

I Am Who You Say I Am

1 Peter 2:1-9

Michael was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. His father, also named Michael, was the minister of Ebenezer Church, a large Baptist congregation. At his childhood home, Michael and his two siblings would read aloud from the Bible as instructed by their father. After dinner, Michael's grandmother would tell lively stories from the Bible to her grandchildren. Michael memorized Bible verses, sang hymns when he was five years old, and was baptized at age seven. In 1934, the Ebenezer Church sent their minister, Michael Sr., to go on a multinational trip, including Berlin, Germany. He visited many sites in Germany associated with the Protestant Reformation leader, Martin Luther, and was deeply impressed by the power of Luther's protest. Upon returning home in August of 1934, Michael King Sr. changed his name to Martin Luther King, AND he changed his son's name to Martin Luther King Junior. Now you know the REST of the story.

Peter describes these believers' behaviors in vs. 1 as, "*malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander.*" These are spiritually childish behaviors he wants them to leave behind. He is concerned because some of these believers don't appear to have gotten past the baby stage in Jesus, and he fears that if they remain as spiritual toddlers they are not going to be able to endure the persecution or ups and downs that are coming their way.

Are you a little like that? Are you the kind of person who is spiritually hot one day, but cold the next? You go to camp or a Christian event, or spend some time with a spiritual friend, or hear a sermon, and things are spiritually hot in you, but then it just fades? One minute you are really confident in your faith, the next, filled with questions and doubts? One minute, praying fervently. The next, unsure if any of this is true?

We need to grow up because living in a harsh world requires a grown-up hope, not warm fuzzies or constant stream of signs and wonders. You need a grown-up, unwavering faith built on the rock-solid hope of the empty tomb.

1. Absorb The Word.

"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." 2 Peter 1:2

Babies grow by drinking milk. Lots of it. Several times a day. Not one glass in on Sunday and another next Sunday. All day, every day, several times a day. That's what Christians need to do with the Word, Peter says. Imagine if a mother only fed her baby one day a week. What would happen to that baby? If it even survived, it would likely grow up malnourished, with serious growth defects.

The Word is imperishable. Everything else in the world is temporary, but God's Word is forever. If you build your life on anything else—the approval of people, the strength of your family ties, the love of your spouse, your financial security, you'll feel insecure and constantly anxious. Whatever it is, eventually it will fade, and if your life is built on it, so will you, along with it.

The Word is living. The Bible is not just a book of theological doctrine and premises, it is the living, breathing, Word of God. In this book you encounter the very voice of God, the same voice that created the stars, healed lepers, gave sight to the blind, and raised the dead. The Scripture is not just about learning ancient truths, it is about God speaking to you, in real time, with real direction and putting that kind of life in your soul. Without that, your soul will shrivel and die.

The Word gives you confidence. Through the Word of the Gospel, you meet Jesus, who gives you a taste of the goodness of God and teaches you that, in all things, you can trust Him. In Jesus you see that at your worst moment Jesus still loved you, and you know that if He loved you, then He will never leave you now.

Nourish yourself constantly on the good Gospel Word! Drink it like the milk a baby drinks to survive and without which he'll remain severely undernourished.

Do you have a quiet time? Do you have a daily time when you pour the Word into you? If not, you are shriveling up spiritually. You need the constant intake of the imperishable, life-giving, Word of God.

10% of everything Jesus is recorded as saying was a quotation of previous Scripture. 10%! He was saturated in it. Are you?

2. Establish Your Foundation On Jesus.

“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. 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.’ 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.’” 1 Peter 2:5-7

A foundation is what you build your life on. A keyword in these verses is “cornerstone.” The cornerstone is the most important stone, the foundation stone. The cornerstone holds together all the other stones—all of them eventually tie back into it. If the cornerstone is stable, the rest of the building will be solid.

The cornerstone frames the building. It sets the lines. It holds the structure. Everybody has a cornerstone. Your cornerstone is your core. It's what you fall back on when things go wrong. It makes life good and gives you purpose and meaning and permanence. Anything you make your cornerstone besides Jesus will lead to an unstable building. It will evaporate and crumble and produce death in you, not life.

If beauty is your cornerstone, then you obsess about it. When you're in college and you're insecure about how pretty you are, you are eaten up with jealousy for those prettier than you and obsessed about what you look like; which leads you to obsess about your body which causes things like eating disorders. Or when you get older and your beauty starts to fade you try to hang on to it by going to work out insanely and start doing weird things to your face.

