

**1 Peter: Living Hope Series**  
**Week 5 2:4-10**  
**May 11, 2014**

Welcome/intro stuff

If it's your first or second or third time joining us, thanks so much for being here this morning, been hoping you might come or come back and join us

And if you're just joining us we're a couple weeks into a series called "Living Hope" as we spend these next ten weeks or so looking at the New Testament book or really letter of 1 Peter

And at the very beginning of 1 Peter we get two sentences

That answers life's greatest question: "what's the meaning of life?"

And since these two sentences answer such an important question that all of us need to wrestle with

Over the course of the next 9 or so weeks we're memorizing together these two sentences that give us the Bible's answer to one of life's biggest and most important questions

Let's put it up here and read it together:

***<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade***

Now if you're new or on your spiritual journey looking for answers

you might not be sure you like or agree with the Bible's answer to this question

or you might be on a journey of figuring out what all of this means for you personally and really

But the Bible's answer to the great question "what's the point of living?" in the midst of all the stuff that plagues us here

Is right here in these couple of sentences: a life of joyful praise and thanksgiving as because in God's great mercy

Jesus was raised from the dead and from that event, we are invited into a new birth into a living hope and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade

Last two weeks we started with that first sentence, totally knocked that out, let's try it together with the words in front of us:

***<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy***

One more time! One more time!

Okay, take it off the screen and here we go one more time!

Now, we're just going to add what God has done in Jesus, read it together:

***he has given us new birth into a living hope***

One more time! One more time!

Take it off the screen—again! And again!

Let's put that whole start of this sentence together and read it together again:

***In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope***

Take away the words, one more time! One more time! One more time!

Let's add that first sentence to it, no words:

***<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope***

Let's just go ahead and memorize the whole book! You're totally nailing that!

Sometime around 1975, psychologists wearing bell-bottom pants and dancing to disco decided that the problem with almost everyone in the world was low self-esteem

And as they started talking about people's problems in terms of low self-esteem and helping people work through the voices in their heads telling them that they weren't good enough, weren't loveable, weren't acceptable

What they discovered was that this totally unearthed a huge, deep well of need in the vast percentage of the population

And for so many people, naming and outing the stuff deep inside of them that was telling them that they weren't worth anything

And helping people to overcome those voices has made a huge difference in many lives

This therapeutic approach to healing the inner world scars from childhood trauma

Or just working through our own normal insecurities has been very helpful for many people because so many of us pick up those voices along the way, don't we?

For me, in middle school, I was 75 pounds with big hair, braces and glasses. I was a toothpick with funny-looking decorations!

So I took a few verbal beatings along the way!

We pick up names inside of us—some of us are given to us by other people, some of us we give to ourselves

And those names and those voices, they get burned into our brains. They end up stored in our brains like mp-3's and they play on loop over and over again

And sometimes they surface and we hear those voices and names and identities and sometimes they're below the surface floating around

But what these voices do is they condemn us and plague us and undermine us and rob us of real joy

And so sometimes what we try to do is fight names and voices with other names and voices: I AM a good person! I AM confident! I CAN do this! I AM smart enough, people DO like me!

But the problem is that most of the voices that we hear and that the world wants to give us, whether they be good or bad, are too shallow, too passing, too temporary to build your eternity around

Whether your voices say to you that you're a loser and unloveable and not good enough or loveable enough or likeable

OR the voices in your head swing the total opposite direction and just tell you that you're always great and indestructible or perfect or gifted or great or the best

The problem is those voices want you to re-find your identity on very temporary and passing things like

what you currently happen to look like  
or what your current skill-set happens to be  
or what your current abilities are  
or who your current friends are

So a couple of thousand years before it was cool and before it would make it into the self-help section at your local Barnes and Noble

Peter this morning is going to help us to get a handle on who we really are

We're going to get the Scripture's answer to the issue of what we do with those voices in our head

that either tear us down or artificially and temporarily pump us up.

