

NOTE: There may be some differences between this transcript and the final sermon given on Sunday as further editing is still being completed.

Know Yourself, Know Your God. 1 Peter 1:1-9

Who do you think you are?

Who do you think you are? It is the name of a popular show on SBS entering its twelfth season where ‘well known Australians play detective as they go in search of their family history,’ claiming in the blurb that our ancestry is the foundation of who we are.

You might have seen it

Who do you think you are?

It’s a great title for a show because it is a question that fascinates us, and we sense an important question

Who we think we are is fundamental to how we experience and respond to others, how we experience and respond to the world we live in, what we might expect from the world

A trivial example, if we identify as say as Scottish, we might see Scottish jokes as a put down, a slight on, for example, our national thrift, and hearing them might make us uncomfortable in the group, or even hostile

But positively – when we hear the pipes we can experience a sense of belonging, even contentment at being in a gathering of people with sensible musical tastes.

And conversely, if we identify as English the first experience might make us feel right at home, and the second make feel like outsiders

That is trivial, but you get the point.

Who we think we are affects our lives at multiple points each day, informs what we expect from and how we engage with the world

For some, those who identify themselves for example by their sexuality or gender – who they think they are is the key to their identity, to how they want to be known and related to.

But there are lots of ways we can answer the question ‘Who do you think you are?’

You could answer it biologically

“I am the expression of my 46 chromosomes’, or I am a mass of cells co-ordinated by multiple chemical and electrical processes.

Or by family relationship – I am Ross’ son, Jayne’ husband

It could be answered in terms of our intellectual or Sporting prowess -

Or our Work or career – I am a gardener, a teacher, an IT professional

Each would tell us something about how we engage with the world

And the Way we answer might tell us something about what we think is most important that people know about us, what is most central to the way we think of ourselves, what guides our engagement with life

What we consider core to our identity in the world

And those answers also tell us there can be a fragility to our sense of identity

If you build your answer to who you think you are around work, or abilities, or human relationships

Who do you think you are if – you lose that work

Who are we if start to lose that intellectual ability

Change our minds about our sexuality or gender

Lose that relationship

Who are we if that mass of cells – stops transmitting those signals, the heart stops beating

Who are we as believers in Jesus?

The first nine verses of 1 Peter give us an answer to that

An answer that, as we will see in the rest of the letter, guides how we interact with our world

With Our past

With present power structures and Authorities

With A critical and suspicious culture

With each other

An answer that shapes our expectations and helps us interpret how we experience the world

An answer not found by looking in, to making our feelings and desires ultimate in telling us who we are

Nor by looking to our human history and relationships, nor our skills and abilities

An answer that is a gift of God to His people, and so the foundation of a Stable and enduring identity, consciousness of which can give hope and confidence is living as we are.

Knowing ourselves

1 Peter 1: Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ:

To those chosen, living as exiles dispersed abroad in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient and to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ.

Peter is the apostle Peter, companion of Jesus, known to us from the gospels, recipient of Jesus' public and private teaching, witness of his miracles and resurrection, the preacher of the first Christian sermon, led by God to share the gospel with the first non-Jewish believer in Jesus, Cornelius.

By the time of writing he has had a long and faithful ministry and is very aware of the difficulties and challenges faced by those who had, like Him, become believers in, followers of, the Lord Jesus

And he writes to those he calls 'chosen, living as exiles'

In those two terms we have summed up the realities that determine the believer's experience of the world

Chosen sojourners

Chosen

Believers are believers by the initiative of God

It is a Gracious initiative. Believers are the recipients of – mercy v. 3 It is 'because of His great mercy that He has given us new birth. In the great privileges Peter will outline here we are receiving what we don't deserve, not what we do. So we can't boast in ourselves, take credit in ourselves, for identity as God's people. But it is a reality, all the more so because it is God who has brought us into being as His people

And the description 'chosen' also catches every believer up into the Bible's big story line. This was a way of referring to God's Old Testament people, a people who had their origin in God's choice of their forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Peter makes that explicit in 1 Pet. 2:9, where he applies to believers what God had said to Israel when He had gathered them to Himself at Mt Sinai

1 Peter 2:⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nations, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.

