



I'm not the most techie person on our staff. So a while back I clicked on something that I thought was an upgraded version of something I run on my Mac. Come to find out that by doing that I had mistakenly installed some malware that froze up my computer. Then a phone number appeared on my screen. I called it and they said for a fee they would fix my computer. I knew enough to not give him my credit card info over the phone and I knew to send out an SOS to Charlie Royce, our Church Administrator! He had helped me a few months back when I spilled coffee on my keyboard. Well, that's another story for another time! He let me know the potential bad news. My identity and my financial information might have been compromised by this malware. Someone might have been trying to steal my identity.

He started clicking my keys and called up some amazing diagnostic programs while I got on the phone and began to alert my banks and credit card companies. What a hassle. And because of Charlie I was protected. Maybe the bad guys saw my account and realized there just wasn't enough there to make it worth their time! Just this week, Charlie sent me another message with a screen shot warning. Dan, don't ever click on this kind of message! I appreciate the help.

Identity theft occurs when someone steals someone else's name and other personal information and assumes their identity for fraudulent use. For a Christian, if we think about it, in the most positive sense possible, we have assumed someone else's identity. Elyse Fitzpatrick, in her book *Because He Loves: How Christ Transforms Our Daily Life*, reminds us of this new identity given to us when we received our salvation in Christ. She says, "We are called Christians because we have taken the identity of someone else: We have taken the identity of Christ. Not only have we been given a new identity that we were not born with, an identity that we didn't earn the right to use, but we are invited to claim and withdraw all the treasures and benefits that come with this new identity."

For the Christian, this new identity isn't an identity **theft**. This new identity is an identity **gift**. The passage we are studying this morning, we simply cannot read enough times. We should print it out and put it in on our refrigerators. We should read 1st Peter 2: 4-10 often so we never forget our brand new identity and our new names associated with this new identity.

I need to ask you a question this morning: What do you think is the greatest danger to the church? Some of us might think, well it's probably the secular culture, even the anti-Christian culture in which we find ourselves in the bay area. Others of us

might say, it's the gross materialism that leads to the worship of money. Some of us might say the greatest danger to the church is the assault on morals, such as what comes through print, computer, TV and movies. I can see how we might think these are the greatest dangers to the church. But these kinds of answers lead us to believe that the greatest dangers are out there.

But I propose that the greatest danger to the health of the church isn't what is going on out there, it's what is going in here, in our hearts. The greatest danger to the church is when we forget our sense of our identity in Christ and forget all the privileges and benefits that come with it. Peter is writing to people who are suffering. Peter is writing to people who have done battle with the secular world. Peter is writing to people who have been bombarded with secular messages to the point that they have forgotten who they are in here. Peter is writing to people who have clicked on the world and the world threatens to steal their identity.

In our passage today, Peter offers us four truths about our identity, four ways our spiritual DNA has been marked identifying us forever as children of God. I see Peter's words this morning as four privileges that come to us at that point in time when we accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. A privilege means it's something special that not everyone can enjoy. A privilege is usually attached to a special position or rank. May these privileges empower us to live out our identity in Christ as we go through life in our broken world. First, Peter tells us that:

### **We are Privileged Because We are Connected to Christ and One Another**

**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....**  
(1 Peter 2:4-5a)

The privileges don't apply unless we come to him first for salvation. The idea here is not just coming to salvation, but to keep on coming to draw near and delight in Jesus. Sometimes "stone" in scripture means precious stone, but in most cases it means building or foundation stone. Peter is saying that Jesus is the perfectly designed stone, perfectly shaped to be the perfect foundation stone for the church. Not just a perfectly formed stone, but a Living Stone. The language indicates that the Living Stone is the Living Jesus who rose from the dead and lives forever and gives life to those who stand on him. The idea is that the living stone was examined by the Jewish leaders in Jesus' day and after examining they rejected him and demanded his crucifixion. But this rejection also expands to include any person since then who has rejected Christ's offering of love, mercy, and forgiveness.

