

Living as the New People of God

1 Peter 1:22-2:10

2 August 2020 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Question: Why has God chosen us to be a community of people following him?

Big Idea: God's word creates a new community of people who love each other and praise him.

Prayer

Master in Heaven, we praise you for your word which you use to speak to us, your servants. As we open it today, we recognise our utter dependence on you and our need for your help to accurately handle the word of truth. Please do a great work in us. Use your word to open closed ears and revive spiritually dead hearts. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Introduction

I recently read a piece by one of those travel writers who make it sound like travelling overseas for holidays multiple times a year is normal.

And it probably was normal for her, at least until the borders were closed this year.

She wrote with that slightly superior tone of someone who prides themselves on only having the best and most authentic experiences wherever they go.

The kind of person who wouldn't normally stoop to the level of going on an organised tour.

And yet there she was, writing about her experience on an organised group tour.

Stuck on a bus with people she didn't know and didn't have anything in common with.

She wasn't expecting it to be a good time.

But over the next couple of days, the most surprising thing happened: they bonded over their shared experiences and became a group.

The older woman who didn't speak English very well, the middle-aged man who smelled and the young couple.

The shared experience of travelling together drew these very different people together.

That's not completely unlike what God does with the church.

He takes diverse people – with all their weird strangeness – and brings them together to live as the new people of God.

I suspect that the travel group became Facebook friends and they stayed in touch for a while, but that faded probably faded in time.

God is creating new people to last forever, founded on the shared experience of being born again in Christ.

Outline

Peter wrote this letter to churches in the Roman empire who needed to know what it means to live for Jesus.

They put their trust in Jesus and found that their faith in Christ made them different, out-of-place, strangers not quite fitting in anymore with all the other people living around them.

Peter wanted to encourage them because while they were probably only suffering a little bit at this time, he knew that it'd get harder for them.

He wanted to remind them that living for Jesus is worthwhile.

We're in the first section of the letter which unpacks what it means to be God's chosen people.

This section can be broken up into two parts:

- Future privileges of being chosen (1:3-21)
- Present privileges of being chosen (1:22-2:10)

Last week, we looked at what it means to be chosen to be part of God's family.

As God's chosen people, we set our hope on the future, verse thirteen, and seek to be like him: "Be holy, because I am holy," verse sixteen.

God will judge all people impartially, but as Christians, we've been saved by the precious blood of Jesus.

There's a change in verse twenty-two between the future privileges we have and the ones we get now.

Peter moves from talking about our relationship with God to how to live in relationship with other Christians.

There's a change from how we live for Jesus as individuals to how we live together, from "me" to "we".

He'll talk about how we relate to the world from 2:11, but first, he deals with how we live with other believers.

It's easy to feel lonely when you're different.

When you don't quite fit in with everyone else, it can even seem easier to just be on your own.

God doesn't call us to be loners, even when it calls us to be strangers.

When we become God's children, we get siblings as we become part of his family – a community of people standing on the promises of God.

God's word creates a new community of people who love each other and praise him.

- Born to be a new community who love each other (1:22-2:3)
- Built to be a new community that praises Jesus (2:4-10)

If you do some quick maths in your head, you'll find that both sections are about the same length, but in this talk the first section is longer than the second one.

Born to be a new community who love each other (1:22-2:3)

The first thing that Peter wants to remind them about their new life is that we've been born to be a new community who love each other.

Peter's writing to Christians – people who've been chosen for salvation.

He describes them in a way that might make some of us nervous in verse 22:

1 Peter 1:22 NIV11 ²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.

A key Christian belief is that we are saved by grace alone, which Peter clearly believes since in verse nineteen he says that we've been bought "with the precious blood of Christ."

Yet he's also happy to say that they've "purified themselves by obeying the truth."

Believing in the gospel means more than just a change in what you believe, there also has to be a change in the way that you live.

When he saves us, God makes us holy, obedience is a gift from God.

We're not saved by being obedient, but through God at work in us, we submit to the gospel.

Being holy, or purified, being obedient to the gospel means that we love others.

Christians are Philadelphians.