Believers are 'chosen' because of God's determination to have a people of His own, to fulfill His promise to Abraham that He would be the father of many nations [Romans 4:13-17]. Our believing in Jesus is not some accident

It is 'according to the foreknowledge of God the Father', something He had decided long ago He would do and is now carrying out in history.

As well as take our breathe away when we think of the mercy and grace that God had committed Himself to before time began, that should tell us two things.

Firstly it is a reminder that being a believer, being who we are as believers, is not all about us. Our wants, our needs, our happiness – where we are at the centre of the picture, where 'we all just want a church that builds us up in life.' Australian weekend Mag 9/10/21], where life is meant to be 'easier if you've got faith.' P.14

It is about God, and His determination to have a holy people of His own

And so He gets the say on what are the conditions of our belonging, of how we are His people. We can only be His people on His terms – which become pretty clear in the verses that follow

Believing in Jesus, the Jesus preached by the apostles, who died for sins and rose again

Secondly, it tells us being a member of His people, being saved, on the basis of His terms, by faith in Jesus, is something we can have confidence in, because it is something God is determined and at work to achieve.

It is He who fits us for His presence by the sanctifying work of His Spirit

And He will, v. 5, guard us by His power.

Believers are believers on the basis of the gracious initiative of God, and it is a purposeful initiative – to have a people of His own, a people of His own obedient to and saved by Christ

to be obedient and to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ.

We are saved, not by obedience, but for obedience, to live as Jesus' people doing all that He has taught.

And we are saved by being included in the new covenant through the death of Jesus

Sprinkling with the blood of Jesus is a double allusion.

In the Old Testament people were cleansed from their skin disease by the priest sprinkling the blood of a sacrificed bird [Lev. 14:7 "He will then sprinkle the blood seven times on the one who is to be cleansed from the skin diseases. He is to pronounce him clean .."]

But there is a more fundamental allusion. It is to Moses sprinkling the people with the blood of the sacrifice when they entered into the first covenant at Sinai Ex. 24:8

This is how the author of Hebrews refers to that event:

*Hebrews 9:¹⁹ For when every command had been proclaimed by Moses to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, along with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll itself and all the people,²⁰ saying, **This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you.**²¹ In the same way, he sprinkled the tabernacle and all the articles of worship with blood.²² According to the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*

God has chosen to bring His people into being, to save them, through the sacrifice of Jesus, and it is reliance on this sacrifice that includes us in the people of God

Believers in Jesus are chosen, believers by God's initiative

But it is an initiative of God that has Changed our relationships

To our past, our former manner of life

To the present rulers of this world,

To the world – our society and its expectations of what we should think and do

And the next phrase brings that home

Believers are chosen people who are living as exiles, dispersed abroad

Exiles gives the sense that we were once citizens of heaven but have been somehow forced out of their – tossed out and longing to return.

The word is better translated as sojourners, temporary residents, people who are resident aliens.

As a Consequence of God's choice believers know themselves now to have another home, another country that we are citizens of.

This is a change worked by God's grace.

Before we believed, we were quite at home here in this world. This is where we belonged. It was to this world we gave our loyalty and took our standards, and its citizens treated us as their fellows.

But that is no longer the case. We belong to the heavenly country – that is where we have our inheritance. We know our time here is only temporary, and we are not trying to become permanent residents.

We are not migrants. We have a few years here, and then we are moving to the country that is our own. And belonging to that other country that is where we give our loyalty to, from where we take our standards, and it is to its ruler we owe ultimate obedience.

Which means we will always be regarded with some suspicion by the citizens of this world

And believers are sojourners who are Scattered, dispersed abroad –

Now that is literally true for the first recipients of this letter. They were dispersed through many areas of what is now modern Turkey.

