

Our Living Savior Gives Us a Living Hope that Gives Us Our Identity

A sermon based on 1 Peter 2:4-10

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

How important is your identity? Sometimes you don't realize how much it means to you until it's no longer yours. I'm a big fan of the show *The Office*, and there's a scene in there where one of the workers, Jim, comes dressed just like another worker, Dwight. Wearing pretty much the same clothes, hair done the same, wearing glasses, talking and acting just like Dwight...for a prank. Dwight gets really offended and says, "Identity theft is not a joke, Jim! Millions of families suffer every year!"

One of the problems that plagues our nation, our society, identity theft or identity fraud. The statistics aren't good. For 2012, over 16 million people, in the US alone, suffered as victims of at least one incident of identity theft. And the losses? Almost \$25 billion dollars. The average amount lost is almost \$10,000. That's a lot of money. That is no laughing matter.

Now, does that bleed over into our spiritual lives? You better believe it does. Every day, there is a thief out there, just waiting for the right opportunity to steal your identity and twist it and distort it to what he wants for your eternity. You know who he is. It's a real struggle for every one of us. It's hard for us to establish our identity and live out that identity, at least the identity God wants each of us to have. And yet today, and always, we have a safeguard in place so that identity theft will not happen. That's our living Savior who gives us that living hope in his resurrection. He gives you and me our true identity.

Now, if you can remember, the original audience the apostle Peter was writing this letter to, it was made up of new Christians, followers of Jesus, whose identity was being threatened to be contaminated. In other words, they were facing enemies, both physical and spiritual, whose end goal was to steal them away from Jesus and win them over to Satan's side.

These believers were most certainly struggling. With so many enemies bearing down on them, so many thieves threatening to steal what was most precious to them, their identity in Christ, as members of his heavenly family, children of the living hope, how could they ever expect to keep it safe? Even for us today, our identity struggles are no different and just as dangerous.

Well, thank the Lord, and thank his servant Peter, for these words, which pointed them, and point us, back to what truly gives us our identity and protects our identity. "As you come to him, the living Stone..." As far as identity problems, Jesus never had them. As the Son of God, he was a rock. Huge, strong, mighty, impenetrable, immovable.

At all times, Jesus understood who he was and what he was here for. Already at an early age, as a boy at the Temple, when Mary and Joseph "misplaced" their son and were searching frantically for him, only to find him back in Jerusalem, teaching the rabbis about God's Word, and Jesus' cool and calm response? "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I HAD to be in my Father's house?"

To his disciples, he clearly understood what he had been chosen by God to do, and nothing would stop him, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." "The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Jesus knew he was the Son of God, he knew his work was to save all mankind from sin and to give them new life, and he knew nothing would drive him off course. That was his identity.

And so as those who cling to this living Stone, Jesus our Rock, in faith, those early Christians, and even more importantly, we today really ought to mirror his identity. That's why Peter calls us living stones here as well. We're replicas of our Lord and Savior. That's our identity.

So, what does that mean? What does our identity consist of? Just look at our verses. Can you locate words and phrases that help to build our identity? I see more than a few.

We're stones, part of the spiritual house, of the holy Christian Church, that's Church with a big C, that is, the whole body of believers of all time.

We're a holy priesthood. Holy, another word for righteous, perfect, of course, only because of Jesus' selfless sacrifice on the cross. We're all priests, offering our spiritual sacrifices to God, our entire lives, just as Paul writes, "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God."

Verse 9 is packed with identifiers. We're a chosen people. Before eternity, before the creation of the world, God chose every one of you to be his own. We're a royal priesthood. There's that priesthood again, this time royal, because we exist to serve our victorious King, our risen and ascended Lord! We're a holy nation. Holy, again, but also a nation. We're part of the same group, the spiritual Israel. Because of Jesus, we are citizens of heaven. We're a people belonging to God. We're his precious, priceless possession. By your baptism, God has written his name on you. You're his dearly loved child. That makes you part of the people of God.

We're those who have received mercy. Maybe the best descriptor of all. Everything that you and I are is all because, only because of God's mercy, his grace, his undeserved love for us, shown in Jesus, the living Stone, and his life, death, and resurrection.

So, just based on those verses, and everything else you know Scriptures says about who you are, do you have a firm grasp on what your identity in Christ and because of Christ is?

If you do, which I hope you do, then it's safe to assume that this identity is always safely in place, right? You're always living out your identity. You're always being who, in Christ, you are. Or aren't you?

Now, if you had to say what period of your life were your most formative years, what would it be? For most people, isn't it in the teenage years? When you start to gain more of your own independence and move out from under your parents' control? When you gain more exposure to the world, society, and the issues that are important to it? When you're learning the lessons of life at a blazing rate, usually because you're making mistakes? Every one of us has that time in life when we're impressionable, and we've struggled to find out who we really are. We've struggled to establish our identity.