That doesn't mean we live in a major city on the East coast of the US or that we're really fond of creamed cheese.

It means that we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, we have brotherly love.

That's what Philadelphia means – literally *philos*, love, and *adelphos*, brother.

The focus here isn't so much on loving God or loving those who don't yet believe, Peter's concerned with us loving those who already believe.

Loving other Christians is one of the purposes we're saved for.

Love is a many splendored thing, love lifts us up where we belong.

Loving others is one of the most fundamental distinctives of Christians.

Even people who aren't Christians know that – if there's anything they know about Christians, it's that they're meant to be loving people.

The church community should be different to any other organisation because of the love we have for each other.

In the words of Jesus:

John 13:35 NIV11 ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Loving one another means taking the time and effort to truly know and understand one another.

It means giving the other person the benefit of the doubt.

Loving means reaching out and including others who're different and offering them the same love that you would show to people who are like you.

Love means being truly authentic and vulnerable – dropping the mask without being arrogant – and honestly and openly communicating with each other.

True community, real community that lasts, is built on love.

When you're saved, you don't just get Jesus, but you also get his church.

Other people who've also been chosen by God.

No matter how annoying they are: regardless of whether they share your culture and accent, your social status, your education or if they talk too much or too little.

That's true for better or worse and sometimes we think it's for the worst.

But God knows what he's doing and this diversity is a key part of his plan to make us more holy.

I reckon that one of the big challenges for us over the last few months has been doing a good job of loving each other.

Under physical distancing, it takes even more effort than usual to love each other, because we're not seeing each other all the time to have the opportunity to love each other and know what the needs are.

Building community is difficult when it takes all your energy just to baton down the hatches.

In another sense, physical distancing makes it all too easy not to love one another because it's really easy to avoid people that we don't get along with.

We don't have to rub shoulders with the people we find challenging and so we miss out on the refinement and growth God uses them to bring out in our lives.

I don't want to give us a massive guilt trip because I've seen love happening in all kinds of ways in our church, so well done.

We do need to keep our eye on the ball though.

People might say, "All you need is love!" It's a nice sentiment, but how do you actually do that?

Christians are meant to have a deep and sincere love for each other – verse 22 – rather than just trying to look like they're loving.

The church isn't meant to be like Hollywood, who used to trade on love (I'm not sure they do anymore) while there were all kinds of offences going on in the background.

Or talk show whose brand is built on kindness (we might say love), which so many people found a toxic place to work.

Sadly, churches can be like that too. Churches can be loveless.

And that will happen if we lose our first love, just like Jesus warned the church in Ephesus.¹

If that happens then we're not the church anymore.

Churches can and should be places that are the real deal.

That'll happen when we're filled with love that comes from the heart.

Christian love is love at full stretch, love that comes from deep inside.

Not just superficial, surface-level love, but love that comes from a pure heart changed, renewed and reborn in the Lord Jesus.

The reason that Peter gives for Christians loving each other seems a little bit unusual at first.

Bugged me all week, if truth be told.

He brings up this perishable/imperishable theme again just like he did in verses four and eighteen.²

Christians love because we've been reborn from the imperishable seed of God's word.

Seeds are amazing things.

They're little packets of protein and high-energy fat that contain almost everything that you need to grow a plant – just add water, a little oxygen and some thermal energy.

Seeds produce life.

When we're born of the seed of our biological parent, we have life.

But because we're sinners, just like them, our lives end with death.

Romans 6:23 NIV11 ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But when we're reborn into God's family, we're born with seed that will give life to the dead, verse three, bring us into God's family and give us life forever.

What's the "seed" that God uses to bring us this life that won't perish?

It's the living and enduring word of God.

It's the gospel that was preached to us, verse 25.

Being born of God will last forever and can't be taken from us.

Peter backs up his case by quoting from the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament.³

Remember how Peter's already said that what the prophets spoke was for our benefit, not theirs?

Isaiah 40 comes hot on a warning that they'll be taken into exile in Babylon.

Then God gives his people comfort – he'll rescue them from exile.