But it continues to be true for all believers. We are not called to set up little enclaves, to build, as it were, Jerusalem on earth. We are sojourners, spread throughout our societies

Think of images Jesus used for His people - salt is scattered, light is dispersed, moves by its nature out and through the surrounds – that is how we have our effect

Which makes our temporary gathering even more precious, a time when we can make the customs and behaviours of our home central

Many of us here are immigrants, and all of us at some time in our family's history have belonged to immigrant communities. And even though as immigrants we are determined to make our home in this new land still those times when

Can hear our music

Eat our soul sustaining food

Hear our language spoken

Are precious

As dispersed sojourners – our times of gathering as believers are precious

Chosen sojourners

This is the foundation for thinking about our engagement with the world, and the key to how we experience the world

Recipients of the gracious work of God to make us His own people, and so given another home, another citizenship, and no longer at home in this world

What Jesus spoke of in the gospel when He said

John 15:¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you.

Cf. John 17:9-18]

Who are we to think ourselves as believers in Jesus – elect sojourners

Chosen by God to be His people because He is determined to have a people of His own, and as such we a people with a sure and rich hope.

³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead⁴ and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.⁵ You are being guarded by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*

A people with hope

That gracious choice has not only changed our relation to this world. It has changed our future, changed our experience of death.

We have been given a New life with a living hope in place of our Old life with its dying hope

That's right isn't it. In this life, in this body, all our hopes end in death. From the day we were born our hope has been dying, and that realisation grows on us as we go through life – and lose parents, and then friends, and, if we are married, our husband or wife. Death is all you are left with.

But given new life in Christ through believing the gospel [1:23]– our hope is for life, resurrection life, the life that death will never end. It is a hope of life, a hope that always contains within its realisation hope for more life.

We have this hope because that is the life of Jesus, who in His resurrection has defeated death, and lives an immortal life, life that will never be subject to death again.

This is a rich hope, and in v. 4 Peter uses the OT term inheritance to describe what God has in store for Jesus' people. Inheritance was the word used in Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua to describe the land of Israel, the land of promise.

It was Israel's inheritance, where each Israelite had a personal portion, their place of belonging, the tangible fulfilment of God's promise.

But Peter uses inheritance to show how much better will be the fulfillment of our hope.

⁴ *and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.*

It is imperishable – will never be destroyed by war or disaster as Israel's was

Undefiled – will never be tainted by our sin, become a place where God can no longer dwell amongst His people.

Unfading. It won't become used, soiled by our handling. It will always come with the freshness of the morning, its delight never stale

And it is certain.

An inheritance is something you possess, have a right to expect

And this inheritance is there, prepared already, waiting – it is kept in heaven for us.

That is a secure place – there is no power in this world that can seize or spoil it

And it is the place God's sojourners on this earth belong to, the place where our God dwells

And not only is it secure, but believers are secure v. 5

⁵ *You are being guarded by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*

We are guarded by God's power

The God who made the world with a word

Who destroyed pharaoh's army in the sea

Who raised our Lord from death, death which holds the most powerful in its chains forever

Is determined to keep and protect His people by His almighty power

And the way we begin in the Christian life, come first to experience our God's grace, is the way we continue to enjoy His grace

It is through faith. This emphasises the graciousness of this wonderful, secure, hope.

Faith is not about earning, but receiving a promised gift.

Our faith does not unlock or enlist a power that waits upon us before it acts.

God's power is always at work for His people. He who watches over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps [Ps. 121]

No. Our trusting dependence is the means by which we continue to enjoy the gracious determination of God to save us. It is not start with faith and then keep God on side by our works. It continues to be by faith we are kept in relationship with Him

As we wait on Him to fulfill His promise at the time of His choosing, when He reveals His salvation in revealing His Son Jesus in glory

That is the way we live in this world

Confident of our heavenly home, our inheritance

Looking to the revelation of our salvation in the revealing of the glory of Jesus

Confident – we know we are only here temporarily because we are passing through to something infinitely better

Way we should get old, if God gives us years on this earth

Not increasingly enmeshed in death, with the death of hope – whether that makes us determined to live it up and use it all up now, or whether it leads to us being overtaken by a deep and bitter sadness

But with a living hope, a hope that gets stronger and stronger

And that sustains a life of trusting obedience to God in loving others

Who are we?

