

1 Peter Chapter 2B

I believe that the church today is suffering from a great identity crisis. Ask the ordinary man on the street, “What is the church?” and you will receive a variety of responses. You can visit different institutions that are called “Church,” and come away thinking that you have been in a pep rally or a theatrical extravaganza, or you could walk away feeling like you have been in a therapy session or a lecture.

A vast majority of people will tell you that the church is simply a building. When they think of the church they immediately think of the brick and mortar that make up the meetinghouses in which the church gathers.

- Those who view the church in that way would say that success in ministry can be observed through the beauty and size of the building. It can be observed in all of the expensive, elaborate furnishings within the building.

A growing number of people today view the church as a theater, a place where productions are staged and extravaganzas are put on to entertain people. After all that’s how you draw a crowd today. (*you need special lighting, high energy music*)

- Leadership in these churches believe that the way to win the world is to be like the world. So they put on productions of Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” when Halloween falls on a Sunday. Is that Church?

Other people see the church as the great bastion of social justice and they seek to apply Christian ethics to the social problems that are rampant in our world like poverty, educational equality, addiction, crime and war.

- Very often, these churches are so focused on meeting the immediate needs of society that that they neglect the transforming power of the Gospel.

Friends, I believe that when the identity of the church is unclear, the mission of the church becomes uncertain. If we don’t know who we are, how can we know what God has called us to do? I believe that Identity helps to define mission.

- So I will ask, where can we look, what resource should we employ to discover the true identity and mission of the church?
- Of course, we need to look to God’s Word, we need to open our Bibles.

The Scriptures provides us with a number of pictures, a variety of images that can help us to determine the identity of the church.

Very often in the Scripture, the church is compared to a Body. Not just any body it is the Body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12: 27 states it plainly: **Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.**

So the church is a Body, a living entity, a complex unity of different parts all living in mutual submission to one single head. Every part is dependent on the others and the life of every part flows from Christ who is the head.

One of my favorite images of the church is that of a Bride, pure and chaste, chosen and loved by Christ her bridegroom. We see that in Ephesians 5:31-32 and also in: Revelation 21: 9 **Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."**

- Because the church has been chosen by God the Father to live eternally in a covenant relationship of Love with the Son it is pictured as a Bride.

And while the church is NOT merely the brick and mortar building in which we gather, the Bible actually compares the church to a building, with strong foundations, more specifically the Bible compares the church to a "Temple

1 Corinthians 3:16 **Do you not know that you (Corporately) are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?**

- The Apostle Paul elaborates on the image of a building in his letter to the Ephesian believers.

Ephesians 2: 19 **So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.**

Looking at all of these images I would like you to see that the Identity of the church is essentially tied to the identity of Christ

- We are the Body but He is the head, w/o him there is no life.
- We are the Bride and He is the Groom. w/o him there is no marriage
- We are the Building but He is the chief cornerstone. w/o him the structure falls apart.

As we return to our study of 1 Peter we come to a section where Peter helps us understand both the identity and the mission of the church. Once again, I will remind you that the identity of the church is inseparably tied to the identity of Christ.

- Therefore, if we desire to understand our own identity we MUST first know WHO Jesus IS! What Does Peter Tell Us?

1 Peter 2: 4 **As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

This morning we will begin what may take a couple of weeks discovering the identity of the church by looking first at the identity of Christ. Peter describes Christ in this way:

1. Living Stone
2. Rejected by man
3. Chosen by God and Precious

1 “Living Stone”

Despite the fact that some of you had a “Pet Rock” when you were growing up, we don’t normally think of stones as being ALIVE. They don’t move, eat, breathe or speak. But here in verse 4 Peter describes Jesus, our Lord as a living stone.

- Peter is not making this up as he goes along, He is not using his imagination, He is using the Word of God to identify Christ. The picture that Peter uses comes directly from the Old Testament.
- The Prophet Isaiah says that the coming Messiah, the Son of David will be the chief cornerstone of a new Temple.
- So Peter is saying that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy.
- He is Living because He has risen from the dead.
- He is the chief cornerstone because He is the foundational stone on which the New Testament Temple is built.
- Then in Vs 6, Peter quotes from the Book of Isaiah.

1 Peter 2:6 **For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."**

- In the building of the Temple, the chief cornerstone was the strongest, the greatest and the most important stone in the entire building.
- The cornerstone was the foundation stone, the first stone to be laid. It was set where two supporting walls come together. This stone was the key to the stability of the entire structure. Jesus is the Key to the stability of the church.
- Remember what I read earlier from the book of Ephesians: Listen to it again in the Light of Isaiah’s prophecy.

Ephesians 2: 19 **So then you (Gentile Believers) are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,**

- In the context of Ephesians 2, the two walls that come together are God’s Elect people from among both the Jews and Gentiles. Both of these people groups come together in Christ where they become one new man resting together on Christ who is the cornerstone.

21 in whom (In Christ) the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

- Remember I said if we want to understand the identity of the church, we MUST know the identity of Christ.
- In verse 4 Peter told us that Christ is a “Living Stone,” and then in verse 5 he tells us that the church, every individual who is saved is also a living stone.

1 Peter 2: 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house,

- In light of our union with Christ, By faith, We who believe are LIKE Living Stones who are being built up as a spiritual house.

So we can rightly identify the church not as a building made with human hands BUT as a Spiritual House, God’s Temple, built on the firm foundation of Christ the “Living Stone.”

- We who have been joined to Christ by faith, have become the dwelling place of God, the earthly center for the worship of the True and Living God.

Let’s think about that image: After setting the Chief Cornerstone, laying the foundation, the Stone Mason then begins to add One stone upon another, carefully shaping and molding each stone so that they all fit together and grow to be a Holy Temple in which the glory of God will dwell.

