

MILE

3

1 PETER – Living Out Our Identity in Christ Amidst a Challenging World

Mile Marker 3 ... “Our New IDENTITY in Christ – We Are God’s ‘Peculiar People’ Who Are Living a ‘Peculiar Life’”

Various texts throughout 1 Peter

Introductory Reflection

This mile marker focuses on the theme of **IDENTITY**. There are many different ways that we might define or describe ourselves as people – it’s however we might answer the “Who are you?” question.

Reflect on the concept of IDENTITY – if someone were to ask you about your identity (e.g. “who are you?”), how would you describe it?

Where does your identity as one who is in Christ fit within all of that? In other words, what “priority” does it have when it comes to your understanding of who you are?

This overall issue of IDENTITY is going to be one that regularly appears in this letter and is therefore worthy of our attention.

Our Approach through the Rest of 1 Peter

From here on in this session on 1 Peter, we’re going to look at this letter according to themes. It might be more typical of a Bible study to just tackle it in major chunks. However, there are only 4 sessions in which to make it through the rest of the material. As we take a more thematic approach, two major themes (inter-related ones) serve as our major focus for the rest of this journey.

THEME #1 Our IDENTITY in Christ (our main focus for Mile Marker 3)

THEME #2 Our CONDUCT as Christ’s people living in this world

Here’s the link between the two: because of our IDENTITY in Christ – what should be the most foundational part of who we are!! – we live the life we do in the midst of this world!

Perhaps the most effective way to reflect on such a theme would be an “inductive” study – reading the letter straight through with a focus on this particular theme of IDENTITY (e.g. noting where it appears, the basic themes being highlighted when it does, etc.). **If you are an overachiever, you might find it good to do just that☺!** In fact, doing that for both the IDENTITY and CONDUCT themes might be very beneficial. What follows in this mile marker (plus the next few) is an attempt to do just that by bringing together such content from 1 Peter.

A Brief Note – What Used To Be *Before Christ*

So much of the focus in 1 Peter is (fittingly) about who we are now in Christ. Yet, as is the case throughout the New Testament, there are also some references to things before Christ:

- 1:14 and 4:2ff Those *formerly* focused on the satisfaction of (sinful/fleshly) desires
1:18 Those who *before Christ* had inherited an “empty way of life”

It’s likely the same type of emphasis that we see through Paul’s focus on the “flesh” in his letters. *Before coming to Christ*, the consistent conduct of a person demonstrates the identity of one controlled by sin.

This all fits the kind of emphasis on the former life that we find in other NT texts like **Romans 8:5-11** (what still is true of those controlled by the flesh); **1 Corinthians 6:9-11** (what the believers in Corinth once “were”); **Ephesians 2:1-3ff** (what was true of believers before Christ); **Ephesians 4:17-24** (the OLD or FORMER self) and **Galatians 5:16-25** (what still is true for those who follow the desires of the flesh). Essentially, it’s what Paul captures in 2 Corinthians 5:17 as the “OLD” that is gone now that we are a “NEW creation” in Christ!

What Now Is – Our Identity *in Christ*: The RANSOMED/REDEEMED

Of course, when it comes to this theme of IDENTITY, the GOOD NEWS of Jesus is that what USED TO BE *before Christ* is no longer the case NOW *in Christ* (again, that’s also part of the eventual focus of many of those texts mentioned above)! This is one of the clear themes in 1 Peter. At the very heart of our NEW IDENTITY is what God has done for us in Christ – the salvation we have as those who are born again into a living hope (remember 1:3ff)! One way this reality of our NEW IDENTITY is captured is through the language of being RANSOMED or REDEEMED.

READ 1 Peter 1:18-21 (ESV) – ¹⁸ you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

There are several ways that the NT captures our salvation; for example, here are two others:

We were guilty and under condemnation because of sin; but God has declared/made us “not guilty!” through faith in Christ.

We were enemies of God, even at war with Him; but God has initiated peace with us, reconciling us to Himself through Christ so that we are now His friends.

The language here in 1 Peter 1 is of REDEMPTION – one of the ways the NT describes salvation is by using this analogy of those who were once captives, but whose freedom has now been purchased (it’s also connected to the NT language of those enslaved being bought/set free). Indeed, the imagery *especially* focuses on the “RANSOM” price paid for that freedom to be possible: the very life of Jesus through His blood shed on the cross (see Mark 10:45 or Ephesians 1:7). The Good News of Jesus announces the beautiful news that though we were once enslaved because of our sin, in Christ, we have been purchased as God’s very own (see 1 Corinthians 6:9-10)!

