

Since this is family Sunday I have invited some of our children to help me with the sermon this morning. We have handed out a few bricks to build a wall. I want to invite those of you with bricks to come up here and help me build it... Now there is one brick that seems out of place. It is different from the others. I think we should remove that brick. What do you think will happen to our wall? Every one of these bricks is important. If one of them is removed the wall collapses. Did you know that is exactly what the Bible says in 1 Pe. 2:4-10. Let's turn to it.

Peter is writing to people who are under a lot of stress. They are being persecuted for their faith. They have been rejected and sent packing. They have suffered loss. It is hard to see beyond ourselves when life squeezes us. So, Peter reminds his readers that, regardless of how they may feel in the moment, God is up to something big. In fact, God is building a cathedral and each one of us is an essential part of the building project. I want to zero in on four UR's in these seven verses. These UR's are identity statements that reflect how God sees us. If I know how God sees me then I am less likely to collapse under the withering effects of rejection and persecution.

You have heard me say the UR's of parents become the IM's of kids. If a parent tells a child, "UR stupid," they will grow up believing, "IM stupid." If you say, "You are lazy," they grow up believing they are lazy. So, it is very important as parents to tell our children what God says about them. But the problem is that many parents don't know what God thinks about THEM. Even if you are not a parent, these UR's will help you stand firm against the constant accusations of the evil one. Here is what God says about you...

1. UR chosen and precious...v. 4. Jesus was rejected by men but chosen and precious to God. Those who come to Him are likewise chosen and precious. Your worth is not determined by what others think about you but by what God thinks of you. "You (we) are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession." (2:9). We all have a part to play in this divine drama.

You should know by now that our mission here at Fellowship is to awaken people to the purpose God has for them. So many people are alive physically but dead to God's purpose. Mark Batterson, in his book, *Wild Goose Chase*, says, "I'm not convinced that your date of death is the date carved on your tombstone. Most people die long before that. We start dying when we have nothing worth living for. And we don't really start living until we find something worth dying for. Ironically, discovering something worth dying for is what makes life worth living."

You are chosen and precious to God who has a purpose for your life which is described in v. 5.

2. UR important...v. 5. You have been repurposed (1:3). You are important but you are not ultimate. You are part of something bigger than yourself. You are called to be a believer/priest standing in the gap between God and man. You represent men to God and God to men.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth to be a holy temple. He set out to fill the temple with priests who would represent Him on the earth. Three chapters into the story something went terribly wrong and the temple God was building came crashing down and now living stones are in ruins and the rubble is scattered everywhere – broken lives, broken families, broken nations. But God had a plan to put it all back together someday. That plan is expressed in

Eph. 1:10 this way: “making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”

God is putting the cathedral back together again. But this one is indestructible and eternal. It is called the church and you are one of the living stones that make up this holy temple. We are being built up into a spiritual house, a glorious cathedral. This truth impacts our parenting. Jana and I just visited at least a dozen cathedrals. They are remarkable structures that took several generations to build. The cathedral in Siena took about 50 years to build. St. Peter’s in Rome took 120 years. The cathedral in Orvieto took almost 300 years to complete. Those who began the construction knew from the beginning that they would never see the completed project. So, they worked alongside an apprentice, usually a son, and passed on their craft from one generation to the next. They knew they would never see the finished project but they also knew they were contributing to a work of art that was being raised up to the glory of God.

Until you see yourself as an important part of what God is up to in the world, a living stone, hand-chosen and precious to God, you will look for significance in all the wrong places. You will evaluate your worth based on how many Facebook friends you have or how much money you have or how many A’s you got on your report card. UR important to God.

3. UR strong. “IM? I don’t feel very strong.” Look at vv. 6-8. Your strength does not come from your own personal power but from your connection to this chosen and precious cornerstone. “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.” Eph. 2:19-22. You are standing on a firm foundation.

The choice of the cornerstone determines the strength and stability of the structure. I learned this in a strange sort of way when I worked for UPS...cornerstone principle. You are either connected to the cornerstone and strengthened by it or you will stumble over it.

One of the reasons our culture is so divided is because people are not connected to one another through the cornerstone. Rather than identify with the Chief Cornerstone, we find our identity in a political party or an activist group or a sports team. If you are connected to Jesus, you are connected to the rest of us – whether you like that or not! The beautiful thing about the church is that it is a mosaic. Each stone is hand-picked and placed exactly where God wants it. And no stone is exactly like another. You don’t have to check your uniqueness at the door when you join the church. As Fred Scott said this past week at Q Commons, God has called us to oneness not sameness. We are to pursue unity not uniformity. A few random stones laying around are not very impressive but put them together in the right way and they can be magnificent.

4. UR God’s prized possession...vv. 9-10. God possesses us so that we can possess Him and make Him known. Living stones are God’s chosen method of revealing Himself to His creation. When we “proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us” it is not just about preaching to people with our lips but making the gospel attractive with our lives. The decisions we make

every day form an emphatic statement about God. When we fear the future, we make the case that God is powerless. When we overlook the offenses of others, we make the case that God is merciful. When we practice generosity, we make the case that God is able to meet our needs. And when we are preoccupied with the things of earth we make the case that God is unimportant.

So what do we do with all this? Look up. When many of the great cathedrals were being built, people were impacted by the plague. The plague or the “Black Death” was one of the biggest killers of the Middle Ages. It had arrived in Europe by 1348, and it killed between a third and half of the population of Europe. If you were infected with the bubonic plague, you had a 70–80 per cent chance of dying within a week. As a result of the plague, life expectancy in late 14th-century Florence was just under 20 years – half of what it had been in 1300. From the mid-14th-century onwards, thousands of people from all across Europe died. A large number were children, who were the most vulnerable to the disease.

There is a modern-day plague that is infecting thousands of Americans and once again, children are the most vulnerable. It’s not the Bubonic plague. It is an electronic plague. In this digital age we have our nose in a screen constantly. On average, parents of children ages 8 to 18 consume screen media for more than nine hours each day, and of that, these parents devote nearly eight hours to watching movies, playing video games and scrolling through social media.

I’m not saying technology is evil. Technology is a way of life. I’m saying that our use of technology can be used for evil purposes. We are in danger of raising a generation of men and women who are relationally retarded. They are more comfortable on Facebook than they are face to face. They encounter rejection not because they didn’t get invited to the party but because someone blocked them on Instagram. Technology is a wonderful servant but a lousy master.

So parents, look up. In fact, look up right now. What do you see? Pipes, duct work, a black ceiling. Now look at what I saw in the dozen or so cathedrals I visited over the past couple of weeks...**slides**. Why did they pay so much attention to the ceiling? Because in a world plagued by war and pestilence and death people needed to get their eyes off the things of earth and look heavenward. Sadly, most of these cathedrals are now tourist attractions or museums. Art lovers outnumber worshipers in these glorious structures. Let’s not act like “cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute” as Annie Dillard says. She goes on to ask, “Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies’ straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us to where we can never return.”

So look up. Take Peter’s message to heart and pass these truths to the next generation: UR chosen and precious. UR important. UR strong. UR God’s prized possession. Not because I say so but because this is the word of God.