

"Who We Are" - 1 Peter 2:4-10

Somebody tell me your favorite Bible verse and why it's your favorite. I've told you before mine is **Isaiah 43:18-19** that says, *"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. ⁹See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."* I love that verse because I made a mess of my life and then God did a new thing in my life and He continues to do a new thing and I need that.

Almost all our favorite verses are about God doing something good for us. He shows us mercy and grace. He forgives. He is always with us. He is generous. He gives us peace and joy. It just goes on and on. Hardly anybody claims as their favorite verse something like **Leviticus 11:44** that says, *"Be holy as I am holy says the Lord."* Nobody quotes verses that talk about turning from sin in repentance. Nobody has **Matthew 5:29** as their favorite that says, *"If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away."* Those aren't the popular, quotable, lovable life verses for most people. And that's okay. I'm not saying it should be your favorite.

But as awesome as God's grace and mercy and forgiveness and generosity is for us, He has the right to expect some things from us in this relationship. What kinds of things does God expect from us? Love, worship, obedience, faithfulness, faith, holiness – that's a good place to start. And we are going to learn in the second chapter of **1 Peter** today that God expects something else of us. In fact, He has a job for us that He expects us to do. It's not a 9-5 job. It's more like a lifestyle. And while the pay is pretty low and the job can be somewhat dangerous, the perks are amazing!

Let's continue our study of **1 Peter** with a look at a few verses that might make our Catholic friends a little nervous. There have been a few times in my life when someone has called me Father Todd. And I'm quick to say that I'm not Father Todd. I'm just Todd because I'm not a priest. I'm just some yahoo who preaches. But actually, Peter is going to tell us in this passage that we are all supposed to be priests. Did you know that? Let's look closer at **1 Peter 2:4-10**.

Peter has already told us we are to be holy and he gave us several good reasons why we are to be holy and what to expect when we are holy. And in chapter 2, we see that as holy people we are to come to Jesus as priests. Let's read **1 Peter 2:4-10**.

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—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. ⁶ For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”⁸ and, “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

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.

Let’s stop right there. That’s enough for now. So, I want you to know and appreciate something. I know you will. I went online and Googled funny priest jokes to start this section off and I want you to appreciate that I am not going to use any of them. You’re welcome. We are going to look at what it means to be a priest and what the perks are and how this title of priest should just be who we are.

Peter starts off this passage by saying that we come to Jesus. And right off the bat, that’s a problem. It’s a problem because if you ask almost anybody if they have come to Jesus, you’ll get replies like, “*Oh, sure. I came to Jesus in 1942. Got baptized and everything.*” And that’s what they think it means to come to Jesus. But Peter is not using the word that way. The way he means it is not just drawing close to Him for salvation. It means an intimate, abiding, and ongoing personal fellowship. (MacArthur, 1 Peter, pg. 104)

But when you come close to Jesus like that, Peter compares it to coming to a living stone. He is the cornerstone on which the church is built. He is the cornerstone on which the Kingdom of God is built. He is the cornerstone – the foundation – on which the rest of us believers are built into a spiritual house.

If you go over to the Middle East today, you will find very few buildings built with wooden 2x4’s. They use a lot of rock. And the reason they use rock is because that’s what they

have the most of. And that's what Peter was familiar with and so he used that to describe not only Jesus as the foundational rock but also Christians who are the rest of the building. We are made to be in Christ and with Christ and we find our purpose when we abide with Him in an intimate fellowship. The writer of **Hebrews** says something similar in **chapter 3**. *"Christ was faithful as a Son over His house – whose house we are."* We are a spiritual house with Jesus as the foundation.

Believers also function as a holy priesthood. Unfortunately, many people associate "priesthood" with the unbiblical model found in the Roman Catholic Church. When the Bible talks about believers as priests, it doesn't refer to the Catholic system. (MacArthur, 1 Peter, pg 108) Instead it's a reference back to the Old Testament and the old covenant. In **Leviticus 16** and some other passages, God tells the people that only the High Priest can go into the innermost part of the tabernacle. It's called the Holy of Holies, and the High Priest could only go in there one day a year and make a sacrifice for all the people. And there was a long list of things he had to do before, during and after. And if he didn't do it all just right, he would be immediately killed.

Now, fast forward to **Matthew 27:50**. Jesus has allowed Himself to be crucified on the cross to pay the price for our sins and to be the great sacrifice that was needed for all the people. There on the cross as He breathed His last, it says, *"And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. 51 And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split."*

The curtain of the temple was torn in two. Now, when we think about curtains, we think of a light fabric that covers a window. This curtain was maybe as much as 60 feet high and 4 inches thick. It was more like a door than a window covering. And it was meant to completely shield the Holy of Holies from the outside world. And when Jesus died and completely paid our sin debt in full, that curtain was no longer needed. So, God the Father tore it in two from top to bottom.

Now, in the new covenant we no longer need one priest to go to God on our behalf. We are the priests. We go to God personally and individually. We don't have to confess our sins to a man and have him pray for us or have a High Priest make a sacrifice for us. We go right into the holy throne room of God Almighty and confess our sins knowing that Jesus was the sacrifice that was already made for us.

So...here we are, priests. Now what? What are we supposed to do now, put our collars on backward and have people call us "Father"? Well, since I don't see that being biblical at

all, let's continue reading in **verse 5** where it tells us we are to make spiritual sacrifices. What in the world does that mean? Well, the primary function of Old Testament priests, as they ministered in the tabernacle and then the temple, was to offer animal sacrifices to God. Now the only sacrifices remaining for us, the priesthood of the believers, to offer up are spiritual sacrifices.