They don't need to worry that Babylon will be the end of the story, since the leaders of human empires are only men who'll be here today and gone tomorrow.

When God's ready, he'll blow them away and fulfil his promises – his word lasts forever.

Being reminded of that must've been a great comfort to these Christians as they suffered.

When you're persecuted, it's easy to think that your life isn't worth much, that you're disposable and therefore how you live won't make much of a difference.

This's a reminder that the word about Jesus – the gospel they received – will stand forever.

God will come to rescue his people from exile.

Therefore trusting in God – and living his way – isn't a fool's errand.

It's not a dumb idea because it's going to happen.

We need the reminder that God's word is powerful.

You think that Mary's virgin birth was amazing? This's even more amazing.

People can be reborn just by reading it, on its own, without any external help.

We need to remember that we don't need fancy arguments or programs or systems or schemes.

God's word is powerful to do its work on its own.

Reading the Word One-to-One with someone might sound like a dumb idea.

I know I'm not meant to say it, but I bet lots of us think it.

Why would someone want to read the Bible with me?

It's old, it's outdated, it doesn't speak to their felt needs, it doesn't offer sophisticated answers for modern people.

We don't feel that way, but we expect that others will.

My friend will think that I'm strange if I ask them to read the Bible with me.

Yep, possibly, and that's okay.

We need confidence that the Bible really can offer them the answers they're looking for.

This's the living and enduring word of God, verse 23.

God's powerful word is what's needed to change people's lives from lives enslaved to sin to lives that are full of love.

Therefore, this's what you need to do, Peter says.

If this really is true, then get rid of all the relational poison in you that stops you from loving other Christians.

He lists five things that disrupt and ruin relationships, sins which stop Christian growth, in verse one of chapter two.

These things are the dynamite that blows you apart.

Have a look with me at verse one:

1 Peter 2:1 NIV11 ¹ Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

That's an ugly list, isn't it?

These are things you've got to fight against.

Realistically, if you're living in community then they're going to come up though.

Get rid of malice. Being nasty to each other destroys unity in the church.

Don't be a liar, don't live off a false appearance of who you are.

Envy – wanting what someone else has – makes you act poorly towards them.

Avoiding the kind of slander that happens around the water cooler.

Except we don't meet around the water cooler anymore, instead it happens in the Zoom meeting when no one else can hear, which is probably worse.

If you were reading that verse on its own without any other context, I reckon that you could say that it's a verse about being holy.

Being holy means putting to death all the unloving actions that we might otherwise do.

Saying "no" to these things is helpful, but the main focus is the focus we should have comes in verse two: crave spiritual milk.

1 Peter 2:2 NIV11 ²Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,

Peter's using the analogy of a newborn baby here.

Be like an infant, after all you've been reborn in God.

Milk's essential for newborn babies.

I never tried it, but coke and chocolate, even water, just won't do.

Babies crave milk because it's absolutely essential to their survival.

My wife describes one of our children in particular as being born, immediately wanting to feed – nom, nom, nom – and never stopping since.

Working on removing all the things that Peter lists in verse one is helpful, but love comes from caving God's word.

That's what the spiritual milk is: God's word.

God's word gives us life and fills us with love.

This spiritual milk needs to be pure otherwise it can cause sickness and spread disease.

In the dairy, you take milk from a cow that's been out in the dirt and grime of the paddock all day.

Everything needs to be sterilised and filtered so that there's no impurities in the milk.

I remember seeing the milk tanker roll up many times and watching as the driver would take a sample of milk from the vat to test and make sure that the milk was good.

We need the full cream version of God's word.

Not the lite version with the good stuff taken out or the extra creamy version with extra stuff (no matter how good it is) added in.

We need pure, unadulterated spiritual milk and you know that you're getting the real deal when it comes straight from the source.

Nothing added to it or taken away from it, but God's word.

The result of this craving is that you'll grow up into your salvation.

Don't get it confused with elsewhere in the Bible where the point is to give up milk and move onto solid food.⁴

These aren't necessarily new converts because it's the same thing that begins our salvation that carries us onto salvation.

