

We're Traveling First Class - #3

Series: This World Is Not Our Home

I Peter 2:4-12

Introduction: We all remember those painful adolescent teenage years as we struggled to figure out who we were, to establish our own identity, be our own person. Who am I? That is a question we continually face throughout our lives.

Unfortunately, that is not a struggle we left behind as we got older. Life, in one sense, is a very long personal investigation into who we are.

It is important to know who we are because that determines everything else about us. It is also important to note that our identity will only be as strong or as fragile as what we attach it to.

As believers, we do not need to suffer from an identity crisis. We are told repeatedly who we are and where we should find our identity.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter has been working to keep the church, who was facing INTENSE persecution, from losing their identity and purpose. He has already shown us the wonder of our salvation and now he wants us to see our privileged status (identity) as Christ-followers. **1 Peter 2:4-12.**

4As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— 5you 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. 6For 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.”

7Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” 8and, “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. 9But 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. 10Once 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.

*11Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. 12Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” (NIV) **Let's PRAY***

In this text Peter talks about priests and sacrifices and construction material. But, I want to continue with my travel imagery in this sermon series, **“This World is NOT our Home,”** by calling today's message: **“The Christian Life is Like Traveling First Class.”**

STORY: A plane was on its way to London when a woman in economy class got up and moved into an open seat in the first-class section. The flight attendant saw her do this and politely informed her that she had to sit in economy because that's the ticket she paid for. The woman replied, "I don't belong in the back...I'm staying right here."

After repeated attempts and no success at convincing the woman to move the attendant went into the cockpit and informed the pilot and co-pilot that there was a woman sitting in first class who refused to go back to her proper seat.

The co-pilot went back and explained why she needs to move, but once again the woman replies by saying, "I'm staying right here."

The co-pilot returned to the cockpit and suggested that perhaps they should have the arrival gate call security and have this woman detained when they land.

The pilot said, "I'll handle this." He went back to the woman and whispered quietly in her ear, and she says, "Oh, I'm sorry," then quickly moves back to her seat in economy class.

The flight attendant and co-pilot were amazed and asked him how he'd gotten her to move back to economy without causing any fuss.

"I told her first class wasn't going to London."

Most of us think of first class as having more leg room, better food/ and a bigger selection of entertainment. And a lot of that is true. **[Story of mission's trip upgrade]**

Everybody's on the same plane, BUT there's the perception first class has it better than everyone else, because you pay a lot more to be there.

Now, the Bible tells us that we're just travelers in this world. We're just passing through. I Peter 2 says that - We are "...aliens and strangers in the world..." We're traveling on the same plane as everyone else but did you know that we're traveling 1st Class. We have advantages and blessings the world does not have.

So, what advantages do we have?

- I. **We belong to God!** That's how we GET into first class. We didn't pay anything extra. In fact, we didn't contribute anything at all to deserve the upgrade. It was all because of God's grace and mercy through Jesus.

We get to sit up front with God. Verses 9-10 says we are ***"a people belonging to God... 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 Peter 2:9-10

When Peter wrote this, he was referring to a prophecy out of Hosea 1:9-10 where God prophesied that there'd be a day when those who were "not His people"... 10...***will be called 'children of the living God.'*** (NIV) That's us!!!

Ephesians 2:12 says that before we were Christians we were ***"... separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world."*** (NIV)

That's how things used to be. But now that we're Christians we have God in our lives. Ephesians 2, verse 13 goes on to say, ***"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ."*** (NIV)

You see, once we became Christians, we didn't just become worshippers of God we became children of God. We didn't deserve to be children of God, but God "bumped us up" to first class.

God says we were "...called out of darkness into his wonderful light." I Peter 2:9

Ephesians 2:6 says it this way: ***"God raised us up with Christ and SEATED US with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus"*** (NIV)

We have been seated with God IN FIRST CLASS.

But now what exactly does that mean? **Peter tells us that we're not in 1st Class to be PAMPERED, but to be PRODUCTIVE.**

A. We're in first class to be Living Stones.

God has saved us to be useful and valuable to Him. He has blessed us to be a blessing. I Peter 2:5 says, ***"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."***

In this passage he tells us we are living stones. It's interesting that Peter would use this metaphor, since Jesus had earlier said to him, ***"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church"*** (Matt.16:18).

