

1 Peter: Hope and Our Identity

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 August 2014

Preacher: Tobin Miller

[0 : 00] Good morning. Wow, it's beautiful. Almost times like that with the, before the Lord and just listening and worshiping, you just want to almost just keep it going, right?

Keep focusing on Him and why we're here. If you're here for the first time, my name is Tobin Miller. I'm one of the staff here. I'm one of the pastors here at Watermark.

We're really glad that you're here visiting with us for this time of worshiping the Lord. I have a confession to make. So my wife and my family are back, and I figured I'd better confess in front of a lot of people instead of just her.

That way I won't get in too much trouble. She'll give me more grace that way. You know, this summer I just realized, I realized that I was getting old. I just did that.

There was something in my mind that designated youth in old age, and that something was Wheel of Fortune. Wheel of Fortune is this game show, and they spin a wheel, and you get money, and you have this word up there, and you're trying to guess what the word is and calling out numbers, and you get points and all this stuff.

[1 : 17] And in my mind, I always felt like that was what old people did when they had nothing else to do. They watched Wheel of Fortune. Now, if you love Wheel of Fortune, please, I'm not picking on you.

It's okay to like Wheel of Fortune. But I realized that it was 6.30 on a Monday night back in Texas, and I found myself sitting down watching Wheel of Fortune.

Not only did I watch it, I remembered when it was going to be on because my father-in-law was watching it with me. And in the middle of watching Wheel of Fortune saying, no bankrupt, no bankrupt, 2,000, 2,000, oh, you've got to be able to see that.

That word is so easy. What's wrong with you? Everyone knows it's this. I looked at myself and said, I'm old. I'm getting old.

Now, I realized I was kind of getting old when I was 40, and I had to get these reading glasses. It actually happened on the trip back from Dallas to Hong Kong, and about halfway through the flight, I was 40 years old, and I'm reading this article, and all of a sudden I'm like, I can't.

[2 : 22] I can't see. It's going to happen if you're not 40. Just wait. It will happen if you're normal. And I always prided myself on great eyes, but I just couldn't see, and I was like, oh, my gosh, I need some glasses.

And so I got these glasses. But last year, I started losing my memory. And this is the thing I want to confess. So Christina was back in Dallas helping her mom go through chemo, and we were here for church on Sunday, and I forgot a kid.

I mean, I have, we have four kids, right? That's the last time I counted, we have four kids. And church ended, and everything was perfect, and so I grabbed the kids, and we got in the car, and we drove home, and we got home, and we were walking through the house, and all of a sudden my phone rang, and it's, hello?

I said, Dad, where are you? And I'm counting, one, two, three. One, two, three. Where are you? She goes, well, I'm back at church. I'm like, oh, okay, yeah.

Okay, well, just come walking back, you know. And I realized that I'm getting old. I'm forgetting important things. I'm forgetting important people in my life, you know.

[3 : 36] I remember growing up, I read this story, and it stuck with me. I think I must have been about 13 or 14, because I loved history, and I was reading this book, and it was a story of in the 1600s, how this very famous emperor, this ruler, his wife died in childbirth.

And he was so grieved that he committed to build this amazing mausoleum and tomb to her, to which he went straight to work, and he ordered the famous, the most famous marble and stone and workers and woodcutters, and he just got totally into this project, and this project went on.

So he had his wife and his body in her casket, and he put the casket in the middle of the room, where they were going to build this big temple around her. And he just got totally absorbed into this building project, and 10 years passed, and 11 years passed, and 12 years passed.

And then one day, he was walking around, and he was surveying everything that he was building, and all this great monument, and he bumped into these old dusty boxes that were in the way, and they were just causing trouble.

And he asked his guys to take the boxes out, and to throw them out to make more room, because they needed to continue the project. They needed to continue to work. They needed to build this amazing tomb, this mausoleum.

[4 : 48] They needed all these dirty boxes out of the way. And 20 years after the project, 20 years later when the project was completed, he didn't realize that what he had actually done was he threw his wife out.