God's word refines so that we grow up into God and reach salvation on the last day.

This's where you're probably expecting me to do the "read your Bibles more" application.

I could do that.

It thought about it, but I'm not convinced it'd help and instead I'll take my lead from Peter.

Peter quotes again from the Psalm 34, which is a psalm comforting those who are suffering by calling them to hope in God.

If you've tasted that the Lord is good, then you'll pursue his word.

Not because you have to, but because you'll crave it and want more and more of it since it's good.

One of the saddest things I've read recently was about a woman who divorced her husband because of a psychic.

She admits that she and her husband were happily married until she went to see this psychic, who told her that they'd divorce.

It wasn't exactly a wild guess on the psychic's part – the stats were in her favour – but she pretty much guaranteed it because the woman went home and asked her husband to separate.

He was blindsided: confused and destabilised and it's no wonder that they started arguing and eventually divorced.

People are looking for answers and they're so desperate that they'll listen to absolute garbage, like that.

God's word never ruins relationships like that, in fact, when we get to chapter three we'll see what Peter has to say about marriage and it's worlds apart.

God's advice is always good for us.

But more than that, we forget that God himself is good.

He's the God of love.

We forget that, take it for granted or plain just don't believe it.

But God's word shows it to us each and every time we dig into it.

God's word renews, cleanses, and matures us for a life of love

When we're founded on the word of God, we're born into a new community who love each other.

Built to be a new community that praises Jesus (2:4-10)

It might sound like Peter's picking up on a completely different theme in verse four of chapter two, but it's really an extension of what he's been saying.

We're being built into a community that praises Jesus.

Being a Christian means trusting in Jesus.

He's the foundation and sits at the centre of our worship.

We come to Jesus, verse four.

He's described as the "living stone," which kind of feels fitting, doesn't it, from the bloke that Jesus called, "Rock"?

He's not just any old stone, though, he's the cornerstone, verse seven.

That's the stone that first and most important stone to be laid.

Whatever direction it goes is the direction the whole building will follow.

If it's skew-whiff, then the whole building will be.

We take our shape from him.

Not everyone's going to see Jesus that way.

In fact, Jesus is the reason that many people think that Christians are strange.

How crazy would you be to build your life around a bloke that didn't exist?

Why would you give your life to an uneducated teacher from two thousand years ago?

Why should I listen to him?

Don't be surprised that people reject you when they rejected Jesus.

Throughout the Old Testament, that's exactly what the prophets said would happen.

Jesus entered the world and the world didn't recognise him for who he was.

They saw the miracles and heard his words and they still didn't believe.

Even the religious leaders of Israel – ESPECIALLY the religious leaders of Israel – rejected him.

They're the builders who rejected him, verse seven.

Their rejection was so strong and so violent that they murdered Jesus on the cross.

Jesus is a stumbling block to many, he's what sinners can't get over, verse eight.

Sinners disobey the gospel, which stands in contrast with those who've come into obedience to it, all the way back at verse 22.

Sinners think that they're just fine living life the way they choose.

I don't need any help, especially from God.

That's exactly what we all did and the consequence of walking down that path is that you get to walk down that path.

Rejecting Jesus means that you don't get Jesus.

Even though he looked like he was rejected, Jesus was actually chosen by God.

Jesus is God's son who came to carry out his business in the world.

He did what we couldn't – he wiped the consequences of our sin away by dying on the cross.

He died so that we can live.

Trusting in his death and resurrection is the only way to be saved.

If you trust in him you won't be put to shame.

Can you see that Peter draws a comparison between us and Jesus?

Verse 5:

1 Peter 2:5 NIV11 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.

That's amazing in itself, isn't it worth pondering, that we could even be compared to Jesus?

We're living stones, just like Jesus.

The living stones. It sound like a rock band.

We – as these living stones – are being built into a spiritual house, a holy house.

There aren't many times that being compared to a house is flattering, but there you are.

In the Old Testament, you had to go to the temple to worship.

Now, we are the temple.

In the Old Testament, only priests had the role of working in the temple.

They were the ones that needed to do all the sacrifices.

