



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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**Volume 18 Issue 37**

**October 5, 2019**

## **A glorious Appraisal Part 3**

*A Case of Mistaken Identity*

- *The Legend of King Arthur*
- *The Importance of Being Earnest (Oscar Wilde)*
- *Superman*
- *The Ugly Duckling*
- *Tangled.*

Each of these stories are quite different, yet each of them share the same theme, a case of

mistaken identity! For example, *The Ugly Duckling* begins on a farm where a swan egg somehow is born into a duck family. Because in comparison to a duckling the swan was large, ugly, and awkward, the swan is mercilessly persecuted by his fellow ducks and the rest of the animals on the farm. In time he leaves the farm venturing out into the world where for a year he continues to suffer as he moves from group to group eventually braving the winter alone in a cave.

Spring finally comes and the ugly duckling can't imagine going through another summer as the year before. Seeing a flock of the most beautiful birds- swans- swimming on the lake, he decides to throw himself at them believing that it would be better to be killed by such beautiful birds than to live a life of ugliness and misery. Yet to his amazement, he is welcomed by the swans which confuses him until he looks at his reflection in the water and discovers that in fact, he was not a duckling, but a swan all the time!

We love this motif because we can imagine the radical change that would occur if a beaten down nobody came to the awareness that he actually was a somebody! Imagine if we were that king (as in Arthur) or that queen (as in Rapunzel/Tangled)! Imagine coming to the realization of what you actually were!

And yet family of God, you need not imagine, for you are living out that story in Christ! In Adam, we were born as losers, nobodies, with no future! Yet in Christ our true identity as kings and queens has been revealed such that we have the glorious prospect of co-reigning with God for the rest of eternity!

But until then, what is our calling? It is to understand and then flesh out our true identity.

Romans 12:2a, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

In other words, come to know who you are and, more importantly, whose you are!

Colossians 3:10b, "...put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him."

This is a calling for us both to know what we have become in Christ and to live in light of what Christ has made us to be!

Ephesians 5:8, "...you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light."

That is the point Peter makes in 1 Peter 2! Yes, from the world's perspective, God's people (then and now) were/are nobodies, fools, the scum of the earth as they lost their homes, suffered in prison, and died a martyr's death. "But you" (look at v. 9) are NOT at all what the world sees or imagines (you are NOT a duckling BUT a swan)!

Peter has shown us man's universal condition: he is in rebellion against God and is thus the object of God's wrath! But when Christ transforms our identity in Christ we become what God has made us to be on account of the grace of Christ (v. 9a), "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession"! This is our True Identity!

Now Peter focuses our attention upon the impact that our newly discovered identity will have in our lives. It begins with our finding our purpose in our outlook in Christ.

1 Peter 2: 9b, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that [ὅπως (*hopōs*) which is a purpose clause] you may proclaim the excellencies of Him..."

Unlike the worldling who views their life as all about them, we live with a distinct conviction: EVERYTHING going on in our life is BY Christ, FOR Christ, THROUGH Christ, and UNTO Christ!

Revelation 4:11, "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will [or 'Thy pleasure'] they existed, and were created."

That having been said, notice that the language here just ISN'T that of glorifying God. Rather, Peter says that on account of what God has made us in Christ our lives now are for the purpose of "proclaiming His excellencies."

But what are Christ's excellencies? The word "excellencies" was used to denote the highest form of moral behavior and so is translated in Scripture as "moral goodness," "eminence," or "virtue." We are talking here about the goodness and greatness of God! In this regard, now that we are children of God our new-found purpose is to spend our time on this earth both growing in our understanding of "God's excellencies" as well as sharing this understanding with the world!<sup>1</sup>

In this regard, notice the word for "proclaim" is ἐξαγγέλλω (*exaggellō*). This is the only place this word is used in the Bible — AND YET it had a very specific nuance in Paul's day! In secular Greek, it was used in the context of tragedy, and so referenced the discovery of that which in normal life would not be seen! (Kittel, 1977, p. 12) "Proclaiming" therefore is NOT merely talking of the "excellencies of God" discovered from an academic study of the Bible. RATHER it is sharing the beauty, glory, grace, and kindness of God that is discovered by walking with God in the crucible!

This is quite an appropriate call for Peter's persecuted brethren. Peter tells them that they must use their suffering as a vehicle both to understand and then to proclaim the goodness and so the greatness of God!<sup>2</sup> Incredible!

The world looks at suffering, trial, and difficulty and uses it as an excuse to give vent to their

hatred for God! For them, any and all pain is an argument against God's goodness. In contrast and in the context of this epistle, Peter knows that trial and difficulty in the life of a man or woman of God will have the net effect of making God and His promises more precious.<sup>3</sup> For example:

1 Peter 1:3-6, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials."

Family of God, trial and difficulty do not squelch the light of Christ. Rather it makes Christ that much more precious to us — for He has overcome the world (cf. John 16:33)! This is no doubt why the Psalmist proclaimed:

Psalm 119:71, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes."

