines its shape, that is, this spiritual house looks like him. And it is on his strength and perfection that the whole spiritual house rests. When Peter says that you are being built up into a spiritual house, he says that your strength rests on Jesus' strength. And your outward appearance is a reflection of Jesus.

As we go about our lives in this world as Christians, as the people of God, we cannot forget that the structural integrity of God's building project rests on Christ's merits. So long as Christ stands, so his spiritual house, the Church, will stand, no matter what kind of pressure, trial, or storm comes along.

The first characteristic of this spiritual house that God is building is that it is built on Jesus. The second characteristic of this spiritual house is that it is made up of many living stones. Peter says that, “you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house.” Each of you is a living stone, as opposed to a lifeless stone. You have a living hope of eternal life. And when God gave you that living hope, he did not just give it to you as an individual, but pulled you into his larger building project. As you come to Jesus, as you approach Jesus, you become part of this house. The verb tense implies, “as you

continually come to him." As you continue to come to Jesus you get pulled into this thing that is bigger than yourself.

Yes, you are an individual brick, chosen by God, but God has placed you into this spiritual house, his Church, this community of people who have approached Jesus over centuries and all over the globe. You yourselves are living stones, like Christ. And you may not be perfect; you may have chips or cracks, but as long as you are continually coming to Jesus, you are being added to this building. You are a part of God's building project and are being made into this spiritual house for a purpose. Which brings me to the third characteristic.

The third characteristic as this spiritual house is that you have a purpose, namely to offer spiritual sacrifices. Every building has a purpose and that purpose defines its structure. This room makes a great meeting space, but it would make a terrible bedroom. Peter says that God is building a spiritual house. And he is doing a couple things when he says that, because the word "house," *oikos*, has two meanings that help us understand the purpose of God's building project.

First, God is building a spiritual house, that is, a temple, a new temple. The original temple built by Solomon has been replaced. The temple was always supposed to be a picture, a symbol, of God's dwelling. But now, because of Jesus, God's dwelling place is with his people. God says, "Wherever two or three are gathered, there I will be."

Peter says you are a spiritual house—the new temple of God Almighty. Not built with lifeless stones, but with living stones. And this is significant because the Temple was the only place anyone could offer sacrifices to God; it was where God met with his people. But now, among you, is where God receives sacrifices. But Peter keeps going. The second meaning for spiritual house is a spiritual household. The word can mean both. In fact, when the original temple was being built, King David prayed to God and said, "I am going to build you a house, that is a temple." But God responded and said no, you won't. Your son will build my house, but meanwhile I will build your house (your household, your line, your descendants).

Peter uses the word the same way. He says that you are a spiritual household, that is, a holy priesthood. The priesthood in the Old Testament was only supposed to come from one family. You inherited it. Priests had to be descendants of Aaron—from the spiritual house of Aaron. But Peter flips this and says, but **you** are a spiritual house, a holy priesthood. Not only are you the temple, the place where God dwells and the place where God receives sacrifices, but you are also the ones who offer up the sacrifices. You are the new priesthood. This house, the priesthood, God is building has a function. You are being built for a purpose: to offer spiritual sacrifices, as priests. I'm going to get to what those spiritual sacrifices are soon.

The fourth characteristic of this spiritual house is that many will reject the house, as they reject the stone it is built on. The picture Peter gives is of two separate building projects. On the one hand,

God is building a spiritual house, but on the other hand, other builders are building a different house to be a part of.

For his house, God has chosen Jesus to be the centerpiece, the cornerstone. And while he is God incarnate, in his human form Jesus looks to be weak, disfigured, beaten, and cracked. He seems far from the beautiful, proud, powerful stone which many want to build their lives upon. So when some people look at Jesus, they reject him. Like builders searching for the perfect cornerstone, they look at Jesus and they see a weak stone that will crumble. Or an ugly stone that will bring them dishonor. When they look at Jesus they can't imagine wanting to be a part of his building. They scoff saying, "This is the stone you will trust? The stone you will put all your hope in? The stone at the center of your life?" Peter says that they are disobedient to the message, "the gospel message." That good news that God has invited all people to be a part of his building project by resting their whole life on Jesus, his chosen and precious cornerstone.

So instead they build their own house. Maybe this is you this morning. You choose things like power, money, success, beauty, companionship, happiness, education, kids, to be at the center of your house. At the center of your world. At the place where everything else in your world rests. So the stone that God has chosen becomes what you trip over. It becomes a stone of stumbling instead of a stone of salvation. You can't get over the idea that Jesus is the centerpiece of God's salvation plan for the world. And so you reject him, you trip over him into sin. But Peter says those who build their house on these things—in fact, on anything but Jesus Christ—will be put to shame.

My wife and I were in San Diego on a little marriage getaway trip a couple months ago, and we went out sea-kayaking off the coast of La Jolla. From the ocean, as you look back toward shore, you see these beautiful homes. Homes is a stretch; they are mansions, actually, built on top of the bluff. These mansions have gorgeous views, and they are impressive feats of architecture. I asked our sea-kayaking guide, "how much does one of those mansions go for?" (curious to see if it was more or less than a two-bedroom place on the Peninsula). Our guide said, "well, it would go for about 30 million, but it's a waste of money." And I said, "Really?" He said, "Yes, because those houses are built on limestone, and the ocean batters them year round, and every year those houses lose between a few inches and a few feet of their yard, and eventually the whole house is going to fall into the ocean."