His wife's body was in that casket, in those dirty boxes. Everything that he was focusing his life on, his whole project, everything that he was sacrificing for, 20 years of his life, he was building this huge monument that was supposed to have his wife at the center of it, and he forgot who he was building it for.

And he threw her away. So if you go to the Taj Mahal today, his wife isn't there. She was thrown out with the trash.

There's a fake tomb there. He's there. But the wife he built it for isn't there. And I thought about that in my life, growing old and forgetting things, and I realized that sometimes we do that, don't we?

Sometimes we forget why we're doing what we're doing. Sometimes we forget who's at the center of what we're building. Sometimes we become so enamored, so entwined, so focused on things that we forget who's at the center of the thing.

[6 : 16] Sometimes we become too busy, and our businesses become overwhelming, and our families become overwhelming, and our pathway becomes overwhelming, and busy, and our life becomes overwhelming, and sometimes as Christians, often as Christians, we forget about Christ.

We forget why we're doing it. We forget what the purpose of the building is. We forget what the purpose of our life is for. And this is what Peter is writing to for in 1 Peter 2.

I mean, it's the same thing. He's writing to Christians in Turkey, Asia Minor, who've lost their focus. They've lost their meaning. They've lost the stone.

They've lost why they do everything. But he's also writing to us because sometimes we just lose it because we get busy. They're losing it because they're being persecuted for their faith, and they're being killed because they're Christians.

But in either side, Peter wants us to know why we're building our life, and why we're building stuff, and what we're doing it for. And so very briefly today, because we're going to have a special, hopefully a reflection time on this, I want to talk about who we are as God's people.

[7 : 36] Now if you're here and you're not in the family of God, listen and ask questions because this is a teaching moment for you just as much as it's a teaching moment for us. I want to talk about who we are, and then I want to talk about what we do, and I want to talk about why we do it.

So who we are as God's people, what we do as God's people, and why are we doing it? What is the purpose behind it? And remember Peter's talking to these Christians who are being scattered, and they're being beat up, and they're being persecuted, and he said here, as he said in previous weeks, that when we become God's people, when you and I invite Christ into our life, when we repent of our sin, we see our neediness, we see our brokenness, when we do that, the Bible says that the Holy Spirit comes into us, and God's Spirit comes into us, and God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, God, he begins to, he changes us.

Peter says, and the rest of the scripture says, that when that happens, we start to think differently. We start to act differently. We start to talk differently. We start to walk differently. We start to value different things. We become different than the people around us who don't know Christ, those who aren't yet in the family of God.

We think differently than the culture, and he says that when we start thinking differently than the culture, then we're going to experience tension, that when we live out our faith, we live out who we are as God's people, we will feel tension.

We're going to rub against each other. We're going to rub against our bosses. We're going to rub against society. We're going to rub against everything because we're different, and God's spirit continues to change us and to make us different.

[9 : 20] And Peter shares with us some ideas of how we're different now than what we were before. Well, he says it in verse nine. He says the first thing we do is that we've become a royal priesthood. Royal, it means holy.

It means above. It means set aside for a perfect purpose. And when he said this, people went, whoa. Because the priesthood in Jesus' day and the priesthood in Peter's day, it was everything.

I mean, the priest served in the temple. The priest kept the sacrifices. The priest did the sacrifices. The priest brought the people to God. The priest's job was to reconcile broken people to a holy God.

I mean, in the Old Testament, it says you were born into the priesthood. You didn't become a priest. Even if you wanted to be a priest, you couldn't be a priest because you were born into it because out of the 12 tribes, there was one tribe, Levi. And out of that Levi tribe, there was about 14 different families in it.

But out of those 14 families, there was only about four of them served in the temple. And everybody wanted to be a part of those four families, but they couldn't because you had to be born into it.

[10 : 23] And what Peter says to us now is that as God's people, don't forget, because before you weren't priests, before you needed help, but now you're royal, you're set aside, and you're the priest.

You're God's priest. Your job is to bring people to him. The word in Latin is very interesting. One of the words for priest actually means bridge builder.

Ponticut. It means you're a bridge builder. And so what Peter is saying here is that you and I, as God's people, with God's spirit in us, changing us, we're bridge builders.

