February 28/March 1, 2009

Discovering True Identity and Mission Together

1 Peter 2: 1-12

Pastor Mark Kremer

Let's just take a minute to think and pray about what we've just been singing this morning:

> *God, we are so thankful that You are who we have been singing about: the author of salvation, the giver of grace, the healer, the redeemer, our friend. God, I pray that You would just quiet our hearts this morning as we seek to listen to Your voice through the Scriptures. We come not above it, to evaluate it, but to allow it, Your truth, to evaluate us. We long to hear Your voice speak to us, encourage us, redirect us, where we need that this morning. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Six months ago we launched this new ministry year as we always do. In the fall we have our State of the Church weekend and it's hard to believe, in some ways, six months have passed. Every year, when we do that the first of September, we always go back to our mission and the core of what God has called us to be about. And as you know if you're a part of our church or have been here for any length of time, you know that our mission is to ***glorify God by seeking to present every person complete in Christ.***

So the question six months later is, "Are we making progress in that mission of becoming complete in Christ?" So this morning we're going to have a little mid-year checkup. We all *love* going to the doctor, especially us men; we love going to the doctor for checkups. I know you women enjoy it just as much as we do. But it's important I think, every now and then, that we stop and we evaluate and we say, "Hey, are we making progress towards the goal of becoming complete in Christ?"

Now I want us to think this morning, as we do that, not just about ourselves, because we are a very individualistic culture where we think basically just about *me*, about *my* life. It's very easy for us to open up the Scriptures and say, "How am I doing?" and see that as somehow in isolation from everyone else. But the question for us is always a two-fold question: "How am *I* doing and how are *we* doing?" Again and again we realize that the New Testament was written to churches, to bodies of believers, and that together they were to be making progress toward becoming complete in Christ. This is not just an individual pursuit.

So the question, as we go through this this morning and we let Peter kind of guide us through what progress ought to look like in our spiritual journey, I want you to think not only about yourself but think about *together*, as a church, how are we doing? Let's evaluate our progress together in becoming complete in Christ. To do that we're going to let Peter speak to us this morning. So, if you have your Bibles, please turn to 1 Peter 2. Next week we'll get back to our study of Corinthians, which has been fantastic, and you know there's a sense in which every week when we come, we're evaluating our lives, we're listening, we're seeking to grow and mature. But today we're just going to pull back a little bit out of what we have been doing in our study of Corinthians and let Peter speak to us in this chapter.

Just a bit of background about the letter that we're looking at this morning: Peter of course was an apostle and he wrote this letter to a group of churches scattered around what was then Asia, which today is modern day Turkey. And it's those various locations in that area that are mentioned in 1 Peter 1:1. It talks about a number of different regions and cities, but you'd get the idea that there

were many, many different churches that were in this region and this letter no doubt was circulated among all those churches.

Now in chapter one he has reminded them, because these are believers, these are people who have put their faith and hope and trust in Christ. He's reminded them of the great salvation that they have, that they have been born again by the Spirit of God to a new and living hope through Jesus Christ, that they were chosen by God and they have an incredible inheritance because of their faith in Christ. So he's speaking to believers and in chapter one he's reminding them of the incredible salvation that they have.

But just as we believe that salvation is just the beginning of the journey, not the end, Peter believed that as well. And so in chapter two he's going to challenge them to think about whether or not they are making progress in their faith and what the various components of progress really should look like.

Chapter 2:1:

> **Therefore,** *[considering the salvation that you have, mentioned in chapter one]* **putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.** (*NASB, 1 Peter 2:1-3)

Verse three says..."**if** you have tasted the kindness of the Lord." The way we would actually translate that better would be, *since* you have tasted the kindness of the Lord, referring again back to chapter one where these folks have put their trust and faith in Christ. They are believers. And that being the case, there are two things that he wants them to be reminded of that they should be doing.

The first is in verse one where he says, "...laying aside or putting aside all malice, deceit, hypocrisy and slander..." In other words, you need to be taking off consistently the old habits, patterns and sinful ways that were a part of your former life. Now this is repeated again and again in the New Testament, in all the letters of Paul and here in Peter; we see it throughout the New Testament. And there are various lists of things; I think there are probably things that were particularly troublesome or sinful that were here in these churches that he mentioned. But the lists are not meant to be all inclusive. He's just saying part of making progress in our spiritual journey is to take off the old and put on the new.