If you've got a Bible, turn with me to 1 Peter chapter 2. If not, on screen behind me, if don't own a Bible at all, free Bibles on the Resource table love for you to take one on your way out

***<sup>4</sup>As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— <sup>5</sup>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.***

One of my favorite speakers told a great story that I will attempt to re-tell here because it so perfectly illustrates this passage

But I will probably not be able to do it justice because she tells it so well.

Her name is Kim and she's a mother of two

and one day her son who was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade or so at the time woke up on a school day and told her that he couldn't go to school that day.

His name was Cole and Kim asked him, "Why not, Cole? Are you feeling sick?"

And Cole replied with great drama and pain, "No, mom. I just can't go to school today because I can't take the pressure!"

"What do you mean, Cole? What kind of pressure?"

"Well, it's just so HARD to be ME at SCHOOL because EVERYBODY THERE KNOWS ME!

I mean all the kids in my class know my name. LOTS of kids in OTHER classes know my name.

My TEACHER knows my name. Some of the OTHER TEACHERS know my name

The PRINCIPLE knows my name and the GUIDANCE COUNSELORS do too

And I'm just so POPULAR that I can't barely stand it and I just CAN'T go to school because of all the PRESSURE."

And she said to him, very wisely and carefully:

"No, Cole, I think you've got it wrong. I love you, Jesus loves you, and the people at your school like you and are for you.

But you're just a 4<sup>th</sup> grader, like all the rest of the 4<sup>th</sup> graders.

And your teachers know the other kids names, too, and the principle works hard at getting all the other kids names too

And you've got friends, but so does everyone else at school.

You are a normal 4<sup>th</sup> grader, just like all the rest of the 4<sup>th</sup> graders, and you are free to go to school without all that other pressure.”

See, our life experience and our culture often beats us up.

So another arm of our culture comes at us with their cure  
they artificially pump us up with all sorts of positive pep talks about how great you are and finding your inner beauty and brilliance

You’re smart enough, you’re good enough, and doggone it, people like you!

And really you can change the world just by being you and getting with this new power of positive thinking about you and how great you are

And what Cole experienced was the natural result of those voices holding sway—that just creates a whole new set of pressures and problems

And for Cole that morning as a little 4<sup>th</sup> grader, what he needed and what he got from a wise mama was a re-sizing  
he was neither beat up nor artificially inflated in that moment

He was relieved of the pressure of an over-inflated picture of himself so that he could function as a healthy human being

The truest thing about him that morning was that he was loved by his family and by Jesus  
and that he was just a fourth grader

Who could go to school without feeling the weight of all of these expectations that were completely invented in his own mind as he in his own way tried to grapple with his identity

And Peter here does the same thing as my friend Kim did that morning.

He says to these people—Jesus is THE living stone, the one chosen by God

AND YOU, ALSO, are living stones, being built and joined together  
and the purpose of that building is spectacular and unique and special  
and YOU in that building are unique and special we’ll get to that in a second

But first off, in the most loving and affirmative way we can say this, can we embrace the good news that we’re each just a stone?

Each beautiful, each unique, and each part of this larger, more beautiful thing that God is building

We're not under-selling your identity, beautiful people, you're a part of God's temple, his new temple with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone

This is a unique and global and special task

But you and I, we're just one of the living stones. Just a beloved, delighted in, cared for stone.

Being rooted in this story as a living stone, securely participating in the building up of God's spiritual house enables us to see ourselves for who we really are

Q'n: Do you know someone who stinks at something but they can't admit it because they're under a complete illusion about how good they are at it?

I mean, that would NEVER happen to YOU because you're ALWAYS honest about what you're good at and what you're not, right?

But you have this FRIEND or this WIFE or this HUSBAND who THINKS they're good at something which makes them blind to how NOT-GOOD they really are!

Here's the deal, when my identity is wrapped up in my performance then I cannot be honest about my flaws because that would implicate and condemn me

But when the good news of our identity in Christ as a living stone secure in him in community with one another gets a hold of us

We are finally free to admit what we stink at and what we're good at and see ourselves not for who we wish we were or want to be

But for who we really are: imperfect, flawed people, who are loved anyway.