If your cornerstone is “being important,” that leads you to jealousy and constant comparison and over-competitiveness and hatred. That's because your identity is built on being the best, because being the best makes you important.

Make Jesus your cornerstone. You're important because you are a treasured child of the holy God. Christ has bought you with His precious blood and has a purpose for you in His eternal plan. You're beautiful because Christ, who is eternal beauty, has clothed you with Himself. That will never fade. Even when the outward man perishes, Paul says, the inward man keeps getting more beautiful.

Peter tells us that if your cornerstone is anything else but Jesus, your life will be characterized by instability, manifested in all those things Peter listed out in verse 1: malice; hatred; envy (jealousy of others); deceit—lying to make yourself look better—hypocrisy; slander; codependency; many other things.

Either you build your life on Jesus, or the Kingship of Jesus will ultimately crush you. For you to make any progress in the Christian life, your life has to have a foundation, a cornerstone, a rock that sustains you in any and every storm you go through. Jesus is the only solid foundation—as we sing here, “all other ground is sinking sand.”

3. Embrace Your Identity.

“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.” 1 Peter 2:9

Identity, simply defined, is your self-definition of who you are, your value, the role you are here to play. Clayton King says, “Identity is what the most important person (or people) in your life thinks about you.”

Who is that for you? Most of us live our whole lives plagued with the question, “Am I enough?” and trying to prove to ourselves and others that we are enough. Am I man enough? Am I woman enough? Am I strong enough? Smart enough? Pretty enough? Skinny enough? Good enough?

Every advertisement we see on TV is that we’re NOT enough: You’re not a good enough mom unless you use this brand. You’re not a good enough husband unless you buy this jewelry. You’re not a good enough person unless you take this cruise. You’re not good enough unless (whatever they convince you that you need so that you can buy their product and line their pockets with your money so they’ll have enough). We hear it all day every day: “You’re not yet enough...” Even if you are enough right now, you live with the fear that one day you won’t be.

Instagram and Facebook are built on showing that you are not enough. Everybody puts up a life designed to scream, “You’re okay, but I’m more,” and you wonder “Am I really enough?” She puts up that picture of her perfect little kids, but you aren’t even looking at her kids, you’re looking past them at that new kitchen she has and wondering, “Why is her life so much better than mine?”

Peter tells us we can stop this frantic race to the top. Because Jesus is our foundation, we have a new identity. He reminds us that we are a people for His possession. You are a valued possession Jesus purchased with His blood! The King of Kings set His affection on you, and He has a plan for you.

You are loved and cherished by God. That will become your strength in trial and temptation and persecution.

- Chosen People

“You are a chosen people.” 1 Peter 2:9

God chose you to be in His family. The Greek word for “people” is GENOS, which can mean a group of people related by BLOODLINE. The Jews, for example were a (genos) of people who shared Abraham’s bloodline, through Isaac and Jacob.

In 1995, entire families were invited to go on a free trip to Disney World and join thousands of other families in a parade down Main Street. The one thing all those families had in common? The name, “Jones.” The parade was an event to publicize the grand opening of the Indiana Jones Experience. The common name of Jones entitled them to an uncommon blessing. One person said it felt good to be a “Jones” that day.

In a similar way, Peter says the church is a chosen people, and we are related by a kind of bloodline. The blood that ties us together, though, is not the blood of physical kinship but the PRECIOUS BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST by which He has redeemed us from our sins in 1 Peter 1:18-19. We are “the church of God which He purchased with His own blood,” says Paul in Acts 20:28. This is because “*Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her*” on the cross in Ephesians 5:25

- A Royal Priesthood

“A royal priesthood.” 1 Peter 2:9

In Israel, there was a specially chosen line of royalty—the line of Judah, and a separate specially chosen line of

priesthood—the line of Levi. Peter says that, in Jesus, you are all of these. You are the chosen of the chosen of the chosen!

In Exodus 19:6, Israel was described as “*a kingdom of priests.*” Throughout Old Testament history, the people of God had two “elite” classes: priests and kings. Very few Israelites were considered priests, and an even fewer number were kings. In the New Testament era, though, ALL Christians are BOTH.