We're building bridges between the world that doesn't know God, the world that doesn't not yet know God, to God. He says as priests, we use our time, we use our talents, we use our gifts, we use our resources, and our main focus is to build bridges.

Did you know that? As God's people, one of your main purposes, and you're always talking about what's my purpose in life, why does God have me here, what am I supposed to be doing? Here are the passages. This passage tells us what our purpose is.

[11 : 25] He says our main purpose is to build bridges. We build bridges to people who don't know God and bring them to the Savior. Peter goes on and he describes in verse nine, he says you're a holy nation.

Now remember before we weren't a holy nation. We were unholy. We were walking in darkness. We didn't want to even know God. But here he says holy. Remember last week we said that word holy. It means you belong to God.

When God calls us his holy people, it means that above all else, it means we belong to him. And so what he's saying now is that we're no longer Americans or Australians or Germans or Hong Kongese or Chinese or Texans.

We're no longer those things. Now we're a holy people, a holy nation. That when you look at our passport, it doesn't say whatever country yours thinks you say, but what it says as God's people is heaven.

And when you go to the embassy, you don't go to a consul, you don't go to the embassy, but you go to God. God. And what he's saying here is that now as God's holy nation, there's nothing that can come through to you unless it first goes through to your representative.

[12 : 35] It means that God is the leader. He's the head. He's the figure. He's standing over your nation. He's watching you. He's guarding you. He's protecting you. And there's nothing today that's going to happen in your life that God does not allow to happen if you're hitting his people.

Does that make sense? I mean, that was really comforting for the people in Peter's day because they were being killed for their faith.

And he says, there's nothing today that can happen to you that God does not want that out, that God does not stop, that God says, okay, yes, they can handle this. Okay, they need this. Okay, this can happen.

He's our representative. We're his people. Our passport says heaven. Remember, our passport says heaven. Hong Kong is not our home. Australia is not our home.

Canada is not our home. As much as most of you wish that Texas was your home, Texas is not your home. Heaven's our home.

[13 : 37] And Peter wants us to remember that we're new people, that we're different, that we're a royal priesthood, that we're a holy nation, that we're bridge builders. And finally, he uses this word, and it's a very powerful word.

And it would probably take me three sermons to unpack it. It starts in verse four. It goes to verse five, and then it talks about it. And he says, what we are is we're living stones. But each one of us in here, we're living stones.

And do you notice what he's been saying in this passage? He doesn't say, Tobin you, Tobin this, Tobin this, but he's talking about community. He's talking about a group of people. He's not talking about God changing us as individuals.

What he's doing is he's talking about God changing us as a family. I mean, Peter and all of the gospels talk about how we change, how we grow closer to God, how all that takes place is it takes place in a community, takes place in a family.

It doesn't take place by yourself. I mean, they wouldn't have all those commandments about be nice to each other and take care of each other and shed off all these things and get rid of malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander. All of those things are things that break community.

[14 : 43] All of those things are focused on yourself. And Peter says, no, we are called now as living stones and we've been brought together as these living stones and these living stones huddle together and living stones are rough and they're different and they rub each other and they hurt each other but God allows that to happen because he's shaping us.

And it's like this big monolith that's there, Christ and he's this living stone and the imagery goes way back to the Old Testament and it means that Jesus is personal, that he cares for you, he's alive, he's spiritual, he's a solid foundation that he can take care of you, he's true, he never changes, he's holy, we can depend upon him.

That he's bringing us to him so that we as his people can rest on him. And the imagery that he uses here is this idea of this foundation, this stone, this is my son's, this is the best I could get, but if you go to Israel with us in two years, you're going to the temple and when you go underneath the temple and these tunnels, you see this foundation stone that Jesus was talking about.

And this stone was like 30 feet wide and like 80 feet long and about 20 feet tall and it was the capstone, it was the cornerstone, it was the most perfect stone, it weighed like 500 tons.

And you look at it because all the rest of the temple rested on that and you're wondering how in the heck did they cut that? How did they get that there? What's going on there? And what Peter is saying is there's even a much greater stone that we rest on.