Even as he was rejected by men, he was the choice, precious, the perfect example of holiness and righteousness to God. Jesus is his Father's beloved Son in whom the Father is well pleased. He was cut, placed and ready to be the perfect foundation for a new kind of building.

For us to understand why the image of a building, we need to know a bit of background. Peter will bring in three Old Testament stone prophecies in verses 6, 7, and 8 and he will apply them to Christ. Peter is comparing the Old Testament Temple—which was built into a physical temple, built with dead stones—to Christ, the Living Stone, a superior foundation to a superior New Spiritual Temple being built with living stones.

Peter expands the image to include us, describing us as living stones. I want us to remember who we were, that we were once dead in our sins, like dead stones, like dead men walking, each of us a walking gravestone soon to be officially marked with the date of our death. But now our new identity is that we have been transformed, born again into a living hope and marked forever with a new identity as living stones connected to the foundation stone, and connected to one another.

The main verb here is that as living stones we are continually being built up into an ever-expanding spiritual house, a spiritual house that will never be completed this side of heaven. But it's the spiritual house where God dwells, continually remodeled as God the architect sees fit, improved upon, added to, changing shape and look. The KJV translates it, "fitly framed together." Everything is closely joined together, knitted together, bonded in a way that nothing else in the world can. But all the while this spiritual house walls of living stones is held up because the weight and stress is absorbed and supported by Christ the living foundation stone.

Another way we can forget our identity and weaken the church is when we choose to live our Christian faith as solo Christians instead of in the collective. Our broken world worships individualism. The church shouldn't. When it does it is allowing the world to steal its identity. Peter's image here tells us that we have the privilege of being called to a collective faith. Throughout the New Testament we see the church explained with all kinds of imagery that shows connection—body, temple, family—all remind us that our walk with God is a community project, not something we are designed to do on our own.

I think it's easy for churches to become like the produce market by my house. I have this great place I go every week and I buy great fresh food. Each time I go there I ask the owner to tell me the sweetest grape, juiciest pear, or hottest pepper that week. One time, I was in the market looking for cheese for my salad, wishing I was in Wisconsin and a Romanian woman told me that Bulgarian feta was the best for the salad I was building. She was right! Once a guy once told me that the best salami is actually Russian. Who knew? So all of us customers go there and we buy our food and then we melt back into our private lives.

All of us who come to CPC hopefully get fed here. We all come from a different place, with different experiences, ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. If we are not careful, we can come together to buy and consume and then race away and melt back into our private lives until the next Sunday.

Peter is telling us that we are not to be like this. God's divine purpose is not for us to come and consume and then melt back into our private lives. We are to be connected, interdependent on one another by loving one another and serving one another, sharing, caring and helping one another through life. We are to be rubbing together. Remember those old rock polishers we had as kids? We put rocks in and over a lot of time of rubbing together those rocks became polished and shiny. When we as living stones rub together in community over a period of time we become more beautiful living stones, we shine brighter to one another. And you know what else? The people outside our church see that we living stones improve the beauty of their neighborhood too.

It is possible to live in the body of Christ and be unknown to the people around you. Some of us are doing it. If we do we are letting the world steal our identity. Peter continues—we are not just privileged to have connection to Christ and one another, we are also privileged to have access through Christ.

### **We are Privileged Because We have Access Through Christ**

**to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (v. 5b).**

You are being built into a Spiritual House. The broken world outside the church has no access to the one true God. In fact, the Scripture tells us that they are far away. On the other hand as members of the Holy Priesthood, by definition, we have been given full admission into his presence.

In the Old Testament people didn't have direct access to God. Before Christ, the people on the annual day of atonement would request that their high priest, whoever he happened to be in their time, offer up their animal sacrifice in the temple so that their animal's shed blood would serve to atonement for their sin. Peter is saying, because of Christ's sacrifice, we can remove the animal, bypass whoever happens to be the temple priest, and go directly to the One True High Priest who himself died, and whose shed blood is the power for salvation and forgiveness of sin.