If you are a Christian, you are a priest! You don’t have to “enter the priesthood.” You already ARE a priest. This applies to both men and women. This is part of who we are as the Church. When we became Christians, God MADE us priests. In the Old Testament, the priests served as MEDIATORS between God and sinners, bringing sinners back into fellowship with God. That’s what was happening when they offered burnt sacrifices to God on the people’s behalf. That was their task. What could be more important than this? As Christian priests, our job is to offer up SPIRITUAL, not ANIMAL sacrifices - but our purpose is the same. To bring lost people into a saving relationship with God.

“Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”
Hebrews 13:15-16

Priests do 3 things:

- A priest’s first responsibility is to worship and love God. Offer spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

“Let my people go that they might worship me.” Exodus 8:1

- Priests represented God to people.

“...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.” Romans 15:16

The priests spoke for God. They communicated God’s words and feelings to others. We reflect God’s attitude toward others.

- Priests represented people to God.

Priests not only represented God to people, they also represented people before God. They’d go before God, and God would hear their prayer. Old Testament priests wore an ephod with 12 stones, with the people of Israel on their heart. Hebrews says that Jesus as our high priest now has us on His heart.

You and I are put in that position. We take others on our heart before God. In the Gospels, Jesus’ power was released according to faith, intercessory faith: We are here to believe on behalf of others.

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”
Exodus 19:5–6

We could sum this up as GOOD WORDS (praise and thanks) and GOOD WORKS (doing good and sharing). It’s okay to sing, “We bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord,” but we should also be saying, “We TAKE the sacrifice of praise OUT of the house of the Lord!”

In Mark 5, Jesus encounters a demon-possessed man. Jesus cast the demons out, leaving the man clean and sober and in his right mind. He asked Jesus if he could go accompany him and the disciples on their travels. But Jesus said, “*No, go home to your family and tell them everything the Lord has done for you and how merciful he has been.*” Mark 5:19

That’s what the man did. Initially, Jesus was rejected by the people in that region, but when he came back a few months later, after the man had been giving his testimony, Jesus received a warm reception. The man’s GOOD WORDS and GOOD WORKS prepared his hometown and the surrounding area to be receptive to Jesus. We can do the same thing.

- A Holy Nation

“*You are a holy nation.*” 1 Peter 2:9

Part of the meaning of the word “holy” is DIFFERENT. This very word emphasizes the fact that we are different from the rest of the world. In his commentary on Peter’s epistles, Lenski says of the church, “We should completely give up the desire to be like other people.”

Peter tells us HOW we are to be different from the rest of the world, “*Abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles.*” 1 Peter 2:11-12

The word “conduct” is used 13 times in New Testament, 8 times in Peter’s letters! Peter is concerned with our “conduct” before Gentiles. He summarizes it in one word: HOLY.

“*For I am **the LORD** your **God**; consecrate yourselves, therefore, and **be holy**, because I am **holy**.*” 1 Peter 1:16

Holiness means separation from the impure, but it also means perfection—of love. Jesus was holy, but He was the friend of sinners who touched the lepers and entered into their pain. Christians talk about holiness like it is remaining separate from the problems of the world; like you get sanitized and tried to avoid contact.

Peter is urging us to “Live good lives.” Our lifestyle is to be morally good, wholesome, noble, and attractive.

In 1988 an 11-year-old Brandon Burlsworth was baptized into Christ at a little church in Harrison, AK. The boy dreamed of playing football one day for his beloved Arkansas Razorbacks. In the meantime, he was active in his church’s bus ministry and youth group. He tried to play football on a little league team without success. After one humiliating play, the local high school football coach, who was watching the little league game, took him aside and gave him an encouraging word. That was a turning point in Brandon’s life. Brandon Burlsworth graduated from Harrison High School in 1994, where he was an All-State selection, and was a walk-on football player at the University of Arkansas. His young faith had grown, and he set an example as a college student both in moral character, scholastics, and his athletic work ethic. He didn’t swear, didn’t drink alcohol, and was so committed to being above reproach he wouldn’t even leave a sidewalk to walk on the grass. He arose at 5 am every day to read his Bible. As you might imagine, he endured a little harassment from his fellow college students. One night his roommates tricked him into drinking alcohol. Brandon was so convicted that he went to the football field to run the alcohol out of his system. His roommates were so ashamed that they came and ran with him. After he redshirted his first year (1994), Burlsworth transformed his pudgy 300 pounds into a slender 260 pounds, and over the next two years, built himself back up to a muscular 300 pound offensive guard. By his sophomore season in 1996, he had earned a scholarship and a starting position at right guard on the offensive line. Before his junior season in 1997, he was selected to be one of the team captains. Burlsworth’s efforts earned him 1st team All-SEC honors in 1997 and 1998, and he was selected for the 1998 College Football All-America Team. He was also named to the All-SEC Academic Honor Roll every year from 1995-1998. Burlsworth graduated from the University of Arkansas with a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree. He was