Because how much better can you get in an area that you refuse to admit needs any healing or change?

The first step is to admit the problem, right?

But the freedom to admit the problem does not come from an insecure place or an insecure person

Nor does it come from someone who's artificially inflated and hung up on having to uphold an image or name that he wants to be true about himself whether it is true or not.

The freedom to be truly honest about who we are and what's really true about us only comes as we find our identity and security in a deeper source, rooted in Jesus

The one who lays his life down for us and then builds us up together on top of him as our cornerstone

each of us a living stone, beloved and secured and in that secure place, we can be honest about who we are, who we're not, and not have to fight to live out an illusion any more.

Now, as Peter continues to play out this image, it gets richer and deeper and more profound.

Because he says that we're built into a spiritual house to be a HOLY PRIESTHOOD offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus

Peter is a good Jew and he knows his Old Testament-- in the Old Testament for only the special priests

ONLY THE PRIESTS could make sacrifices and anyone else who did so was punished or rejected

BUT HERE he is calling this church made up of common people who are both Jews and non-Jews a name that was reserved for God's special people in the Old Testaments—only the priests were authorized to approach God

In fact we get this story in the Old Testament of King Saul who's the KING OF ISRAEL, and he's supposed to wait for the priest to come and offer a sacrifice before going into battle

But the priest is running a day or two late, so King Saul, THE king of Israel gets impatient and offers the sacrifice himself

If ANYONE had the right and authority to play substitute priest for one sacrifice it would be THE KING!

But because of that act of disobedience, God completely rejects Saul as king and ultimately takes the kingdom out of his hands and his family

Peter knows that story and he says anyway that now in Christ WE'RE the priests who can offer up acceptable spiritual sacrifices

In Romans 12:1, the apostle Paul talks about offering our bodies as a living sacrifice, and I think that when Peter is talking about spiritual sacrifices he's talking about that kind of sacrifice: our bodies, hearts, minds, dreams, gifts, money, careers, kids, the whole shooting match

All of this, Peter says, we can now do because we've got a new name and a new role as priests because of Jesus

YOU are a PRIEST—wherever you go, whatever you do; it's not just me as the lead religious guy, every single thing you do, every moment of every day, you get to offer holy sacrifices

In my small group this past week one person shared how a guy they were just getting to know in another small group years ago at another church declared one night that he had the best job

And so they asked him, "what do you do?"

And he said in all sincerity, "I get to work at a PAWN SHOP! And every day I get to serve Jesus by serving customers. And every day I get to scrub the toilets in the pawn shop.

And when I'm scrubbing those toilets, I'm doing it as an act of service for and to Jesus!"

When you've got someone who can declare with a straight face that you're scrubbing toilets at the pawn shop as an act of worship to Jesus

Then you know you've come face to face with someone who is spiritually much further along than you are.

Peter is re-naming us here, and we'll continue to dig into that in a second because Peter then gets distracted.

Because Peter is a big fan of Jesus, and with the mention of Jesus' name here at the end of that sentence, he goes "SQUIRREL!"

"JESUS!" I've got important stuff to say about him—enough about us, let's talk about Jesus for a minute

So he launches into a description here of Jesus from the Old Testament:

***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."<sup>[b]</sup>***

***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,"<sup>[c]</sup>***

***8 and,***

***“A stone that causes people to stumble  
and a rock that makes them fall.”<sup>[d]</sup>***

***They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were  
destined for.***

A couple of months ago someone told me a story where they invited someone to  
come here to church

And they responded that everything about the church sounded really interesting,  
they loved the idea of being a part of a community and they loved how we served in  
Chatham

There was just one problem: the whole Jesus thing!

To which I say with all respect and humility, if Jesus is a problem for you, you  
definitely will have problems with our church! He’s what this whole thing is about!