We should never grow used to this idea. For centuries people were shut off. At Jesus' crucifixion and death the giant veil in the temple that separated the people from the holy place was torn in two from top to bottom. So now there is no veil in the spiritual house of God separating us from the holy presence of God. There is no mediator needed except for Jesus Christ our High Priest. We are collectively all part of this holy priesthood. I imagine this might be a difficult concept for any from a Jewish or Catholic tradition. But you understand this from your tradition: It was always considered a privilege to be a priest. And it's still the same today. We are all privileged to be the holy priesthood.

Every one of us who have been born again into a living hope have been permanently marked with a new identity: priest. Collectively we are a priesthood of believers, more specifically, a holy priesthood, who are able to continually draw near with confidence to the throne of grace. We don't bring an animal to slaughter. We bring spiritual sacrifices to God. What are these spiritual sacrifices?

We bring him the praise of our lips. We bring the good works we do for others. We bring our money and other material things we share with others to further the work of God. We offer all these sacrifices through Jesus Christ, for only then are they acceptable to God. If we do any of this for our own pleasure or glory, they are not acceptable spiritual sacrifices.

The whole point of a spiritual sacrifice is to willingly offer our gifts, our possessions, our strengths, energy, situations God has us in, all for service to our king. In fact in verse 9 Peter drives this point home by describing us with another term, "royal priesthood." Let's take it even deeper. A life of sacrifice means not using something the way I want to use it. My education is for his purpose. My home is a sacrifice. With this new identity my money is not my money; it all belongs to God to be used in active service to him. And for every one of us as we collectively place ourselves on the altar of God as living sacrifices, our collective worship, our collective experiences of offering spiritual sacrifices of all kinds is intended to be a wonderful aroma of praise to God and a wonderful entrance into the very presence of God.

If you are like me, I am exhilarated by these privileges so far. But I am also fearful. My new identity challenges me to rethink my priorities in this broken world. I think Peter understands this fear. So I am grateful for our third privilege.

## **We are Privileged Because We have Security in Christ**

Peter supports this with several Old Testament quotations.

**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" (v. 6).**

We have the security of knowing that because we have put our faith in Christ, we know we may experience disappointment in this life, even suffer for a little while, but we will never be ultimately disappointed or embarrassed or learn that our faith has been in vain. The idea is not just that Christ is our perfect foundation stone, it's also understanding that from our foundation of Christ, a true and straight plumb line emerges that lays out perfectly how we are to stand on that foundation and find our place within the walls of the church.

**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," (v. 7).**

Peter quotes the Old Testament, Psalm 118 verse 22. The idea here is that a builder goes to his local stone quarry looking for the perfect stone to serve as the foundation of their building. They look at all the stones available and they reject the best stone in the quarry and instead choose a flawed stone on which to build their building. So their building foundation is weak, their plumb lines are crooked, and their building is built wrong. Then Peter quotes Isaiah 8:14:

**"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 (v. 8).**

Peter is telling us that those who presently don't believe, who are presently stumbling, have chosen a flawed cornerstone, and they have no security and are destined to experience the full justice of God because they haven't believed in Christ.

We are right to ask this morning, whom do you trust today as your cornerstone? Have you ever accepted Jesus Christ, the perfect cornerstone, as your Savior? When you do, it changes everything now and for all eternity. Don't leave here today without having the Good News explained to you. Receive the gift of salvation and you can walk out of here changed. After our service we have a prayer team up front. Come up and tell someone you want to become a Christian. Or talk to someone at the Welcome Center in the lobby and they would be honored to help you answer God's call on your life and receive these awesome privileges. And now Peter returns to his readers and if we had any doubt about our new identity, he lays that to rest.

**But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, (v. 9a)**

A Chosen People—literally a chosen race. We are chosen not because we deserved it or achieved anything at all. We are chosen by God's grace because he placed his eternal love on us. One of the most fundamental terms of identity is race. This race he refers to is not defined by skin color. It's defined by what has happened in our hearts. We are changed. We are remade to live in community together no matter our ethnicity or skin color.

A Royal Priesthood—As I we saw earlier we are priests who belong to the king, have access to the king, and set apart to serve the king.