the first Razorback football player to complete a master's degree before playing in his final game. Burlsworth was selected in the 3rd round of the 1999 NFL draft by the Indianapolis Colts. After attending a Colts minicamp, the coaches were impressed enough to pencil him in as the projected starter at right offensive guard. Eleven days after being drafted, Burlsworth was killed in a car accident on his way back home to attend church with his family. I want to show you a clip from the movie "Greater" about Burlsworth's faith and football. The point in this clip is to drive home the impact of good words and good works.

- A People For God's Own Possession

"God's special possession." 1 Peter 2:9

"You shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine." Exodus 19:5

"Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life." Isaiah 43:4

In the New Testament era, it is the CHURCH that God claims for a unique relationship with Himself. Through His redemptive death, Christ purposed *"to purify for Himself a people for His own possession."* Titus 2:14

The VALUE of something lies in the fact that someone important or famous possessed it.

Here are some things that recently sold for high values.

- Slice of Charles and Diana's wedding cake: \$2,450.

This 28-ounce-slice of cake icing features the royal coat of arms and came from one of 23 cakes that were baked for the wedding of Prince Charles and Princess Diana in July, 1981.

- Winston Churchill's cigar butt: \$5,700.

The cigar end was retrieved by a police officer after Churchill had dropped it on the pavement.

- Muhammad Ali's art collection: \$945,500.

The collection consisted of 26 drawings and paintings created by the athlete in the 1970's.

- Albert Einstein's $E=mc^2$ letter: \$1.2 million.
- Michael Jordan's trainers: \$1.47 million.
- In 2017 The Salvator Mundi, a picture of Jesus purportedly by Leonardo da Vinci, sold for \$450 million.

We have been claimed and are possessed by GOD. He made us in His own image. That means we have now been *"bought with a price,"* 1 Corinthians 6:20 and have been sealed with the mark of God's ownership, the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 1:13, and all of that gives us a value we cannot even begin to imagine!

"The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples..." Deuteronomy 7:6-7

“Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.” Deuteronomy 9:6

In his 2001 book, “Craddock Stories,” Fred Craddock tells of his encounter with Ben Hooper. Craddock and his wife Nettie were vacationing in the Smoky Mountains, eating hamburgers in a restaurant. An old guy comes up to them and asks them who they are, what Fred does for a living, how long they plan to be there, etc., all making Fred antsy. Then, after finding out that Fred is a preacher, the man says he has a story to tell. Fred asks him to sit down with them, and the man tells his story. He says he was born in these mountains to a single woman. In THOSE days, that meant shame. Boys at school had names for him. They guessed who his father was and knew who his mother was and made his life miserable. He ate his lunch alone. He started going to a little church in Laurel Springs. The preacher was a large, bearded, craggy, big-voiced man who scared the boy but drew him as well. The boy would go just for the sermon and then sneak out before anybody could corner him and say, “What’s a boy like you doing in church?” But one Sunday he couldn’t get out in time. He was blocked, and he was scared, because at the end of the aisle was the preacher. Then the confrontation: the preacher looked at him and said, “Well, boy, you are the child of . . .” and the boy flinched. What would be next? Being a “child of . . .” was his whole nightmare. But then the gruff, rough, preacher said “Boy, you are a child. You are a child of God. I see a striking resemblance.” The preacher swatted the boy on the bottom and said, “Go, claim your inheritance.” The old man in the restaurant said, “I was born that day.” Fred said to the old man, “What is your name?” He said, “Ben Hooper,” and then he left. Ben Hooper was twice elected governor of Tennessee.

What’s YOUR story? It’s time for us to go claim our inheritance.

You will never win enough to feel like you are enough, and the good news is that you don’t need to. Jesus won for you. He values you and promises He has a plan to use you for good. With Jesus, you are always enough!