Peter here says that Jesus is going to be a stumbling block, something that makes  
people to fall

And for the past 2,000 years, Peter has been proven right—Jesus is quite simply the  
single most polarizing figure in all of history

No one person has ever had more *followers* in all of history

And no one person has had more people attack him or discredit him or garnered  
more negative press than Jesus  
more ink has been spent on this man than any other human being in history,  
both positive and negative

And what Peter is claiming here ABOUT Jesus and his UNIQUE role in our  
relationship with God goes totally against the conventional wisdom of our world  
today.

Recently I was talking with someone at a party and he asked me what I do and we  
started talking about faith and religion

He was a life-coach; and he had grown up church-ed but had left it

But he was saying that as a life coach, he really encouraged his clients to engage in  
some sort of spirituality  
and it really didn’t matter what kind or brand or version, just do whatever  
you have to do

And I totally understand that from the outside, if you're not involved in any sort of real personal faith commitment

It all pretty much looks all the same, right?

Many people in our culture have recognized that there's a spiritual component to our lives

but to them it doesn't much matter how you engage with or express that spirituality, just find whatever works for you and go with it

There are probably some of us here who pretty much think the same thing

That all of this religion or spirituality or faith stuff is basically the same thing and we just happen to be Christian and your co-worker or neighbor just happens to do their own private personal spirituality and it's all good

And I get that's what conventional wisdom says, but can I tell you what the Scriptures say and what Christianity has to say about that?

Someone in my small group made this analogy this week, I thought it was so brilliant I'm stealing it

The Scriptures say that God has done something utterly unique in Jesus: God is playing a giant game of Jenga

God is building a SPIRITUAL HOUSE—it's a huge, ginormous, humongous Jenga tower,

a spiritual house, a place where God is really known and worshipped and experienced for who he really is and how he really relates to us

And do you know what holds up God's house of worship? Do you know what's at the very base, holding this whole thing up?

Jesus Christ—Jesus is the chief cornerstone, the one on whom this one true house of worship is built.

Jesus himself is the only sure foundation for this whole spiritual tower, this whole building made up of living stones—Jesus himself is the base holding this whole thing up!

If you take this base out you know what happens to this Spiritual House? [CRASH!!!]  
Exactly like that.

Any spirituality that is not built on Jesus Christ who is GOD'S LIVING CORNESTONE for his house of worship will not stand forever

All other spiritualities will eventually and ultimately collapse without Jesus at the base and the foundation

That's not to say that every other religion or spirituality is 100% wrong, there's lots of things we share in common with all kinds of religions and spiritualities

And yes, by all means, let's COEXIST and be respectful of one another

But ultimately what Peter says is that apart from Christ without Jesus as the foundation and cornerstone is that it does not hold up

Jesus, not just on the side but the one on whom the whole thing is built

That no other spirituality or religion will stand

Some of you are thinking "are you telling me that Christianity is the only way to really know God and everyone else and everything else is ultimately wrong?"

NOoooo! I'm not telling you that. JESUS is telling you that, talk to him! The Scriptures tell us that, talk with them!

Because as Peter says here, the only way we get to be priests and the only way we get to make spiritual sacrifices that are ACCEPTABLE to God is THROUGH JESUS CHRIST!

He's the only mediator, the only one who gives us access to God the Father

Jesus is the mediator, the great high priest, the living stone, who makes US priests and makes US living stones and gives US access to God

Peter goes on and he picks back up on helping us to figure out who we are now that he's re-established for us who Jesus is and how we relate to him:

***<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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.***

I mentioned earlier that in junior high I was like 75 pounds with big hair, braces, and glasses

I was a toothpick with funny-looking decorations and occasionally got joked on because of that and of course I was deeply and totally insecure and just didn't like myself all that much

But some of that changed when I made the J.V. basketball team.

Our team stunk and I wasn't very good, but I was good enough to be on the team and get plenty of playing time and I was our leading 3-point shooter

And on game-days the cheerleaders would put on the outside door of our lockers these little cut-outs of a basketball and write notes on them to cheer us on

And the cutest cheerleader was Jennifer Miller and she cheered for the Varsity team, not us lowly JV'ers.