Chosen sojourners

Waiting, with a living hope

And while we are waiting we are people who know that suffering in this life is purposeful.

⁶ *You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials*
⁷ *so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

A people for whom suffering is purposeful

Suffering is universal in this life – physical, emotional, psychological

Every great world view grapples with it. It was the existence of suffering that is said to have launched Buddha on his path, seeking an explanation for it and a way of transcending it.

But modern secular people have a problem in thinking about suffering. As Keller writes

“In the secular view, suffering is never seen as a meaningful part of life but only as an interruption.”
 [p. 26 Walking with God through pain and suffering.]

There is no sense or purpose to it, and it can be a real threat to identity, with the capacity to rob us of what we think makes us who we are.

But it is different for believers in Jesus

There is suffering for believers in Jesus in this life, of various kinds.

Later Peter will speak of persecution as a painful trial 4:12, and that is a reality for many believers

But he also writes of slaves suffering at the hands of crooked masters, of wives living with the fears associated with having a husband unsympathetic to their faith.

The various trials or tests that bring us grief are not restricted to persecution.

They can include the grief of loss, the grief of loneliness, the grief of sickness – especially chronic sickness, the grief of longing for a loved one to turn to the Lord.

They are as varied as our varied lives, but in all our lives they have the one purpose – to show the genuineness of our faith, for that is the one thing that is looked for in faith

An enduring trust in the word of God, in the promises of God and in the God who makes them in all circumstances

so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Such genuine faith will bring both honour to God whose word and promises will be revealed as worthy of all trust, and result in praise, glory and honour to the believer when Jesus is revealed, the praise, glory and honour of being included in the salvation revealed on that day

Paul uses an illustration to help us see the role of our trials.

Think of gold. It is reckoned valuable because of what it can purchase. Gold, which can only purchase things of this earth, and which will perish with this earth – is tested, tested to show it is genuine and only has value, can only obtain the goods, if it passes the test, is the real deal.

But faith obtains something so much greater – that inheritance which is kept in heaven for us. Should not its genuineness be shown and seen by all if it is to obtain that goal.

And it is trial that shows the genuineness of our faith, of our trust in God.

It is easy to say you are a believer, to be convinced that God is good, when everything is going well – you've got health and human love, you have plenty, are liked and respected

But when we lose someone we love

When we are fearful for the eternal fate of our children

When sickness shatters our dreams and plans, and pain tests us everyday

When being a believer moves others to slander you and leave you out

When your plans and dreams are thrown into chaos by a pandemic

Will you then believe God is good, that He cares for you, that He is with you?

If you keep believing the gospel, if you confess every day that the Lord Jesus died for you when you were a sinner and will raise you up on the last day to eternal glory

You will

In the pain, the confusion, the grief – you will

And your faith will be refined, believing His promise just because it is His promise, the promise of the God who never breaks His word

That refined, genuine faith, will honour God, and bring you praise, glory and honour at the last day as you enter your inheritance

We know our trials are purposeful in the context of our relationship with God, refining and revealing our trust, doing God's work in our lives – even if we can't see it.

Believing our trials have a purpose, a good purpose, is very different from saying we know why this or that happened, what particularly God is doing in my life or your life by this suffering

If we knew, we wouldn't have to trust God – just trust our approval of the explanation, accept it because it makes sense to us

And trust, simple trust, the trust of a child with their parent, is what God looks for from us in all our trials – that we keep trusting Him by trusting His promise to us in Christ.

[Assures of great outcome [Romans 5:3-5]]

And Christ is the focus of our faith, of our believing

.⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; though not seeing him now, you believe in him, and you rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy,⁹ because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

A people characterised by love, faith and joy

Who are we – a people characterised by love, faith and joy

These verses are a reminder that we are in the same situation as those to whom this letter was first written.

They had never seen the Lord Jesus, neither could they see him now – just like us

And it is a reminder that even though Peter speaks of trials, and will come back to that throughout the letter, the present Christian life is not one of grim duty, chronic sadness, or cold calculation of future reward.

It is a life lived in a relationship of love and trust with the living Lord Jesus that brings us joy.