The name Peter means rock. Peter knew that Jesus is the foundation of the CHURCH. He also understood that he, like us, is one of the living stones that make up the building of the church. By itself a stone can't do much good. But with others, it can be part of majestic structure. Peter is saying, "That's who you are. Your role is to be a living stone in God's kingdom."

We're not dead weight. We're not huge boulders that need to be moved out of the way. We are LIVING Stones.

Jesus is presented as the Chief/Choice cornerstone of The Church. The first stone laid is the most important. Every other stone will be laid in relation to it. It determines what each subsequent stone must be in terms of size. It sets the standard for every other stone that would be cut, quarried and put in place.

He is the cornerstone of creation, and every other stone will be measured by Him. Though God had chosen Jesus to be the chief cornerstone the Bible tells us that He was rejected by men. They did not accept Jesus as Messiah. They rejected Him

as Savior. They looked at Jesus. They listened to Jesus. They watched Jesus. They evaluated His life and ministry for 3 ½ years and deemed Him unacceptable. He was not the kind of Messiah they were looking for, so they cast Him away. They put Him to death.

Jesus was deemed worthless and unwanted by men. They failed to see the great treasure that was before them but what was despised in their eyes was precious and beautiful in the eyes of God.

While He is the chief cornerstone for the church, He is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense others.

In every age, people stumble over the Gospel. In every age people do not accept the truth about Jesus.

Stumble over the virgin birth.

Stumble over the deity of Christ.

Stumble over the miracles.

Stumble over the cross and the substitutionary nature of Christ's sacrifice.

Stumble over and kick at the exclusive claim that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven.

Stumble over and refuse to accept the truth that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We are sinners, in desperate need of a Savior.

1 Corinthians 1.18 - ***For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.***

2 Corinthians 2.15-16 - ***For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; 16 to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life.***

People want to live their lives how they want to live them. They want to believe what they want to believe but to do that they have to remove the rock that stands in their way. Throughout the years mankind has taken out the hammers of hate,

and the chisels of criticism and tried to rid themselves of the Rock of Ages...the Chief Cornerstone...Jesus Christ.

They have attacked His story. They have attacked the Bible. They have used countless methods to rid the world of Jesus and His Good News, but they cannot. It stands firm and unshakeable.

It is this rock, this stone, which will ultimately determine our eternal destiny. You can build on it and stake your eternity on it or be destroyed by it.

In Matthew 21.42-44 - "***Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: " 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'***

43 "Therefore, I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed." (NIV)

For those whose lives are joined to it and built on it we will not be disappointed. It is precious and beautiful. Our identity is determined by Christ. Just like Jesus we are described as living stones.

Warren Wiersbe: **When one trusts Christ for salvation another stone is quarried from the pit of sin and cemented by grace into the God's spiritual house.**

We are not pictured as a bunch of individual stones lying around a field or work site but as stones, quarried, cut and polished so that we can be fitted together and cemented together in the Church.

ILLUS: Years ago, someone wrote a satire about a woman they called Gert Rizzoli. They wrote that she was so devoted to her spot in the pew at Featherside Congregational church that when she passed away last month, her family received permission to cast her body in bronze and set it in her favorite spot on the pew.

To the consternation of some church members, her body is now permanently located in the aisle seat she occupied every Sunday for forty years.

Her daughter Sofia said "She loved gazing at the preacher from that spot, being the 1st in her row to receive Communion, having quick access to the bathroom. It gave her a sense of deep, spiritual comfort."

But fellow churchgoers also remember Gert's stiff response to anyone who tried to take her place. One man was shooed away by Gert on several occasions when he arrived early and inadvertently took her spot. Now the bronze statue serves as an irritating reminder of the encounter.

"It's like she's still there defending her seat," he says. "She was a Christ-like lady, except when it came to giving up her spot. Gert is a fictional character - but she is the spitting image of a "dead stone." She SAT ON THE PREMISES rather than STAND ON GOD'S PROMISES.

By contrast, we have been called to be living stones which God builds into His spiritual house, THE CHURCH. God has called us to do something with our faith.

And that's the core of the next phrase in that verse:

I Peter 2:5 says, ***"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."***

B. We're in first class as a Royal Priesthood.

That concept of our being priests is repeated in verse 9 when he says: ***"... you are a chosen people, a royal PRIESTHOOD, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*** 1 Peter 2:9

If you're a Christian... you are a priest.