And everyone in school knew her name but I didn't think she had any idea who I was

But one game day Jennifer Miller signed my cut-out basketball saying "Make another 3-pointer!"

And I arrived at my locker, utterly stunned that Jennifer Miller knew my name and knew that I was the 3-point shooter guy

And I kept that piece of paper and treasured it and called it my precious forever

Making the basketball team helped my street cred just a little bit during an otherwise awkward time of my life

And that was a nice little boost, but what was my social standing based on? The thin ice of my own very shaky and very poor 3-point shot that I could not make today if my life depended on it!

And when those shaky basketball abilities were exposed for what they actually were and they disappeared a few years later, what was I left with?

Nothing. And you know what I found on the other side of my very brief and very thin basketball stardom?

That the voices of insecurity, shame, fear, self-condemnation, and all that other stuff were right there waiting for me.

They hadn't gone away, they'd just been swept under the rug; and when that rug got taken, all those voices came back, they were right there, waiting for me, still

Listen again to Peter talk about who we are:

***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. <sup>10</sup> 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.***

How much of that new identity is contingent on us or our performance? None of it.

How much of that new identity and those new names are contingent on what God has done for us? All of it.

See, our culture rightly identified the problem of shame and guilt and low-self-worth as a major issue for so many of us

But the only antidote they could give us was to pump us up with all these shallow new external identities that mostly rely on us and our abilities:

You ARE pretty, you ARE smart, you ARE capable, you DO have gifts

And those things might be true for you now OR they might just be a pack of wishful thinking

but regardless for all of us, there is going to come a day when you're not so pretty, not so smart, not so capable, when your gifts and abilities are no longer functioning at top speed

And if you've swept the voices of shame and guilt and condemnation under the rug of your current capabilities or good looks or intelligence

Then when that rug gets pulled out from underneath you, do you know what's waiting for you all over again? Those same voices

Earlier we read that whoever trusts in Jesus will never be put to shame  
trusting in Jesus leads us to the place where we trade our shame and guilt and pain for HIS love and acceptance.

Again, trusting in Jesus Christ generates this transaction where you trade all the voices of guilt, shame, and condemnation  
and replace them with HIS love and acceptance—and this new, eternal identity

All of these new names given to you that have NOTHING AT ALL to do with anything you and I do, and everything to do with what God has done for us.

And THESE names will be true of you even when you're not pretty, even when you're not smart  
even if you're a vegetable sipping your food through a straw with nothing to offer anyone, these things will be true of you because you are in CHRIST

Underneath your chairs are a notecard and a pen. Dig those up for me now.

I want to close our time this morning by accepting the good and wise gift of our culture

and recognize that most of us have voices and identities in our heads that undermine us and do damage to us

And part of the power of those names and identities is that they operate just beneath the surface in shadows and darkness

And seldom do we bring them out into the light to look at them

So this morning we're going to close by doing two things: first, I'm going to give you a minute of silence to ask the Lord to bring to the surface whatever names or mp-3's are stored in your brain that he wants to deal with and break their power

And as those come to mind, I want to invite you to write them on this notecard—this is all part of taking them out of their place of darkness and into the light

There it is: "I'm so stupid." is one of my mp-3's in my brain. Let me bring that out of the shadows and expose it to the light.

And then go back for more, ask the Lord to show you anything else

Some of you don't think you know what I've been talking about for the past 25 minutes, but give it a shot and see if the Lord might show you something

Whatever he shows you, I want to encourage you to write it down as a part of this little prayer exercise.

And then what I'm going to do is read to you this passage from Peter three times, just let it wash over you.

And I want you to write down whatever name, word or title pops out to you.

What is God's word or title that he wants to give you to replace the names or phrases that are currently at work in your soul?

EXCHANGE your shame and pain for his love and acceptance here this morning.

Pray to open the time

***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. <sup>10</sup> 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.***

Pray prayer of sealing and blessing over what's happened.