Remember the context here is that of suffering whereby:

1 Peter 2:4-5, "...coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

Understand an important principle: God is after our reliance upon Him and so He ordains trial. Yet what do we do with trial? We misuse it to question God's goodness! Jack Miller put it this way:

When God shows you your weakness and you think He has forgotten you, you get broken in the wrong place. God wants to break us at the point of our pride, and we let ourselves get broken at the point of our trust. (Miller, 2014 , p. 273)

Now this may go without saying, but for us to do this we must make "the excellencies of God" the focus of our lives prior to any trial! See I have a theory... one of the reasons we don't share "the excellencies of God" in the valley is because we ourselves don't believe that God is good! Academically none of us would debate the proposition. But practically, how long has it been since we "tasted and seen that the Lord is good"? In order for us to proclaim and see "God's goodness," in the valley we ourselves must partake in it in a land of peace (cf. Jeremiah 12:5)- which means we must actively labor, long, and pray to behold God's kindness/goodness!

Over the years I have been on an odyssey in my walk with God. I began praying that God would show me His goodness — which in part is what Moses prayed when he asked of God,

“Show me Thy glory” (Exodus 33:18).

I then set my focus in my daily study times to discover “the riches of God’s kindness and grace” which, according to Ephesians 2:7, God intends to display to us for the rest of eternity! And Christian, do you know what I have discovered? The overwhelming glory of God’s kindness, mercy, and love!

- Truly, we do not have because we do not ask! (James 4:2)!
- We do not find because we do not seek (Matthew 7:7)!
- We do not discover because we fail to knock (Matthew 7:7)!

So Christian, ask... seek... knock! Purpose this week to get out of it nothing more than beholding the excellencies of Christ! And then, as you discover it, purpose to share what you have learned with another person!

Carrying on with our changed outlook on life because of our newfound Identity in Christ, Peter addresses another important element: Because of what we are in Christ, we now also have a new perspective.

1 Peter 2: 9c, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God’s* own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

This passage is talking about what really happened when you and I were saved. We were transferred from the dominion of darkness into the Kingdom of Light (cf. also Colossians 1:13)!

In order to appreciate this, we begin by considering the “darkness” from which we have been delivered. In Scripture the word “darkness” has distinct connotations. It is associated with and so equivalent to:

1. Blindness, 1 John 2:11.
2. Sin, Proverbs 2:13 cf. Proverbs 4:19.
3. Evil, Ephesians 6:12.
4. Ignorance, Psalm 82:5.
5. Folly, Ecclesiastes 2:13–14
6. Falsehood, 1 John 1:6.
7. Death, Job 10:21–22; Psalm 88:12.
8. Imprisonment, Psalm 107:10, 14; Isaiah 42:7; 49:9.
9. The loss of everything good thing, Job 18:6, 18; Psalm 35:6.

In contrast “light” has the exact opposite connotation. On account of Christ we now are able:

1. To see (1 John 5:20).
2. To obey (Romans 6:16).

3. To do good (Galatians 6:10).
4. To know truth (John 14:6).
5. To live a life of meaning (Philippians 2:16).
6. To live in reality (John 1:1, 14; 14:6).
7. To enjoy life (1 Thessalonians 3:8).
8. To walk in freedom (Galatians 5:13)!
9. To have and enjoy every good thing (1 Timothy 6:17)!

Truly, God has called us from “darkness” and all its implications to live in the warmth, beauty, goodness, and blessing of His “light”! As such, in Christ we are able to see the world, God’s Kingdom, and so reality accurately!

And yet we know that today we are not fully there! We live in the already/not yet, where “darkness” and “light” exist side by side in the life of the believer. And thus, every day — and this is important — we have the choice either to live according to darkness or to live according to light!

This is what is behind Peter’s exhortation. Satan, this world, evil and wicked men/nations may endeavor to hold us in a dark place. But as long as you have Christ, you can walk in the light. Accordingly, our call, “while passing through the valley of weeping” is to “make it a spring” (Psalm 84:6)! Paul put it this way:

Romans 13:11-14, “And this *do*, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us [in prison, at work, in traffic, on the scaffold, or seated on a worldly throne] behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. [How do we do this?] But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.”

One of the themes that arises in Science Fiction stories is the fanciful idea of a multiverse (instead of a Universe). Here different, yet parallel universes existed side by side. In many of these stories the main character is transported into one of these parallel worlds. There he could still see and interact with what was going on in our world, but he also was subject to the world to which he had been brought- which involved interacting with peoples, creatures, and concerns that were alien and invisible to the world as we know it!

Science fiction aside, in Christ we literally have been introduced into a new realm; a realm of light, purity, righteousness, and peace! Accordingly, we have one foot in this world and one foot in the next! Now the lost and dying of this world do NOT see it and so from their perspective we are a little odd. Peter records it this way:

1 Peter 4:4, “And in *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign *you*.”

Yet we see the kingdom of God... we have tasted it and have begun to enjoy it! And Peter's question to his persecuted brethren was/is, "Will you live by it!"