Just to give you an idea of what that means consider that in the OT the priesthood was restricted to a qualified minority. Their distinctive activity was to offer sacrifices to God on behalf of his people and to communicate directly with God. Now through Jesus Christ, every Christian has been made a priest before God.

Rev 1:5-6 ***"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father..."*** (NIV)

Now, under the New Covenant, Christians are priests, and we are allowed in God's presence. You don't need a preacher/elder/bishop/deacon or someone who calls themselves a priest to do that for you. YOU ARE THE PRIEST empowered and entitled by God to come into His presence.

The Bible teaches the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, which means that that we all have equal access to God, and we don't need a human intermediary in our relationship to God. A deviation of this doctrine is to think that we don't need ***anyone*** at all in our lives. In other words, I don't need a preacher. I don't need a church. I don't need the church or anyone else.

We all have equal access to God, but we all equally belong to one another.

The priesthood of all believers means the following:

1. All believers have direct access to God through Christ.

Eph 2:18 ***"For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit."***

2. All believers are under obligation to live holy lives.

3. All believers must offer up "spiritual sacrifices" to God, including:

- (a) living in obedience to God and nonconformity to the world (Ro 12:1-2);
- (b) praying to and praising God (Ps 50:14; Heb 13:15)
- (c) serving with whole hearts and willing minds (I Ch 28:9; Eph 5:1-2; Phil 2:17);
- (d) performing good deeds (Heb 13:16)
- (e) giving of our material possessions (Ro 12:13; Phil 4:18); and
- (f) presenting our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness (Ro 6:13,19).

4. All believers must intercede and pray *for one* another and for all people (Col 4:12; 1Ti 2:1; Rev. 8:3)

5. All believers must declare the Word and pray for its success (Ac 4:31; 1Co 14:26; 2 Th 3:1).

Barclay makes an interesting point. The Latin word for priest is pontifex, which means "**bridge builder.**" Barclay says, "The priest is the man who builds a bridge for others to come to God; and the Christian has the duty and the privilege of bringing others to the Savior whom he himself has found and loves."

If you're a Christian, YOU can be the priest God uses to bring people to Christ.

Then Peter talks about one other thing **Verse 5 says, "*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."***

3. We're in first class to Offer up Spiritual Sacrifices.

Now, what does that mean? Romans 12:1 says it this way: "***I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God- this is your spiritual act of worship.***"

In other words, your priesthood is not a part time gig. You don't put on your priestly robes when you come to church on Sunday and then take them off when you leave. Your body is a living sacrifice. A tool for God's use.

ILLUS: It's like when a couple gets married and start a family.

Does the man stop being a husband when he leaves home to go to work?

Does the woman stop being a wife when she goes to the supermarket?

Do their children stop being their children when they go off to school?

Of course not! Whether you go to work or school, or vacation, or a family gathering, you are God's representative. You are a priest of God all the time.

Hebrews 13:15-16 tells us: "***15Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. 16And***

do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” (NIV)

God calls you and I to speak and act on His behalf with those who aren't saved. To share our faith, to talk to others about Jesus, to do good things for others, and pray for them.

One person said, **"Live and speak in such a way that those who know you, but don't know God, will come to know God because they know you."**

God didn't save us and put us in first class seating just so He could pamper us. God put us in 1st class so that you could go to the back of the plane and find ways to serve/talk to/ pray for those who don't have our advantages.

So, #1, we belong to God through Christ, meaning we've been bumped up to First Class to serve as living stones and priests and to offer up spiritual sacrifices.

One more thing, just so you know, II. You and I don't belong in 1st Class.

If we don't realize that we don't belong there we can end up being like that woman in the joke I told earlier. She was convinced she belonged in 1st class, but the punch line of the joke was her ignorance of reality.

People who believe they belong in "1st Class", believe they deserve to be honored because they're good people. They believe their morality is better than others (at least in their own eyes). They do more, give more, go to church more, or whatever else. Those are the modern-day Pharisees... and we all know what Jesus' attitude was toward them.

These folks approach God with a sense of entitlement - I BELONG HERE

But Peter was very clear that you and I don't belong there. Verse 10 says, ***"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."*** (NIV)

We don't even deserve to be on this trip, must less travel first class. Our sins had disqualified us for God's blessings. But something changed. We met Jesus.

As you come to him, the living Stone- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-... the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 1 Peter 2:4-6

He's the ONLY reason we get to sit up front with God. Once we were not a people... once we'd not had mercy. But that all changed when we came to Jesus and trusted in His mercy, grace, love and forgiveness.

