

“Who Are We?”

1 Peter 1:1-2

Mercy Hill Church | May 5, 2024

Big Idea: *One of the most important things in life is to not just know who we are – but whose we are and how we came to be. Knowing this as Christians will ground us through the storms of life & faith.*

1. Our Identity: Who We Are (v.1)

- (cf. 1 Peter 2:11, Hebrews 11:13, Matthew 8:20, Deuteronomy 4:37, Acts 10:34-35, Isaiah 5:11-13, 1 Peter 2:9, 5:12)
- **Peter’s Identity: An Apostle of Jesus Christ**
 - Peter’s identity is rooted in Christ Jesus.
 - Apostle in the general sense means “sent one” or “messenger.” But here refers to a formal title – the 12 apostles (disciples) who witnessed the life, death and resurrection of Jesus along with His teachings and miracles.
 - Spiritual gift of “apostleship” not the same as being an Apostle.
 - Peter writes with authority not from himself but from God
 - Background of 1 Peter
 - When? ~62-63 A.D.
 - 64 A.D. Emperor Nero falsely accused and persecuted Christians for a fire which burned ½ of Rome.
 - Apostles Peter & Paul killed (martyred) in subsequent years
 - Where? Rome
 - Who? Christians (mostly Gentile, non-Jewish) dispersed throughout modern day Turkey, regions of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia
 - Map from ESV Study Bible (Crossway):



- Why? To encourage and remind the believers to stand firm (1 Peter 5:12) and persevere
- **People’s Identity: Elect Exiles**
 - Exiles (Strangers, Aliens, Sojourners, Pilgrims)
 - Living in between two worlds
 - 1 Peter 2:11 - Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and *exiles* to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.
 - Hebrews 11:13 – These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and *exiles* on the earth.

- **Historic (1st Century) Greco-Roman Cultural Background (from Peter Davids)**
 - Various gods and goddesses were everywhere – statues and sometimes altars and shrines along the streets, and temples in the towns and cities
 - Most meats sold in the markets came from sacrifices made in those temples
 - In a household there would be a shrine...daily offerings which might include some wine, some bread or grain or flowers or incense, etc.
 - Extended family would celebrate various special occasions: births, birthday, marriages, deaths, building a new house – would include offerings to the appropriate god or goddesses – and if large enough event, would take place in a temple
 - If the family were an artisan, family would belong to a trade guild which would have meetings and celebrations – often in a dining hall of the temple of the god or goddess that was the patron deity of the guild
 - All civic celebrations had a similar religious component to them
- **Jews, as the only monotheists, would not participate...while still participating in trade and commerce...but could not fully participate in the trade guilds nor civic affairs.**
 - They constantly had to decide what compromises they could live with and where they had to draw the line. It was difficult for them to eat with a pagan or actively participate in much of pagan society since so much of life was intertwined with pagan religion.
 - Naturally led to suspicion of the Jews.
 - Considered foreigners; considered “atheists” (re: had no images/statues so obviously no deities!); practiced genital mutilation (circumcision)
 - Jews did have protected legal status in Roman Empire; however not always tolerated – some were able to live peacefully, while others not as much.
 - Jews were considered “immigrants” – allowed to live under their own traditions and practices so long as they did not break local laws -- but view and considered as “other” and experienced discrimination
- **Christians were considered a subgroup of Jews – since Jesus was Jewish, and majority of initial followers were Jewish...and believed in a monotheistic God.**
 - But very different when a non-Jewish (Gentile) became a follower of Jesus
 - In Greco-Roman eyes this person (Gentile Christian) had no ancient right to live like a Jew.
 - Rejecting the gods of their upbringing and their community -- and undermining the welfare of the city, they were seen as anti-social and “atheistic”
- **Gentile Christians, in essence, were a “double-minority” and felt the sting of isolation, discrimination and persecution of following Jesus even more so!**
- **Elect (Chosen)**
 - In the OT, Israel (Jews) were God’s chosen people (cf. Deut 4:35-37) but that was never meant to be exclusive. The redemptive story of the Bible is God’s mission for all peoples to know Him – and God’s “chosen” people expanded beyond ethnic lines to include Gentiles (non-Jewish) people. Not exclusive but inclusive – the gospel for all peoples!