- When God, by His Spirit brings us into union with Christ we become like Him. He is a Living Stone and so we become living stones. Made alive through His Resurrection, many members joined together by the gracious hand of God built into a Holy Temple we God dwells by His Spirit.

Paul tells the Corinthian Believers how they are changed into the image of Christ.

2 Corinthians 3: 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

- By His Grace and for His glory we the living stones have been brought into a living union with Christ to be a Holy Habitation, a glorious dwelling place where the eternal God lives with His redeemed People.

Moving on we see another way in which the identity of the church is tied to Christ. 2, HE was rejected by men but chosen by God.

1 Peter 2: 4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,

- The word that Peter uses for “Rejected” is a word that means, “Precluded or disavowed after a time of examination and testing.”
 - Let me give you an example:

- As a Boy I was a picky eater. Those were the days when there were no fresh vegetables all vegetables grew in cans. The worst of them was peas. Well after a careful examination, I rejected peas. (*kept in cheek till able to leave the table*)
- In this case the builders the Leaders of Israel, carefully examined Jesus, they put him to the test and rejected Him, nailing him to a cross.

Think of how utterly foolish it would be for a builder who has carefully studied all of the blueprints of a building and examined the list of materials only to throw away the most essential element of the entire structure.

- These builders knew God's Word, the blueprints like the back of their hand.
- Like good builders they could tell you the spec and size of every beam, the height and width of every stone and how all of the stones fit together.
- AND YET, when the building materials arrive, after carefully inspecting all of the stones to be used in construction they casts aside, they threw away the chief cornerstone.
- How foolish it is to reject the stone from which every other stone is to be measured. The cornerstone is the anchor that holds every other stone in place. To throw it away is to destroy the whole building.
- And My Friends, that is exactly what the Prophets foretold would happen concerning Christ, the Chief Cornerstone.

1 Peter 2:7 **but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"** 8 **and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.**

- Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, he came performing signs and wonders, proving his identity. Nevertheless, he was rejected and despised.
- This prophetic rejection of Christ, was witnessed firsthand by the Apostles.

John 1: 11 **He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.**

John provides the detailed narrative of Christ's rejection.

John 19: 5 **So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!"** 6 **When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him."** 7 **The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God."**

SO we see that both New and Old Testaments identify Christ as being **"rejected by man a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."** (Isaiah 53:3)

- As we seek to identify the church, we have to wrestle with this difficult truth.

- As it was with Christ, so it is with those who follow Him. He was despised and rejected and we should expect the same treatment from sinful people.
- Here in the U.S. we have been blessed (So Far) to escape persecution, BUT those to whom Peter is writing were experiencing hardship and oppression.
- At the time of Peter's writing, Nero had begun his reign of insanity, and the church was experiencing persecution. That is why Peter wrote in Ch 4.

1 Peter 4: 12 **Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.** 13 **But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.**

- Again, because our identity is tied to Christ we can expect to be misunderstood by the prevailing society around us. It should not surprise us when we are rejected, even hated by the world.
- WE live amidst a population that has rejected the God of the Bible, a society that is openly rebellious to the standards of morality traditionally upheld by the church. This rebellion has laid the ground-work for future persecution.
- On the last night that he was with his disciples Jesus prayed these words:

John 17: 14 **I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.** 15 **I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.** 16 **They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.**

- When you as a living stone seek to glorify God with your life, when you proclaim His goodness, his mercy and seek to live in accord with his Holiness you will be maligned, rejected and even despised by those who love darkness.
- Where can we find comfort, encouragement and solace amidst the increasing hatred and rejection of Biblical truth?
- We rest upon and cling to the Living Stone. Although the world hated Him, he was **"Chosen and Precious in the sight of God."**

3 Chosen by God and Precious

1 Peter 2: 4 **As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious**

- This description of Christ as chosen and precious should be held up in stark contrast to the opinion of fallen man.
- He was despised and rejected by men BUT He was chosen and precious to God.
- He was arrested and put to death by men BUT He was Resurrected and Exalted by God.

In the sovereign plan of God, Jesus had to suffer, had to die as the sacrificial lamb in order to release us from the bondage of sin.

- The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ clearly displays both the rejection of men and the honor of God.

Philippians 2: 8 **And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,**

- Because of who he was and what He did, giving himself as the sacrifice for sin, GOD highly exalted Him, honoring him with a name that is above every name.
- Christ was chosen and precious.

Isaiah 42:1 **Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.**

- Christ was the chosen one, the servant of God, the one in whom the Father delighted.

He was chosen as the God-man, the only Mediator between God and Man. Chosen to be the head of the church, the Savior of the body, the foundation stone of the spiritual building. He was chosen by God to be the author and giver of spiritual and eternal life to as many as were given to him by the Father.

- Now, in the same way that Christ is spoken of as being “Chosen,” WE who are redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, sealed with the precious Holy Spirit can also be called the “Chosen.”

1 Peter 2: 9 **But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**

- As He did with the nation of Israel, God, for His glory choose from among all of the nations, a people, who would be His holy nation, a people for His own possession.

Deuteronomy 7: 7 **It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.**

1 Peter 2: 9 **But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**

What is the Identity of the Church?

- Chosen Race (chosen by God Himself, before the foundation of the world)

- Royal Priesthood – Whose lives are dedicated to the Worship of God, offering spiritual sacrifices of praise, thanksgiving and prayer to the one who redeemed us.
- Holy Nation – A people who have been purchased out of the slave market of sin, set apart for God Himself.

WHAT is our Mission?

- To proclaim the excellencies of him who called US out of darkness into his marvelous light
- His Excellencies: His righteousness, kindness, patience, mercy and grace, His goodness and perfect justice that were clearly displayed through the cross.