This is the house many people are building. They have rejected Christ and so they are building a gorgeous house that looks great and beautiful now. But it won't last. It's going to fall into the ocean. It won't stand the test of time, it won't stand the storms of life, and it certainly won't stand before God Almighty. And those who reject Christ and choose to build their lives on anything else—maybe that is you this morning—will eventually be brought to shame. Your beautiful, respectable, 30 million dollar home will be gone, and they will be left standing on the edge of a cliff with nothing left. Ashamed at your own hubris, knowing you made a huge mistake.

Jesus tells us to build upon the rock, not the sand. Peter tells us to come to the Living Stone. Come to Jesus Christ, build everything around him and you will never be put to shame. He says this stone is precious, literally, "this stone is honor" to you who believe.

But if this is you this morning, are you stuck? Is there a way out of your crumbling building and into the spiritual house God is building? Yes. Peter says that those who don't believe are "destined" to this disobedience, but I think a better translation is "chosen." It's the same word that Peter uses when he talks about Jesus being the chosen and precious cornerstone. Peter's point here is not that God has chosen Jesus to be the cornerstone, and in a separate decision chosen some people to reject him; that he has predestined them to a disobedience that can never be changed. In fact, in just a few verses Peter hopes that those who don't believe would come to believe! Rather, God has chosen Jesus to be the cornerstone, the centerpiece of his building plan. But in choosing Jesus—the only stone that he knows will actually be able to bear the weight of the world—he knows that some will reject Jesus. And so he is, by definition, choosing that they will disobey.

God is kind of like a dentist. Every time you see him he says that the only way to healthy teeth is if you floss. It's the only way. But he tells you that knowing that some people are never going to floss. Every time you see him he tells you to floss. And every time you leave, you don't floss. And if you do this long enough eventually your teeth will rot away. You can say, well, why didn't the dentist just choose something I wanted to do to keep my teeth healthy, like eating chocolate? I love chocolate. I would eat chocolate every day to keep my teeth healthy. Why? Because it wouldn't work. Of course he chose to tell you to floss; it's the only thing that would keep your teeth healthy, even though he knew some people wouldn't.

God chose Jesus to be the healer of our souls, knowing that some people would never listen, never trust their whole life to him. But Jesus was the only way. So to you who believe, this stone is honor. But to those who don't, it is a stumbling block that leads to shame. You can either build on Christ, or be broken on him. What does that mean for you who believe?

It means, yes, in this world many people will reject you. Many people will look at you and think, what an ugly house. Why would you throw your lot in with that crew? Why build your life around a crucified man who has been dead for two millennia? Why hang around all those chipped, cracked, ugly stones, those broken people?

Why? Because God is building a spiritual house for himself to dwell in. And those who are a part of it will never be put to shame. This house will stand on the merits of its cornerstone—Jesus Christ. And although I am cracked, broken, ugly, and undesirable, God would include me in his house. And although you are cracked, broken, ugly, and undesirable, God would include you in his house also. As we all come to the Living Stone, God is building us up into a beautiful, spiritual house for himself, and he will dwell with us forever. You are the spiritual house of God. This is the first metaphor Peter uses for you.

You are Abraham's Children

The second image God uses for you as the people of God is that you are Abraham's children. Abraham is the forefather of the Jewish people. He was a man whom God called and promised that his descendants would be special—they would be his covenant people. Look with me at verses 9-10, and hopefully this will make a little more sense.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

In just two verses, Peter uses no less than six descriptions for you—the people of God—and every one of them is a clear echo of Old Testament language. And because of that, I don't think that Peter is trying to say six different things about you, but I think he is trying to say one thing in six different ways—that you are Abraham's children. You have all of the status, identity, rights, and privileges of God's Old Testament people. Let's look briefly at each these six descriptions so we can see how Peter is using them.

First, Peter says you are a chosen people. Older translations say, "a chosen race." The idea is that you are descended from a common lineage, from a common ancestor, and Peter is referring to a passage in Isaiah 43 when God calls Israel a chosen people when he promises he is going to choose a savior for them. Here in our passage Peter tells us that Jesus is chosen to save you, his chosen people, children of Abraham.

You are a chosen people. Peter is saying that you are God's chosen people—you are descendants of Abraham. You have been grafted into Abraham's family, and God has chosen you. But not only are you chosen, you are a people, a race, you are from a common lineage. You are related by blood. Not the blood that runs through your veins, but by the blood that covers your sin.

Second, Peter says you are a royal priesthood. We've talked about this a little bit. What Peter means is that you are a priesthood of the king. This is a quote from Exodus 19:6, where God is speaking to all of Israel. Priests are the "in" crowd. They are the ones who can come before God on behalf of the people. And the nation of Israel was supposed to be a priesthood on behalf of the other nations. Peter says that you are in. You are now part of that priesthood. You have special access to God, to the king, as his priests. Not some of you, not the professional Christians. No. Together we are a royal priesthood; every man and woman a priest with access to God.