A Holy Nation—We are privileged to be set apart by God to be his holy nation. As much as we identify with our gender, language, ethnicity, cultural, and social class, as citizens of our Holy Nation we are not to be divided by those normal divisions that separate people. We are called to be different from the world. In our Holy Nation we are called to celebrate what we have in common, but not limit ourselves to circles of people just like us, as Peter finally learned. Paul rebuked Peter because after he accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ, he refused to eat with Gentiles. Eventually Paul had to pull him aside and show him the truth. And we see from this letter that Peter finally got it. The Holy Nation is founded on the gospel which tells us that our identity is not in whether we

are Jew or Gentile, male or female; our identity is found in Christ only. He unites us. He reconciles us. He challenges us to be the example of understanding and reconciliation in our divided and angry country right now.

We have been given the privilege at this time in history to connect with people who are at such odds with one another. We have been given the privilege to point hurting people to the hope that's only found in God's Holy Nation. We have been given the privilege to point people to true peace as we live out our new identity as a Holy Nation. And we will become polished stones if we are willing to be stretched in such a way.

We will need the reminder every day that we are God's own possession. He reached down and claimed us as his own. We may never feel accomplished, but are his. We may face unimaginable difficulties in this fallen world—maybe health related, maybe family related, maybe financial, maybe spiritual battles—that require every bit of armor every day. What I especially need to preach to myself in these times in my life is the fact that I am God's own possession.

And finally Peter says, now that we understand our new identity, now that our new identity is clear, we can only then be able to understand our mission, our purpose. Peter has shown us who we are, now he concludes by telling us why, what on earth are we here for? We are here to proclaim...

### **We are Privileged to Proclaim the Excellencies of Christ**

**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 (verses 9b-10).**

One of the ways we can proclaim or advertise or shine forth in a world of darkness is to collectively gather together as teams of privileged to declare his praises by showing grace and mercy to people in need, whether it is in Honduras or here on the Peninsula. At CPC we are challenged to do community together, to gather as teams of the privileged to serve people wherever God leads. It might be in a local homeless shelter, in a school, in a convalescent center. It may be a group of people such as veterans or day laborers. We encourage all our community groups to mobilize as a team to advertise the excellencies of Christ.

We called to mark out time on earth as living stones sharing our privilege with others. We are not called to mark out time as grave stones waiting around to die and go to heaven. We don't exist so that people can say, "What a great church building this is." We don't even exist so that people can say, "What a great bunch of people this is." We exist so that people can look at us and say, "What a great God **he** is!"

There is not a person who doesn't have an opportunity to proclaim his excellencies. Peter would tell us that calling isn't a choice; we are called. One cool thing is that each of us as living stones being built up into a spiritual house, live, work and play in different places. So we have the opportunity to sprinkle the Peninsula with proclamations of his excellencies. Peter ends with this thought:

### **We are the Privileged People of God**

We can never forget this. It's uncomfortable to face up to the fact that many of us may have forgotten who we are. We have allowed the world to steal our identity. When we forget who we are in Christ, sin immediately becomes more seductive and easier to do. When we forget our new identity, we become more self-sufficient and less connected to God and one another. When we forget that we are the privileged people of God, it becomes easier to simply consume on a Sunday instead of living in caring community throughout the week. When we forget who we are, we are unable to help reconcile the division in our country. When we forget our identity in Christ, we will likely become part of the problem.

I want us to bow our heads now. I want to share some questions that I have been wrestling with this week. I hope you will consider how the reminder of your new identity and all the privileges that come with it would speak into the following areas of your life:

Does your identity in Christ as a privileged people of God speak into the hopes and dreams and plans you have for your life?

Men, does your identity in Christ speak into how you engage your wife? Wives, does your identity in Christ speak into how you engage your husband? Husbands and wives, does your identity in Christ speak into how you engage your children? Singles, does your new identity in Christ speak into how you embrace your singleness?

Does it speak into how you decide what you view on your computer, or how you spend your money, or how you respond to a health crisis in your life, or how you respond when those crazy difficult things happen in your life?

May each of us remember Peter's words not only today, but also tomorrow and the next day and the day after that. **"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."** May we never forget the truth: We are the children of God.

*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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