[16 : 16] And that stone is Christ. And not only is that stone the center of our lives, but he says it's also the foundation that he builds us on top of each other.

Now the imagery is scary, the imagery is powerful, but the imagery of the cornerstone is this thing that basically says Jesus is the most perfect stone, it's the biggest stone, it's the true stone, it's the holy stone, it's a never changing stone, the cornerstone was the most important thing in a building.

It was the most precious, the most precise, it was the thing that determined your building. If you had a crappy cornerstone, you had a crappy building. It was made out of sandstone, it fell apart.

But usually you wanted a great, amazing structure. You had the best material. It was the straightest piece of rock. It determined how you built.

If the cornerstone was crooked, your house was crooked. If the cornerstone was straight, your house would be going to be great and it determined everything. And what Peter is saying here is that Jesus now is this cornerstone in our lives.

[17 : 22] He's this cornerstone in our church. And he says, if you build on this stone, you'll never need to be ashamed. If you build on the stone of Christ in your life, in his word, you're never going to have to come back and go, oh, I just messed up.

Oh, wow, I shouldn't have done that. He's saying, if you build on this cornerstone, if you lay your life on Christ, your life will always turn out straight and right.

So here's a question for us as God's living stones. What cornerstone are we building on? If you're going to draw out a map of your life and your life is this house you're building, what's that foundation in your life?

What's that foundation that you're building on? If you go to San Jose, there's an amazing house there. It's the Winchester house, Elizabeth Winchester. Her husband died like in 1880.

I mean, it's a crazy, crazy house. It's like a crazy person house. And so she received about \$20 million part of the Winchester, or I just know this because I'm a hunter, the gun factory.

[18 : 37] So she received \$20 million as her inheritance from her husband and then she received which would have been like hundreds of millions of dollars today and then she received \$1,000 a day as her salary which would be about \$50,000 a day today.

So this was her salary. So she went to San Jose and she built this, she bought this six bedroom house and she just started building on it. And she hired like two or three groups of laborers and constructioners and architects and if you go there it's amazing.

It'll take you forever to go through it. I mean, it costs you like \$30 but it's worth the \$30 if you have a good tour guide. But it's like, it's like she just kept building for 30 years. For 30 years she's built on this house and there's just no rhyme or reason.

There's like 160 bedrooms. There's like 500 rooms. There's like 58 bathrooms which is great if you're a woman but as a guy. there's like 60 staircases.

There's three elevators. There's two that are, they go up, you know, what do you call that? Horizontally. But there's actually one elevator, the first of its kind ever in America that goes vertically. It's kind of like Willy Wonka, right?

[19 : 42] I've always wanted to see that horizontal, vertical. Right, right, okay. My wife is going. I'm so glad you're back. So, you know, so she builds this house and you go there and you're like, wow, this is, you know, it's seven stories tall and it's out of control.

47 fireplaces and 60 stairwells and it's just crazy and you look at her house and you say, what was she thinking? You know, sometimes that's like some of our lives.

If we're honest and we look at the map that we're building and the house that we're building and we have somebody who loves us and cares enough about us to come alongside of us, they look at our lives and say, what were you thinking?

You cannot find the cornerstone in the Winchester house because there's not one because it's this craziness and the hard thing is that sometimes for us as God's children, it's the same thing.

We started off with the cornerstone, Jesus, but then we just started building our own little kingdom and our world and things that we want and things that are important to us and no one ever said, well, how does that fit into the house that God has you building and we didn't even think about that, we just kept building.

[21 : 05] Peter says, if you build on Jesus, this amazing, precious cornerstone, you'll never be ashamed.

You know, the scary thing, I think, for me about this passage and for us is that he talks about it in the plural. He says, we and we and we and what he's saying over and over is it's a community, it's a church, it's what he has planned for us.

We live through the church and his people and you know, my experience in Hong Kong is most people think of church just like another club. I remember before when we moved to Hong Kong, Christina's dad grew up here and lived here in his 60s and I said, so what's your experience of Hong Kong?