When we offer up these sacrifices, I want to remind you of the kind of sacrifices the Old Testament priests were to offer. They were always to be the best. They were to be blameless, spotless and without defect. This is fully explained all through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. There are several recorded instances of priests not doing it right and they would lose their position or even be killed. So, God took that job seriously and He still does today with us as spiritual priests.

Today, our offerings should be pure acts of sacrifice, deriving from pure motives and focusing on the goal of honoring God. And the New Testament gives seven basic, acceptable spiritual sacrifices for Christians: their bodies, their praise, their good works, their possessions, their converts, their love and their prayers. (MacArthur, 1 Peter, pg 115)

So, let's look a little closer at what is essentially our job description. What sacrifices are we to make on a regular basis? Let's **start** with **Romans 12:1** that says we are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. That means we give every part of our bodies as a sacrifice, including our minds and our mouths. We control what goes in and what comes out. We watch, read and listen to things that are honoring to God and we speak in a way that is honoring to God. You may say, *"Oh, I just have colorful language"* but it is black and white with God. **Ephesians 4:29** says not to let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths. And for some of you that is a great sacrifice but it desperately needs to be made.

The **second spiritual sacrifice** we all need to make is the sacrifice of praise. **Hebrews 13:15** says, *"Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name."* We need to normalize giving God praise for everything in our lives and telling other people that we see that God has given us life and breath and health and a beautiful day and the freedom to enjoy it. And we give the glory and praise to Jesus, not Mother Nature or good luck. Let that be the fruit of our lips as Hebrews says. It also says in **Hebrews 2**, *"I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises."* Let's do that.

Hebrews 13:16 says we are to sacrificially give both our good works and our possessions. Some of us learned about this firsthand this past week. Some in our church gave very

generously to a new family in the community and then they just up and moved to Oklahoma, leaving all the stuff we gave them behind. And it's all just gone. But we gave as a sacrifice to God, not just those people. We gave our good works and our possessions as sacrifices because that's what priests do, right?

Paul gives us our next sacrifice in **Romans 15** where he says, *“Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”* Paul saw his ministry to the Gentiles and especially his ability to bring them to Jesus as a sacrifice acceptable to God. Who are you ministering to and when was the last time you shared with them the Gospel? Spiritual priests offer sacrifices of converts.

Next, Paul uses Jesus as an example of sacrificial love in **Ephesians 5:1-2**. *“Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”* I'm told that if you have a grease spot on your clothes you can get it out by putting a piece of paper over it and then putting a hot iron on it. The iron melts the grease and the paper soaks it up. Sometimes we have to just soak up the ugliness and unloveliness in a brother's life and learn to love that person. That's what Jesus did for you. Now do it for others as a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God.

Lastly, we offer sacrificial prayers to God. There is a beautiful verse in **Psalms 141** that says, *“May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.”* Prayer, especially intercessory prayer, is a sacrifice because it takes time and it takes effort and because it relies on faith.

You may be thinking that some or maybe all of these sacrifices are hard to do. And you are right. But God expects us to make these sacrifices and Jesus Himself said that if a person is to follow Him it meant to deny himself and take up his cross daily. (Matthew 5) There is a price to following Jesus. But there are also great rewards. And Peter is good about telling us what we need to do and then explaining why we should and giving us the motivation we need to get it done.

Look at verses 9 and 10 again. *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.

There is a ton of good stuff just in those two verses. We are chosen. We are God's special possession. That word "possession" means we have been bought for a price. And we know that price is the blood of His Son Jesus. He has called us out of darkness and into light. Jesus said in **John 3** that man loved the darkness more than the light because their deeds were evil. We don't live that way anymore. Thank you, Lord!

All of that is good stuff and plenty motivating for us to live as holy priests making our daily sacrifices. But look at the last part of **verse 10**. We have received mercy. I don't know about you but for me, that's a big deal. I need mercy in my life.

A friend of mine told me one time about having to stand before a judge and make his plea. I don't remember what he was accused of but he said he knew he was guilty. He had done it and regretted it but he was guilty. When it was his turn to speak, the judge said, "*Well, I guess you want justice done, huh?*" And my friend said, "**Oh, no sir. I want mercy.**" (Bill Glass) I feel the same way. I'm guilty. I'm way guilty. I don't deserve mercy but thank you, God, the definition of mercy is getting something you don't deserve.

God's mercy is overwhelming. It is not just a little bit of mercy. We have been given a waterfall of mercy to wash away all our sins and give us a new life in Him. And every time we offer up a priestly sacrifice of praise or offerings or love or prayers, God is reminded of that mercy and shows us even more. And then we see that mercy and it motivates us even more to offer sacrifices until it just becomes a loop we don't want to get out of. In fact, it just becomes who we are. We are priests offering our sacrifices and receiving mercy from God.

Music

Is that who you are? Does that describe you? It can and it should. If it doesn't I would love to talk with you right now as the music plays. Ask God to forgive you and show you mercy. You sure don't want justice from Him when it comes to your eternity. Accept His free gift of eternal life through the death, burial and resurrection of His Son Jesus who now sits at the right hand of the Father waiting to show you mercy. Do it right now. Today is the day of salvation.