Not seen is not the same as not known.

Not seeing him now is not the same as His not being present now with His people

Peter will speak of why the Lord Jesus is worthy of our love and trust as He returns to the death of Jesus for us over and over again in this letter

But it is love and trust of Jesus that marks out believers.

When our Lord was talking to Peter after His resurrection His one question was – do you love me?

Loving and trusting the one who is worthy of our love and trust because He has died for us to give us life and conquered death in His resurrection and always lives to keep His promises is the continuing source of our joy, for we are loved and secure in life and death

And this joy is glorious for it anticipates the joy of heaven

And as we love, trust and rejoice in Jesus we are receiving the goal of our faith

⁹ because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Receiving the goal of our faith is not the cause of our joy, but the consequence of our love, faith and joy

In our present relationship with Jesus we start to receive a downpayment of what we long for on the last day, the salvation of our souls

That salvation is already at work in us as we love, trust and rejoice in our Lord, and its presence guarantee's its fulness.

Love, trust and joy, even in suffering, is how our reality as chosen sojourners is experienced in relationship with God through His son

How that reality will be expressed in our relationship with the world and each other Peter will tell us in the rest of the letter

But if you are a believer in Jesus – is this who you think you are

A chosen sojourner

A person with a sure hope

Someone whose suffering has a purpose in our relationship with our God

Someone whose life in relationship with Jesus is characterised by love, faith and joy

This is who we are – and it is good

And we have this identity

Not by finding these things in our selves – in our abilities, our genes, our feelings

But by the work of God

And so it is a secure, stable identity, one not even death can take from us

But our confidence in that depends on our confidence in God

That means

To know yourself you must know your God

To experience life as a believer as one of love, confident faith and joy – must know your God

That knowledge woven through the whole book, but it is worth pausing to consider what Peter tells us of our God here

Knowing our God

He is Living and mighty

A God with a Plan and Purpose, a plan made known in His promises, which He is active to fulfill

A God with the Power of life in Himself, life which He can give to others in new life

A God with the Power to Keep His people

He is not some dumb idol to whom we must give life by our devotion. He speaks, and acts, and saves

And he is Gracious and Merciful. He is great in mercy. All these privileges, this wonderful enduring identity, this hope of life, He bestows on those Peter will later describe as having gone astray in our sin

He is someone whose grace and mercy can be relied on

And He is Father, Son and Spirit, the One God in our salvation

To those chosen, living as exiles dispersed abroad in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient and to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we treat the Trinity as some kind of abstraction, or a deduction.

Not so.

The Trinity, the One God who is Father, Son and Spirit, is the God we meet in our salvation, the God who saves us.

Christian experience has been Trinitarian from the beginning, as trusting the Son we are trusting God [1:21], and brought into relationship with the Father of the Son as our Father, and we receive the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ [1:11] who assures us that the Father is our Father – crying Abba Father

And knowing God as Trinity is the grounds of our confidence

That the promises Jesus speaks are the promises of God, His words the words of God

The work Jesus does on the cross is the work of God to save us

That the God Jesus makes known is the true and living God, and we know Him truly in His Son

That the Spirit we receive is the Spirit of God who brings us now the life of God

Growing in knowledge of the living Almighty God as Father, Son and Spirit will help you grow in conviction of His love, His might, His life

In your joy in being chosen sojourners, confident of your inheritance, confident in your God even in trial

Know yourself as the gospel declares you to be

[by knowing the God the gospel invites you into relationship with]

“Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.” Calvin Inst. 1:1

Knowing yourself and knowing your God informs every decision we make

Gives us the framework in which to interpret every experience we have

But more

It is the source of a life lived now with faith, hope and love

A life frail, mortal, sinful creatures could never obtain or imagine for themselves

A secure identity that death cannot take away

So meditate upon what Peter says here of you if you are a believer in Jesus

Chosen

Sojourner

A person with a living hope

A person whose sufferings have a purpose

So that you live that life of love, faith and joy

And meditate on the God who calls you to trust Him – Father, Son and Spirit – and know His might and mercy

So you live it confidently