- Side note: remarkable to consider the life of Peter and his former attitude and views of Gentiles and his growth and understanding of God’s mission for all peoples (cf. Acts 10:9-35)
 - 1 Peter 2:9 – “But you are a *chosen* race...” – not just Jews but Gentiles!
 - Peter reminds them that even though they are exiles, they are elect – they have been chosen by God!
- OT Context: Being exiled was punishment and judgment from God on Israel due to their sin and disobedience -- most notably being conquered and exiled in 722 B.C. by the Assyrians and in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians.
 - Isaiah 5:11-13 - ¹¹Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them! ¹²They have lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine at their feasts, but they do not regard the deeds of the LORD, or see the work of his hands. ¹³Therefore my people go into exile for lack of knowledge; their honored men go hungry, and their multitude is parched with thirst.
- However, here in the NT, the Christians are seen as exiles not because of their lack of faith and obedience to God, but rather because of their faith and obedience to God! Peter reminds and encourages these Christians of their identity as elect exiles!
 - Jesus had forewarned his disciples:
 - John 16:33 "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."
 - John 15:18 "If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you."
 - Matthew 8:20 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

2. **Our Origin (Story): How We Came To Be (v.2)**

- (cf. Romans 8:29, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 1 Corinthians 6:11, 1 Peter 1:22, Romans 6:16, Exodus 24:3-8, Ezekiel 36:24-28)
- Peter not only reminds these Christians of who they are as elect exiles, he also reminds them of how they came to be – their “origin” story:
- **Work of the Triune God**
- Note how all 3 persons of the Trinity are mentioned: Father, Spirit and Jesus (Son). All at work in their lives in calling them and shaping them to be who they are as God’s children, elect exiles.
 - **Foreknowledge of God the Father**
 - God’s sovereignty and initiative in salvation.
 - God did not just know them—God was at work in them even before they were aware of it. God the Father took the initiative in their lives and has drawn them into an intimate, loving and redemptive relationship with Him! (Jobes)
 - Purposeful plan => ultimate foundation for hope and encouragement
 - “Know” in Hebrew often refers to God’s covenantal love bestowed upon his people
 - Jeremiah 1:5 “Before I formed you in the womb I *knew* you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”
 - Romans 8:29 “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...”
 - 1 Peter 1:20 “He (Jesus) was foreknown before the foundation of the world...”
 - **Sanctification of the Spirit**

- Traditionally in (reformed) Christianity we view part of the *ordo salutis* (“order of salvation”) as regeneration, faith, repentance, *justification*, *sanctification*, perseverance, glorification.
- However, we do see in Scripture the word “sanctification” often used to convey the ongoing growth in faith and likeness of Jesus, but can also refer to that initial separation from sin – “consecration” or “set apart”
 - 2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, *through sanctification by the Spirit* and belief in the truth.
 - 1 Corinthians 6:11 ¹¹ And such were some of you. *But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.
- **For obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood**
 - “Obeying the truth depicts their conversion through the truth of the gospel” (Craig Keener) – that is obeying (or responding to) the truth of the gospel – repentance, faith and trust in Jesus!
 - 1 Peter 1:22 Having purified your souls *by your obedience to the truth* for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart
 - Sprinkling of Blood
 - In OT, sprinkling used for cleansing a leper (Lev 14:6-7) or for ordaining priests (Exodus 29:21), but more significantly and relevant to our passage, a covenant was confirmed with sprinkling of blood
 - Exodus 24:3-8 ³ Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules.^[a] And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.” ⁴ And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. ⁶ And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. ⁷ Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” ⁸ And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”
 - Forgiveness and cleansing the people needed to stand in right relation with God
 - Entrance into the covenant required an obedient response to the gospel and sprinkling of blood
 - Ezekiel 36:24-28 “For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My

ordinances. "You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.

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Reflection Questions

- *How do you view yourself? Who are you? What are the things you tend to draw (find) your identity from (in)? How does this passage remind and encourage you of your true identity in Christ?*
- *How have you experienced being an "exile" -- either in general and/or as a Christian? How did that feel?*
- *What are your expectations of the Christian life? Do they more reflect your personal desires or the reality of what Scripture says? What are some of the difficulties you are facing in life these days?*
- *In what ways do you need to be reminded that the Christian faith, following Jesus, is about grace & God's work in your life? Have you turned to God in repentance and faith in Jesus? Why or why not?*
- *Parent Corner: How would your child answer the question, "Who am I?" In what ways can you prepare your child(ren) to be faithful exiles in this world? What are ways you can help root your child's identity in Christ vs. in other things?*