Well, this whole life, aren't we all just like spiritual teenagers? Not so much that we struggle to establish our identity. We have that identity right here in front of us, in Scripture. But the problem is, our sinful natures are so malleable, every day it's a fight to live up to that identity.

Holy? I'm not close. Every day I sin and fall short of the glory, the perfection God demands of me. A priest? I'm not so sure God would be satisfied with many of my sacrifices of gossip, disrespect, hate, lust, spiritual laziness. People belonging to God? Then why, day after day, and sin after sin, do I pull away from his grasp so I can be closer to Satan? Ones who have received mercy? Then why am I so quick to throw that mercy and love back in God's face with my disobedience and stomp all over his compassion?

Yeah, the New Man in you and me, controlled by the Holy Spirit, he desperately wants to and tries to live out that identity, but the truth is, he doesn't always succeed. Millions may suffer from identity theft today, but everyone suffers from spiritual identity theft. There are thieves lurking out there who will do whatever it takes to steal that spiritual identity from us. Satan, the world, and our own sinful natures work tirelessly to steal us for themselves, to get us to believe their lies that if we can't live up to that unrealistic standard and identity God sets for us in his Word, that's ok...that our "good" is good enough for God, so be ok with where you're at and how you're living.

That's simply not true. And you know what's scary? Look again at verse 8, "They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for." If that's the identity we want to take, to believe the lies of the thieves out there and cast God and the truth aside, Peter has a sobering truth for us – the identity of unbelief in this life is destined to result in eternal destruction.

Wow! What's at stake to lose is so much more than even thousands of dollars. Our eternity is attached to this identity. By ourselves, we're vulnerable. But thank the Lord that you and I have a safeguard in place. It's just one, but he's all we need to protect our spiritual identity.

We have Jesus, our living Stone, whose identity does not change. Though you and I are most like sand than stones, easily washed away by the waters of temptation, we have a Stone, a Rock, that will not move. He does not change.

Now, I'll admit, Jesus may seem to be an unconventional choice to be our eternal safeguard. He was "rejected by men...the stone the builders rejected," and it's easy to see why. A promised Messiah? And the Jews expected a proud, earthly king, coming in power and might to defeat their physical enemies. And came Jesus, the humble son of a carpenter who had no desire to be that kind of king or to establish an earthly kingdom.

A Savior? And the people wanted a strong warrior, battle-tested, who would throw off the yoke of the Roman Empire and save the people from every physical calamity they faced. And came Jesus, and he died on the cross, not as a warrior, but as a common criminal. No seeming victory there but rather pure foolishness to think he was THE Savior.

Rejected by men, but chosen by God...for that very purpose. To not give people what they wanted, but to give them the eternal protection they needed...from sin, from death, and from the devil. That was his identity, our Savior from sin, and he never lost it. Jesus, because of his life, his death, and his resurrection, he's our Rock, our eternal refuge. He cannot be shaken. He cannot be overcome.

Because of him, our forgiveness, our eternal salvation, and our identity (saved, heirs of heaven) is safeguarded from all of the spiritual thieves who want to steal us away.

Now, all that's left for us to is to continue to be who we are, to live out our identity in Christ. It's still a daily struggle. But you want to know the solution? Surround yourself with Jesus.

Right? Who we are is often the cumulative result of the people we surround ourselves with. They help to shape our identity. Like, for example, you have parents who are a little quirky, you end up like this! Or, your friends are into a specific sport and a specific team, you usually end up being like that as well.

When you're having trouble with your spiritual identity, surround yourself with Jesus. When you're hanging out with friends who go out and party, get drunk...rather surround yourself with Jesus. When

you're around people who preach that love = tolerance, that we have to be ok with homosexuality, sex before marriage, living together outside of marriage...rather surround yourself with Jesus. When you hang out with people who are disrespectful towards God's representative of government, who really don't have anything nice to say about them...rather surround yourself with Jesus.

Surround yourself with Jesus. He's the greatest influence you can have. Surround yourself with his Word. That's what serves as an alarm system for us. When my identity is being threatened, I have God's Word to alert me to the temptation. God's Word strengthens us in our identity, our likeness of our living Stone. God's Word protects us against the thieves who want to steal us away. Surround yourself with his Word and in his Word!

Friends in Christ, the struggle is real. The threat is dangerous. The thieves are out there. They want your identity. How important is it to you? It means your eternity.

But the Rock, your living Stone, he won't let them get to you. He is your protection. He is your example. And he is your motivation as you continue to keep your identity. You are living stones. You are a chosen people. You are a royal priesthood. You are a holy nation. You are a people belonging to God. You have his mercy, now and forever. Amen.