To be a priest, you had to be a bloke and part of Levi's tribe, and even more specifically, from Aaron's family.

That's different now.

We don't have to go through a priest to be able to get to God.

Each and every one of us who believes in Christ is a priest.

This's the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

We can all offer spiritual sacrifices.

Our spiritual act of worship, as Paul says in Romans 12, is to give our lives.

These are acceptable to God in Jesus.

Not having priests doesn't mean that there aren't leaders in the church.

It's just that they're now called servant leaders called elders.

And one of their key jobs is to teach, but not to be the priests.

But more about that in chapter five.

God has called us to be a chosen people, a holy nation, a special possession.

That should sound familiar because it's a fulfilment of the promises that God made to Abraham all the way back in Genesis 12.

It's so important that Peter basically repeats it twice – in verses five and nine.

Chosen, not just as individuals, but chosen to be a people.

Verse 10:

1 Peter 2:10 NIV11 ¹⁰ 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.

This really puts our western individualism in its place.

When we think of salvation, we think of him or her being saved.

In other cultures, the matriarch or patriarch gets saved and everyone is.

We like to think that it can just be JC and me.

But as one commentator has said, “The Christian life cannot be lived authentically in isolation.”⁵

I realise that we’re living in strange times.

I understand that the most loving thing many of us can do at the moment is to stay home.

Especially this week, when things have come closer to home.

And I’m thankful for those who are loving others by not wanting to spread virus.

At the same time, this’s a moment for us to think about what church is and why we come to gather.

There are people who’ve been really, really missing time together over the last few months and want to be back at church because they like being with people.

There are others who are much more comfortable with less people.

I’m fairly sure that the writer to the Hebrews didn’t have in mind a situation where we could use emails and text messages and phone calls as ways of encouraging each other.

Coming together is about more than just fellowship which can sometimes just be code for socialising, can’t it?

And a live stream isn’t church – even though it’s the closest we can do and we thank God for it.

Even under the “old normal” just being at church isn’t necessarily being the church.

God is building us into one people who praise him, verse nine.

God has called us to be a people and the main way we express that is through the local church.

Think about the implication of this for meeting as a church.

It means that our faith isn’t just expressed in worship to God.

It’s expressed in worship to God with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Not just for what we can get out of it, but because we express what God’s doing in us.

We don’t come to temple, but we’re being made into a spiritual house of living stones.

We don’t practice a human religion, we worship the living stone.

We’re not Christians because we’re located in a country on a map, but because we’re part of God’s kingdom.

We’re being built to be a new community that praises Jesus

Conclusion

Friends, we might seem strange to the world but we're not alone.

We've been chosen by God.

God is saving people like you and I to become a people for himself.

We're born as a community to love each other.

And we're being built as a people who can praise God.

What a privileged position!

Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, we thank you for your love and mercy shown to us in Jesus. Although the world may reject you, we are honoured to be called your people. As your children, we ask that we might grow up in your love and truth. Make us into mature family members and followers of your Son. May your Word be ever open before us and may your love be ever growing within us. Help us to live in such a way that we would proclaim the excellences of your name, for the sake of Jesus, Amen.

¹ Revelation 2:1-7

² And he will again in 3:4.

³ Isaiah 40:6-8

⁴ 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 and Hebrews 5:11-14.

⁵ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

Living as the New People of God

1 Peter 1:22-2:10

2 August 2020 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Question: Why has God chosen us to be a community of people following him?

Big Idea: God's word creates a new community of people who love each other and praise him.

Discussion Questions

1. Give some examples of ways Australians think i) more communally, and ii) more individually than people in other cultures. What about Australian Christians?
2. What does it mean to have 'brotherly love'?
3. What are some of the opportunities and challenges in loving each other at the present time?
4. According to Peter, why is the power of God's word important?
5. Should mature Christians grow beyond craving pure spiritual milk?
6. How have you recently tasted that Lord is good?
7. What does Peter mean when he says that Jesus is the cornerstone?
8. Why did Peter expect that some people would reject Jesus?
9. What's the connection between being a house, being priests and praising God?