It's really the imagery of, and we used this alot in Colossians, of taking off the old clothes, the old ragged worn-out clothes that we used to wear as non-believers, and putting them aside because God has something better for us. One of the marks of growth in maturity in the faith is: are we taking off the old ways? Are we ridding ourselves of sin? Are we quick to confess and acknowledge and recognize the sin in our life and put it away?

Now that's what Peter is challenging these folks with: put it aside; get rid of that old stuff. And that continues to be a challenge for us. So the question is, are you and I, individually, putting off the old life, taking off those things? Do we recognize the sinful patterns in our life and are we consistently confessing those things before God and putting them aside for something better? And would we say that together as a church? We recognize sin; there are probably things that are just true in our culture, things that are more likely to be stumbling points, more likely to be habits and sinful behaviors that we have, being who we are. Are those things going away? Are we putting aside those things? Are we taking steps to rid ourselves of those old sinful habits and patterns? That's one of

the questions we need to continually ask ourselves. And perhaps those closest to us need to be asked whether or not they're seeing us making progress in taking off the old way of life.

The second thing, though, is headed in the positive direction in verse two:

> **...like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,** (vs. 2)

Now a lot of people have looked at this and interpreted this passage as being for baby Christians. But that is not what he's talking about here. This is not the same as Paul talked about back in Corinthians when he said, "*I would like to give you meat and solid food but you're still babies; therefore, I have to go back to the elementary things."* That's not what he's talking about here. What he's talking about is, that in a maturing and growing Christian, there is a hunger for truth and for God that is like that of a newborn baby. Our hunger for God ought to be similar to and compared to the hunger that a baby has for milk.

Now I just happen to have had a lot of experience in my household with babies. And if it wasn't good enough that I had six of my own, within two or three years of my last one coming along, I had a grandbaby. So you know it just kind of keeps coming to me that I know what it's like when babies are hungry. They will cry; they will do anything until they get milk. It's the one thing they crave. They long for it and the only thing that will satisfy them; you can turn on music; you can pat them on the back; you can lullaby them; you can do all kinds of things...rock them but, when they're hungry, by golly there's only one thing that's going to satisfy and that's milk. You can pacify them for a minute, hoping that pacifier will work and just give you thirty more minutes of sleep...about two minutes, right? They want milk!

And this is what Peter is saying to these folks. You ought to have a hunger for God that is like a newborn baby that just won't be satisfied until you lay hold of it. You won't be satisfied for any substitute or for anything else. You hunger and long for God. Here he says it's a hunger that shows up as a hunger for the Word of God.

Now you have to understand, for these folks, they had the Old Testament, but many of these people would have been illiterate so it wasn't that they were going to read or study their Bibles. But they would listen to it being read to them. They would listen to the apostles and pastors who would come and teach them and he was saying that the mark of a growing, maturing Christian would be a hunger that just wouldn't be satisfied with anything less than God's truth. That was the mark. And that truth, that food that comes from the Word of God, would cause growth and maturity. They would grow up in respect to salvation; they would grow up into maturity in Christ, into Christ-likeness.

Now he defines that a little bit further in verse 4 when he says *what* they're looking for as we hunger for the Word of God.

> **And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God,** (vs. 4)

When you're coming to the Scriptures to get fed, what are you looking for? Are you looking for facts? Are you looking for philosophy? Are you looking for behavioral correction? What is the primary thing that we should be looking for when we come to the Word of God? He says here, we should be looking for **Him**. In other words, as He says, you're **coming to Him**. It's not coming to

Him the first time for salvation; this word reflects a continual, intimate coming to Him through the Word of God.

That is we long to meet Jesus in the pages of the Scripture. We long to connect intimately with Christ and have this deep and intimate relationship with God that comes as we absorb the Word of God: as we listen to it, as we read it, as we study it, as we hear it preached to us. As we meditate on it, we think about it; we memorize it. We are hungry for Christ, to meet Christ, to know Christ more intimately, and that drives us to the Scriptures again and again and again because we desperately want to be connected to Him. That is the mark of a maturing Christian.

Now I think it's important to recognize the order here: that our hunger for the Word and for Christ will be diminished if there is sin present in our life. He says, "*Get rid of the old way of life so that you will have a spiritual hunger."* And then, as we hunger for God and we meet God in the pages of the Scriptures and we encounter Christ, we will have even a greater awareness of our sinfulness. And the cycle continues. Those things go together and I think that's why they're put together here so intimately in this passage.