Peter continues in verse 22 including language of being “cleansed” or “purified from sin” (this is also part of the language of 1:2 and the imagery of 3:21). It’s a different picture, but one that still emphasizes the Good News that our sin and its consequences are dealt with because of Christ!

What does this language of being RANSOMED/REDEEMED communicate to you about your IDENTITY in Him?

What Now Is – Our Identity *in* Christ: The ELECT/CHOSEN

Back in Mile Marker 1 (we didn’t have much time for that previously), we focused on language that appears in 1 Peter 1:1-2 – in Christ, we are **the ELECT/CHOSEN ones according to the foreknowledge of God**. There is certainly some theological debates about what this means (especially as it relates to our human free will and our faith response). But, here’s the bottom line: **anyone who is in Christ has been CHOSEN by Him**. It’s what the beautiful NT language of ADOPTION likewise captures. It really flows out of being those RANSOMED/REDEEMED by Him – *purchased as His very own*.

Peter goes on to write more about this in chapter 2 – in this context, incorporating those who are in Christ into the same ELECT/CHOSEN category as the OT people of God!!

READ 1 Peter 2:5, 9-10 (ESV) – *5... you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ... 9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. 10 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 (language from Hosea 1:6,9 and 2:23).*

Compare the language of v. 9 with Exodus 19:3-6 and Deuteronomy 7:6-8.

This is no small thing, *especially for those who were not part of the Jewish people in terms of their ethnicity!* God had chosen to make the OT nation of Israel His very own. Likewise, those who are in Christ now embrace this IDENTITY and the status that goes with it as God’s very own people.

Reflect on what each of these words mean about our IDENTITY:

“HOLY/ROYAL PRIESTHOOD” (2:5 & 9)	
“CHOSEN PEOPLE” (2:9)	
“HOLY NATION” (2:9)	
“God’s SPECIAL POSSESSION” (2:9)	

The cumulative effect of these terms establishes the same basic reality: **we have been picked by God to be His own!** (Insert the reminder that this is only because of our faith in what He has done

so that we have no room to boast). For a group of 1st century readers who had been ostracized within their own earthly homelands – and maybe also for us, this had to be quite the reassurance!

When it comes to our IDENTITY, what stands out to you about being God's ELECT or CHOSEN?

What Now Is – Our Identity in Christ: The STRANGE/PECULIAR

Because we are God's own through Christ, it means something has changed about our status in relationship to the world. While we remain here on earth, we now have a different true homeland. That's what is captured in 1:1 and 2:11 where Peter uses a couple of different related words. There are a few ways we could capture what they say about our IDENTITY in Christ:

- **In Christ, we are SOJOURNERS or TEMPORARY RESIDENTS here and now** – those on a journey *through a different place* on our way to where we truly belong.
- **In Christ, we are EXILES here and now** – like the OT people of God frequently experienced, we find ourselves in a place not our own where we may not always feel welcomed!
- **In Christ we are FOREIGNERS or STRANGERS or ALIENS** – just as people visiting an earthly country not their own, it means that throughout our entire earthly journey we are not going to truly “fit” here as those who are in Christ = **a PECULIAR people!**

Believers in Jesus may be living in their native lands, but they do so as those who don't truly belong in these places because their true home is beyond this world (remember what is promised in 1:3ff). It's what Paul captures in Philippians 3:20 with the language of “our citizenship is in heaven.” This has always been an important part of the identity of God's people (see Hebrews 11:13ff as well). It's a part of our identity that has significant implications for the way we go about life in this world.

Reflect on what this means for our IDENTITY in Christ – think about how you have experienced this even in your own earthly homeland and what it means about the way we view life here and now.

Concluding Thoughts and Application

There are, of course, other realities we could identify related to this theme (*e.g.* see 1:14 and 2:2-3). Here are a couple of key “takeaways” to land on.

1. **This talk of IDENTITY emphasizes WHERE and TO WHOM we ultimately belong!**
2. **This talk of IDENTITY connects directly to our CONDUCT; we live in a certain manner in Christ because of what is true of our IDENTITY in Him!**

Spend some time reflecting on what the application of this IDENTITY means.