And because He did all that for us... He expects us to use our privilege and identity in Him for His Holy purposes.

APPLICATION:

Peter uses a term in this passage that is translated in the King James Version as peculiar: ***"You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people"*** (1 Pet. 2:9). Other translations use the words unique or "God's own possession." In other words, different—different because we belong to him, different to make a difference in the world.

Key Take-Away: We are called to be different so we can make a difference.

1. Stay connected to Christ.

Experiencing the difference that makes a difference requires that you stay connected to Christ, that you know who you are in him. Stop calling yourself a failure, a loser, an underachiever, a hothead, disorganized, undisciplined, lazy, and every other bad name that you may be tempted to pin on yourself. Give yourself a new label: You are a rock. A living stone. Part of God's temple. You are priest, a bridge builder. You belong to God: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (v.9).

Peter also says that we are to ***"offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"*** (v. 5). He talking about the content of our lives, our worship, our prayers, and our service to others. All ministry, all mercy, all compassion is a sacrifice to him.

Stay connected to Christ. Know who you are in him. Secondly, to experience the difference that makes a difference ...

2. Be a stranger to danger.

I'm referring to the ultimate danger: **sin**. Peter tells how to keep a safe distance from sin: ***"Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul."*** (1 Peter 2:11, NIV).

Notice that he uses the word desires. Have you ever struggled with a sinful desire? Maybe it's something you would never do, but the desire to do it just won't leave. Even though these acts might never be committed, the desire alone to commit the sin is enough to destroy your soul and hinder your spiritual life.

We have to remind ourselves that there are certain things we can't afford to even think about, because sinful thoughts fan the flame of sinful desires, and sinful desires wage war against the soul.

Peter says that we are to view ourselves "as aliens and strangers." Our attitude is to be like the old hymn: "This world is not my home. I'm just passing through."

Now, here's my point: It's impossible for us to visit a foreign country and not feel a little out of place. We never forget we are foreigners and that there is another place that we call home. It is the same for believers, and even more so.

- **This world tells us to believe one thing; God tells us to believe another.**
- **The world tells us to think one way; God tells us to think another.**
- **The world tells us to live one way; God tells us to live another.**

Don't get too comfortable with this world's way of doing things. Be a stranger to danger.

Peter goes on to say, ***"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us"*** (v. 12).

Notice the phrase "though they accuse you of doing wrong." It's an unfortunate fact of life that if you seek to live for God, there will be times when you are accused of either doing the wrong thing or doing the right thing for the wrong reasons.

When you remain true to your convictions, you will be accused of being narrow-minded.

When you are confident in God's direction for your life, you will be accused of being arrogant.

When you refuse to back down in the face of opposition, you'll be accused of being stubborn.

And when you experience God's blessing in your life, you'll be accused of doing it all for your own glory.

Don't let unfounded accusations prevent you from doing good.

Conclusion: Christians are to be different in such a way that we make a difference in the world. Stay connected to Christ. And be a stranger to danger.

STORY: Tony Campolo told of the day he boarded an airplane traveling to Philadelphia. "I was settled down in a window seat when I happened to glance across the aisle, and there, seated next to the window opposite mine, was one of the most sophisticated and attractive women I have ever seen.

After a few minutes, a very macho-looking guy got on the plane. His satin shirt was unbuttoned so "chicks" could see the curls of hair on his chest and the gold chains hanging around his neck.

With great interest, I watched as he spotted the empty seat next to the stunning woman across from me. He sat down next to her and then he "did his thing." And in no time at all he had the young woman thoroughly involved in conversation hanging on his every word.

As a sociologist I was fascinated with this interactive process. But then an unexpected and exciting thing happened.

When he had her completely engaged, she made her move and pulled a Bible from her shoulder bag. Before the guy could figure out what was happening, she was laying the gospel on him. Her eyes sparkling with excitement, she began telling him all about Jesus. She pointed out verse after verse that showed the way of salvation.

This sudden turn of events amused me. At one point, I had to bite my tongue to keep from laughing. Brilliantly and seriously, she told the story of God's salvation and after his initial shock, he began to listen to her with genuine interest.

That woman understood what it was to be a priest of God. She was prepared for men like this. She knew exactly where to turn in her Bible to talk about Jesus and talk about how this man could become a Christian.

She was different to make a difference. Are You?