Third, Peter says you are a holy nation. He is quoting here again from Exodus 19:6 where God calls his nation of ex-slaves a "holy nation" just before he gives them his law through Moses at Mount Sinai. These descendants of Abraham were God's holy nation. Peter again takes this title and applies it to you, to Christians. You are a holy nation, a people group, an ethnicity, set apart. You now also are the descendants of Abraham.

Fourth, Peter says you are “God’s special possession.” He is quoting here again from Isaiah 43 and the idea is that you are his most treasured possession. What is your most treasured possession? What is the thing, if your house is burning down, you run back into the house to grab? That’s what you are to God. You are his most treasured possession.

Fifth and sixth, Peter says, “you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” This time Peter is reaching back into the book of Hosea, an Old Testament prophet. In the beginning of the book of Hosea, God’s people, the Israelites, have been unfaithful to him. So much so that God compares them to a wife who regularly and shamelessly cheats on her husband. So in chapter 1 God speaks to Hosea and says these are no longer my people. “I call you, lo-ami, ‘not-my-people.’” But then God comes back in chapter 2 and says, “you who are not my people, now I will call you my people. I will restore you, I will take you in.”

Peter says that is you. See what Peter is doing here? He says, just like Israel, you once weren’t God’s people. You once were under his harsh judgement. But now you have become his people. You’ve received mercy. You are just like the Israelites. In fact, you **are** them. You are the people of God. Once you weren’t, but now you are. This is significant, especially when you consider who is writing this. Peter was a Jew. Peter was part of the original people of God. And he is telling Gentile Christians, you’re in. You’re one of us. Not only was Peter a Jew, he was a racist Jew. We read in the book of Acts that for years after Jesus’ death and resurrection Peter saw Gentile Christians as lesser Christians, and Jewish Christians as higher Christians.

But something has changed in Peter’s thinking, in his theology. Here, by around 60 AD, he now recognizes that Gentile Christians are equal before God. That have all the rights and privileges of Jewish Christians. In fact, Peter says that they are part of the family in the exact same way. Every title that the people of God in the Old Testament hold, you now hold. You are no different. You are full-fledged members of God’s family, his treasured possession, his royal priesthood, his chosen people. You are Abraham’s children.

You are the people of God. You are God’s spiritual house. You are Abraham’s children. I find it fascinating and even a little surprising that this question—describe yourself in three words—finds its way into so many interview rooms. Because at heart, a job interview is about finding out what you can do. Do you have the skills and talent to be a productive member of this organization? Can you do the job we are looking to fill. So why ask a question about your core identity? But it is a common interview question because we all know intuitively that what you can do is a product of who you are. Your identity is the driving force behind all action.

Peter knows that too. Peter tells us that God is not building his temple for no reason, but “to offer spiritual sacrifices” and to

“declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light.” Peter spends the next couple chapters of his book explaining how to do that—as Christians who fit awkwardly into the world in which we find ourselves. The spiritual sacrifices we are to offer up is holy living. We are supposed to live in a way that declares the goodness of him who called you, even when that takes sacrifice. And that has an effect on how we relate to those in authority over us, and those whom we have authority over. It affects our marriages, it affects what we say and how we say it. It affects how we view suffering, and how we act in the midst of suffering. It changes how we act when people insult us. It changes our attitudes, it changes what we do with our bodies. It changes everything!

These are the spiritual sacrifices we offer up to God. This is how we declare his praises. And we are going to dive into those things in the next few weeks as Peter gets into them. But here’s what you have to remember as we preach the next few weeks. The next few weeks, really the rest of this series in 1 Peter, all rests on this theology. This passage comes first. And this passage has to come first. All the rules, all the morality, all the charges to live holy lives will break you. If you don’t get this—if you don’t understand first that you are the People of God—you will try to follow the rules for all the wrong reasons. You will try to follow the rules to get to heaven. You will try to follow the rules to be saved. You will try to follow the rules so that God loves you or values you. But you are already the people of God! God already loves you. God already values you. He sent his own Son to die so that you had a shot at being with him, at getting into the family, at being part of his building project.

Those people that Peter talks about that disobey; Peter doesn’t say they disobey the rules. They disobey the gospel message! The rules aren’t the problem, their heart is. They reject Jesus and they try to build their own way to God, built on success or money or importance or religious snobbery. You are already the people of God. God called you a chosen people. God called you his most treasured possession. God builds you up into a spiritual house where he is pleased to dwell.

And the holy living Peter is talking about is a result of that. We live holy lives not because we are holy, but because God is holy and we are his. We offer spiritual sacrifices not because we were born into the right family and have the right background, but because he called us a holy priesthood and that’s what priests do. We are being built into a spiritual house. We reflect the glory of him who called us to be part of that house! That’s the whole point! What else could we do?

You are the people of God. Those are the words that describe you at your core. Don’t forget that!

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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