And so, on account of our Identity in Christ, we have a new outlook when it comes to life! And yet Peter is not quite finished. On account of our Identity in Christ, we also note that there is a transformation also when it comes to a new expectation when it comes to the future.

1 Peter 2:10, "For you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

At first glance this appears to be a statement of our value to God.<sup>4</sup> Yet when we see that behind this text is Hosea (cf. Hosea 1:6, 9–10; 2:23), we recognize that Peter is celebrating the glorious fact that because of our sonship and God's mercy we now have a future and a hope (the very thing which the Old Testament people of God at the time of Hosea lacked)! Ironically, non-Christians have absolutely no ground for any hope of a brighter tomorrow, and yet most live expecting that tomorrow will be better than today. In contrast Christians have been introduced to reality and so know the vanity that accompanies the things of this life. And as a result, so many choose to live in doom and gloom — as a defeated army!

Christian, behold and come to understand your future!

As "the people of God" you have before you the consummation of every promise and plan that God has ever made or imagined.

2 Corinthians 1:20, "For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes..."

Do you understand this? Name a promise God has made in Scripture! If you are a son/daughter of God, then that promise is or will be fulfilled in your life! Furthermore, as ones who have received "mercy" we have the basis to live in any place or time unto the glory and praise of God. Recall Paul's exhortation after spending eleven chapters describing the "mercies of God" to the Roman believers.

Romans 12:1, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship."

And so far from becoming "name it claim it" types, our sonship and God's mercies give us an amazing confidence regardless of the prison cell in which we might find ourselves! And so though today at times we might suffer in this state of sin and misery, it truly is the only hell we will ever know! What lays before us is a New Heavens and Earth where we shall "be like Christ" (Romans 6:5), see Him as He is (1 John 3:2), know as we are fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12), cast off this mortal (1 Corinthians 15:53), be free once and for all of the pains and miseries of this life (Revelation 21:3-4), and so forever be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17)!

So, of all people we ought to be filled with hope, expectation, courage, and joy! If the grave could NOT hold Christ, neither ought a prison cell to diminish our joy!

In summary, we have before us a very important choice: By what will you allow yourself to be defined? Will it be:

- The world's estimate of you?
- The prison in which you currently reside?
- Your own personal struggles of sin or doubt?

Or the estimation of God?!

Peter urges us to live in light of the estimation of God

- By which we have become "...a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession."
- By which we live to "proclaim the excellencies of God" as they are discovered in the fire.
- By which we have the glorious expectation and hope that tomorrow truly will be better than today!
- By which we have become sons and daughters of God most high.
- By which we live in light of His many mercies!

If that will be you and me — if ever these things are going to define us — it will require two things:

1. A daily choice when it comes to the content of our identity, and
2. A willingness to struggle to live according to it!

David Powlison put it this way: "Your true identity [in Christ] is a gift of God, a surprising discovery, and then a committed choice." (ESV Men's Devotional Bible, 2015)

So Christian, "...do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Make the choice each day to view yourself as God does!

## References

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## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> Examples of this can be seen in the hymns of Revelation (4:11; 5:9; 15:3–4; 19:1)!

<sup>2</sup> In this context, would you notice that this calling is in the realm of the prophetic ministry. Last time we saw that in Christ we have become “Royal Priests.” Here we discover that our telos when it comes to our purpose on this earth. Our jobs, our relationships, our parenting, our leisure, our health, our education, all of in the good and bad to tell the world the glorious character and deeds of God as they are revealed in our trials and difficulties!

<sup>3</sup> “The Isaiah context is probably foremost in Peter’s mind, since the next phrase, that you may declare the wonderful deeds, also contains an echo of Isaiah 43:21, ‘to tell forth my praises’ (Isaiah’s word ‘praises’, *aretas* (LXX), is the same as Peter’s word translated ‘wonderful deeds’). The context is appropriate, for it promises redemption from captivity in Babylon (Isaiah 43:14) and repeatedly emphasizes that God forgives and redeems his people for his own sake, that his glory might be proclaimed (Isaiah 42:8, 12; 43:7; 43:25; 44:23). Similarly, God has redeemed Christians not out of Babylon but out of darkness and has called them to himself, taking them not back to Jerusalem but into his marvellous light. (Cf. 2 Corinthians 4:6; Ephesians 5:8; Colossians 1:12–13; 1 Thessalonians 5:4–5; 1 John 2:8–11.)” (Grudem, 2009, pp. 117-118)

<sup>4</sup> In this regard, Chuck Swindoll made this excellent observation, “Think about how much the value of something ordinary increases when it has been owned by someone extraordinary. An old dictionary becomes more valuable if it was Abraham Lincoln’s dictionary. A desk suddenly becomes more expensive and interesting if Winston Churchill wrote his famous speeches hunched over its worn surface. And, yes, a normal man or woman takes on a different kind of significance if she or he is the personal possession of God Almighty (2:10).” (Swindol, 2014, p. 172)