And he said, well, Hong Kong is a place you can get clubbed to death and what he meant was, think about it, you know, there's clubs everywhere and I think that it's true, we can get clubbed to death and sometimes we live life in the Christian life in Hong Kong and we think that church is just like a club.

We do it and we leave but what Peter says is no, he says no, you are the church. And if God wants us to fix the brokenness in each other and in Hong Kong and the world, he doesn't do it through one person, he does it through the stones coming together and resting on him.

[22 : 32] I mean, we as priests, he says here, and the idea is, to me it's scary because what he's saying is that each one of us in here is unique, different, gifted, talented and that God has brought all of us here together as his church for the purpose of verse five, offering up spiritual sacrifices.

So what Peter here is saying, now listen to me because I'm going to offend you because I offend myself because it's taken me a long time to get around this. What he's saying here is that you and I, everyone in this room, if you're within the family of God, that it's no mistake that God brought you here today.

It's no mistake that you're sitting here in this church because the passage says that God brings us his living stones to the cornerstone because he has something he wants to do in us and he has something he wants to do through us.

It means that every one of us in here, if we're God's people, we're called to serve, we're called to pray, we're called to give and tithe, we're called to invest our life and the people around us and build bridges to bring them to God's family.

And if you walk in here and you don't do that, what that means is there's a piece of God's church that's not functioning.

[24 : 16] And if there's a piece of the church that's not functioning, it means the church isn't functioning. It means the church isn't what God meant for it to be.

I'm a Calvinist when it comes to God's sovereignty and God has us here and if you're here as his people, it means he's calling you to a community to pray, to serve, to give, and to build bridges to.

And that if you don't do that, if you just come and go and walk away, you don't do these things and the church misses out on you serving, the church misses out on you teaching, the church misses out on you praying, the church misses out on you volunteering, the church misses out on you giving, the church misses out and there's all these little pieces in this church that aren't going to be the way they should be and what that means is the rest of us here, we're worse off because we're dependent upon each other.

And I think that's the scary thing about church for us because we're type A people, we're motivated, we're getting it done, let's get it going on and we don't want to be dependent upon anybody, we just want to do it, do it, do it, but what Peter here is saying is that he's brought us together because we need each other.

And if we just come and go, then the rest of the body of Christ is hurt and the church is hurt and the church can't do all the things that God has in store for it because not all the pieces are working together.

[26 : 09] Does that make sense? You know, when we started the church, we had 33 people and we had 33 people and they signed a covenant.

We are looking at these passages like 1 Peter 2 and we're looking at this idea of coming together as living stones and being built upon the living stone and giving up our spiritual sacrifices and building on the capstone and when these 33 people came together, we said, okay, we're a priest, we're living stones, we're a new nation, God has called us to come here and what we said is when we came in, we signed this agreement, this covenant, 33 of us and we said, hey, God has called us all to pray and we all wrote that we have to do that.

Then we said, hey, God has called us all to give and we realized we had to do that too because of course, Hong Kong is an expensive place and just even to make our rent here, we had to give and do these things and it's something we had to do.

We said, God has called us all to serve. You know, we realized that was going to happen because we were just 33 people, we didn't have hundreds of people, we didn't have the people we have today but we just knew each one of us here, we had to serve because we're the priest, we're the living stones, we're the temple.

Then we said, God has called us to invest and invite because we knew that's what we were called to do. We're called to be bridge builders.

[27 : 46] Now we might not be totally gifted in sharing our faith but it doesn't take a lot to invite people to a community group or to a church or to be nice to people or to care for him.

This is what God has called us to do when we started. And I realized that it's easy for us to come into Watermark and we look at everything and we go, wow, this church, you know, we're only four years old.

We get four years old in three weeks. So we're only four years old but for me, it seems like a lot of neat things are happening with the sharing and the outreach and all the things that God's bringing into our midst and people are saying, let's make that happen, let's do that thing and I realize it's easy for you to come in here and say, well, they don't need me because it's already happening.

I mean, they don't need me. They don't need me to, they don't need me to pray, you know. But you know that every Sunday we don't even know where we're going to meet for sure.

