

Sermon Notes from the am morning service on Sunday 4th September 2022

What is our true identity? – Steven Driver Scripture references from the ESV

1 Peter 1:1-9 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

We live in what has been dubbed a post-Christian culture. Traditional views are now rejected and it is more common to find increasing hostility towards Christianity. You might find that friends and family openly ridicule aspects of your faith. If you are a grandparent, mentioning your faith might be considered as old school and not worth listening to.

In workplaces, there is an increasing push for companies to promote values that go against biblical teaching. If you object to this, would anyone even listen to you, and how would you be viewed by your colleagues?

The new academic year is about to start, and in schools, too, so-called progressive views are accepted and are being promoted. Being a Christian in this environment can be seen as inviting hostility.

What are we to do? Human nature generally goes with one of two options.

1. **We long for a past golden age** – that time when Britain was seemingly truly Christian. However, the reality is that it was not actually some sort of Utopia.
2. **We compromise and try to fit in.** We allow our beliefs to be moulded by the people and culture around us, and reject obedience to God in favour of following everyone else.

Neither of these options work but this passage from Peter's letter shows us a better way. Peter was writing at a time when Christians were still few in number. Not many were killed for their faith but they did encounter cultural hostility, abuse and mistreatment, not unlike what is happening today. We are trying to work out how to live in the same sort of culture that they were in. Peter was writing to these churches with that goal in mind. He wanted to show them how they could stand firm in the Gospel and not compromise. However, that would just have been a letter about how to put up with what was going on. More than that, Peter's goal was to enable them

To stand firm in the Gospel and rejoice in the Gospel

We need the same encouragement today and Peter's letter shows us, as Christians, who we truly are, what we have as a result and why we can rejoice. This will give us something firm to hold on to throughout the week, not just on Sunday.

1) We are chosen (vv 1-2 above). Back in your schooldays, you might remember those times when you were waiting to find out if you would be picked for a sports team. Were you good enough at the sport, did the captain like you – would you be the last person to be picked? Sometimes, as Christians, we can find ourselves thinking that God works in the same way and that we have only just managed to scrape into his team.

However, Peter leaves us in no doubt that anyone who is a faithful follower of Christ has not been picked in this way! Far from just putting up with us, God loves us and knows us intimately. Peter names all the churches

he is writing to, and calls them 'elect exiles'. He is showing two things here.

a) God has chosen his people. Peter speaks of the 'elect' because God's people are chosen according to the

foreknowledge of the Father. If you are a follower of Jesus, you can know that the Father chose you even before he created the world. You haven't just scraped into the team! You are accepted for who you are. You haven't been picked because of any perceived quality, but because of the overflow of covenant love from our Father.

The whole Trinity, Father Son and Spirit, were all at work in that choosing. The Father loves us, and sent his Son to die for us. You have been set apart at exactly the time

chosen for you, with the Spirit doing a transforming work in your heart so that you could know the work of Jesus for yourself. We are his people and he does not forget us.

b) We don't belong here. The churches named here were not exiles by geography.

They were spiritual exiles. Because they belong to God, they are his people and a part of his kingdom, no longer belonging to the world. If you are a follower of Jesus, then this is true for you too. Just like the Israelites, we are not living in the land that God has promised us, and we too are called to live differently to those around us.

It shouldn't surprise us that we find ourselves more and more at odds with our culture, but we can stand firm in the knowledge of the grace of God. Regardless of how things are around us, we can know that God is in control, that he chose us and we are his. Therefore, we do not need to conform to the world around us. It wouldn't make sense to be the same as everyone else. Just as Peter does for these churches,

we can pray for his grace and peace to be upon us, so that we rest in him

2) We are his children (v3 above). When a child is born, we love that child the moment he or she is born, even though they have done nothing to deserve our love. This is a glimmer of how God sees us.

We so often forget that we are born again.

Our relationship with God is not just as a citizen of his kingdom. It is not like our relationship with the Queen! Those who have heard and responded to the word of God become his children. We are in the most intimate relationship with our God that we could be. We are not what we once were – our old life died with Christ.

In our culture, we are quick to apply labels when someone does something habitually. We think what we do is who we are, so we say this is the sporty/academic/creative child, depending on their aptitude.

Being a child of God is different! We are free to be who God made us to be, aligned with his word. We are not defined by things we have done in the past.

We are only defined as a child of the living God.

God looks at you with love as his child and wants to draw you into his loving presence. We do not need to be defined by how our family, school friends or work colleagues see

us! Whatever they say or think, however well or badly we did in our exams, nothing changes the fact that we are loved by God and counted as worthy.

You are not defined by the world. You are defined by God and he calls you his child. We are chosen by God and we are his children. These are not just statements but bring us what only Christians have.

1) Christians have a living hope (v3 above). The hopes of the world are a bit like nursery rhymes! They start well and sound appealing, but they end badly.

If you ask today's young people what they want to be when they grow up, the most common answer is to be famous on social media. If that isn't the answer, then they mostly just want to be just plain famous, have lots of money, own a nice house or be popular. All of those hopes are just the same – they will all end badly because all those hopes die.

They will die with you. If you put your hope in anything but Jesus, you become trapped in the prison that your sin creates when you put your hopes in earthly things. Instead:

- Jesus gives us a living hope.
- Jesus died and took our sin on the cross.
- Our old life died with him on the cross.
- The power of sin died on the cross.

Remember that he rose again, with a resurrected body, showing to all who saw that new life was possible.

- We died with him and we will rise with him.
- Our hope in eternal life is secured through his resurrection.

Our hope is so much better than anything the world can offer because it has brought us into a new life which starts now and will come to fruition in eternity.

2) Christians have an imperishable inheritance (v4 above). Our holidays are often wonderful times that we might describe as a slice of heaven, but even the best holidays will pale into insignificance in comparison with the reality of the inheritance that we receive as God's children.

If we can catch a glimpse of what eternity will be like, it will change how we behave and how we react to things now.

- We won't strive after things that ultimately fade
- We will naturally spend more quality time with our Lord
- Our devotional time will come out of delight, not duty, because we will want to be reminded of who we are and what we have.

This inheritance never fades, never spoils and never dies. It is kept in heaven, secured for us.

How can know that I will come through all my difficulties and reach the end of my life still trusting in who I am in Christ, when it all seems to be getting harder? The answer lies in **v5** (above).

It has been said, wrongly, that God will not give you more than you can handle. In fact, God will and does give us far more than we can handle! Even each breath we take comes from him, not from our own devising.

God is in control of all things and it is through his power that our faith is shielded.

God keeps us and

holds on to us. He guards and protects us by his power so we can receive his inheritance. We cannot save ourselves. It is only by God's power at work in us.

When troubles come (which they will), when doubt creeps in (which will happen) when there is hostility at work, school or within your family (which there will be) it can be tempting to put aside your faith.

- It will be by the power of God that you keep going, as you are drawn by his Spirit to utilise his means of grace – his word, prayer and his church.
- It is a testament to his power working in you, keeping your inheritance secure, that you decide to cling to him.

God is being the Father who loves his children and our natural response to this is what Peter describes (**v6**)

In all this, you greatly rejoice

When we know deep down who we are, and what we have, we don't just stand firm in the Gospel, we rejoice in it!

We don't need to long for the good old days or compromise our faith. We can live out our faith because we know who we are and what our hope is. If we focus on that and

meditate on it, we will be bold in our faith and say no to what our culture tries to draw us into. We will stand firm and rejoice.

Ask yourself:

- Do you know who you are and what you have for eternity?
- In the light of that, how will you face this week and the people you meet at work or school?