I mean, the fact that you guys are sitting right here is a huge answer prayer for us. We don't know if Cyberport's going to have a wine convention or a convention of lawyers or a wedding and they're going to pay a lot more than we're going to pay because they're giving us a discount.

[28 : 58] You know, we're doing outreaches in Hong Kong U right now and we need to see people praying. We have people praying for offices and businesses and things like that but it's easy to come in and say, well, you don't need me.

Give. I mean, it's easy when you come into a church like this and you go, well, they're doing pretty good. They have a white guy with four kids, you know, or there's a pastor or they have the staff and they don't need, but you know, it's, unless we all give, it doesn't work.

If you're not in the family of God here, you can clog your ears right now, but just to share with you, you know, the last four months, we haven't even had half come in of tithing that we need to even survive and so the staff are coming together and go, okay, what are we going to do?

We have all these outreach planned. We have all these things we need to do. Are we going to stop them? And by faith, we said, no, no, we're going to keep doing it. But the family needs to know that we haven't been giving the way that the church needs, but the rents are increasing and the costs are increasing.

Do things are increasing, so we need people to give, serve. When you walk in here and it looks really organized and there's signs everywhere, but you know, it takes 30 to 50 people every Sunday to serve, to be teachers and make things happen.

[30 : 16] It doesn't just happen, but before you come in here there's been people who have been praying, giving, and serving and thinking through everything. And if we as a body don't do that, then the family doesn't work.

Invest and invite. I mean, if you walk out of here and you don't do that, there are people in your office space that I'll never have a chance to talk to. There are people when I walk up to them and they learn that I'm a pastor, they go, oh, but you can go up to them and say, hey, I'm working with you every day and yeah, I go to church.

And if you don't do that like the saints are called to do, like the rocks are called to do, like the new nation is called to do, then we're not, we're not the church. We're not being who God has called us to be.

We're not living out His glory. We're not making His name great. When it says proclaim His excellencies in verse 9, what it says is to retort, to evangelize His excellencies, all that is good, all that is wonderful, all that is true, all that is beautiful, all that is faithful of God, we as a church are called to do that.

Now, I know what you're thinking because there's so many who are going to go, ah, and you're going to walk out here and go, I can't do that. I'm just too busy. I can't do any of those things and yeah, I like coming on Sunday but I just can't, I can't be the church, I can't be the living stone, I can't be the priesthood, I can't lay on the foundation with these other rocks, I'd rather just do it by myself.

[31 : 51] You know what Peter says? He says the church is worse off because of that. You know what I say?

I say that the things we're trying to do in Hong Kong and beyond are worse off because your gifts and your talents aren't being used and helping us and there's some things you guys see that we don't even see and you're going, hey, we need to fix this and all of a sudden we see it, we go, yeah, you're right, we need to fix this but if you just come and go, we'll never see those things.

As your friend, what I want to say to you is ultimately you're worse off. I have the incredible privilege of counseling people in this church and in Hong Kong probably more than I want to and one of the things I realize, especially as I counsel Christians, that there's a lot of Christians that feel dissatisfied and purposeless and not doing what they feel like God has called them to do.

And what always comes back to me is there's a realization that they have been building their lives on a capstone, on a cornerstone, on a hope, on a truth that isn't Christ.

And all of a sudden, 20 years into their career or their marriage or their life, they look back at their life and the house that's being built and they feel very, very, very sad and disappointed. What Peter says here is the reason for that is because we've become so busy we forgot who we're building upon, who we are, what we do, why we do it.

[33 : 46] Why we do it's real easy. It's in the last part of the passage. It says this, you were once not a people, but now you are the people of God.

You once had no mercy, but now God has given you mercy. Why do we do what we do?

Because Jesus was his cornerstone and the passage says that he was deemed unworthy so people threw him away. They hung him on a cross.

He died for you and me so that we might lay on this foundation and receive life. That's why we do it.

We do it because we have a Savior who is deemed unworthy, unlovable, not good. He was discarded and in his discarding he brings us life.

[34 : 56] He brings us hope. Hope when we get old. Hope when we become nearsighted. Hope when we lose our memory.

Hope in whatever happens in our life. That's why we're God's people.