What happens as we come and we meet with Christ and we see Christ and we long for Christ?

Verse 5:

> **...you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

As we come to Christ and we meet with Christ, we develop an intimacy with Christ. We are built up into a spiritual house. It really is the imagery here of the Old Testament temple, where the presence of God dwelt among His people. Now the Scripture tells us we are, together, the temple of God. God, by His Spirit, abides and dwells on this earth in His people. So we are being built up into this spiritual temple, this dwelling place of God. And not only are we the dwelling place of God, but we are the priests that serve before God. We now have access; all of us have access to God. In those days, in the Old Testament, only the High Priest had access to the Holy of Holies, to the presence of God.

But now, not only is He saying we are being built up into this incredible dwelling place of God, more and more reflecting the glory of God, but we are the very priests who have access to God. We can go in and minister to God; we can offer up sacrifices, he says, that are pleasing to God. And he's going to expound what some of those things are a little bit later, but here he doesn't mention what those spiritual sacrifices are. I think really it's the totality of our life we're offering up to God as a sacrifice to Him. And everything that we do, everything that we're thinking, if it's in alignment with Christ and empowered by His Spirit, it is acceptable and it's pleasing to God. Your work life, your home life, your worship here at church, your worship at home, it's all pleasing to God when it's done in the right spirit, empowered by the Spirit and focused on the person of Christ. Your entire life becomes an act of worship, offering yourself up.

Now the priest not only ministered to God but priests would also minister to the people. And so you get this sense that we're not only ministering to God and increasing in our effectiveness and our ministry before God, but we're also ministering to others. We're turning and being representatives of God to the world and ministering to them on His behalf. That's what's implied in priesthood. So we're this temple, this dwelling place of God. And as we long and hunger for God, we're being built up to be a pure and better reflection, more beautiful reflection of who God really is, just as the

temple was in the Old Testament. And we're growing in our effectiveness as priests, ministering before God, worshiping God, and turning an offering of God's grace and mercy, to a world that desperately needs it. That's making progress in the faith.

Verses 6-8, reminds them of who we have come to and who this Christ is that offers all of this to us. He quotes here from Isaiah 28:

> **For this is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." This precious value, then, is for you who believe. But for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone," and "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.** (vs. 6-8)

Again he goes back to pick up on what he talked about in verse 4: that we have come to Christ, the living cornerstone, the one who was chosen by God to bring life, the one whom we are connected to...if we have believed in Him. And if we have believed in Him, He will never disappoint us. Don't you love that? When your life is directed towards Christ, when the focus of our life is a God-hunger that brings us again and again to Jesus in our daily life, we will not be disappointed. He is the living stone, the life-giving stone that makes us living stones, solid, usable in the hands of God.

In contrast, those who disbelieve, and here he quotes from Psalm118, verse 7, he talks about Jesus being the stone that the builders rejected. The builders he's referring to were the religious leaders of Jesus' day whose job it was to build the spiritual life of the national of Israel. And as Jesus came on the scene, the builders examined Him like a contractor would a cornerstone that's delivered to the job site. And as they evaluated and examined Jesus to see if He was going to be adequate for what they were looking for, they turned Him down. They rejected Him and sent Him back, saying, "*No we don't want you. You're not the Messiah we were looking for."*

And here is this incredible reminder of the cost of making the decision to reject Christ: because the One whom the builders rejected will come back, not this time as the Savior of the world, but as the judge of the world. And they will stumble and trip and fall and ultimately meet their doom because they rejected the person of Christ. The world may reject Christ; the majority of people who live on this planet may never come to accept and believe in Jesus but those who believe in Him, though they may be in the minority, will find themselves standing in God's presence with joy when He returns.

The others will stand with a sense of doom because of the judgment that will come through Christ. That's our great hope and the reason why it's so important that we continue to pursue Christ... because we have the living stone that we're connected to. This is real life! When we have Christ, we're at the very center of God's plan for all of humanity. We're connected to the one who is the life giving Spirit. And that's what life is really all about, being connected to God Himself through the person of Christ. And yet we're reminded in this that we also have a mission: there are many who do not know Christ; there are many who have not yet understood who He is and we get our sense of mission from that.

Now he talks some more here, beginning in verse nine, about two important elements of our maturing in our faith. The first has to do with embracing our new identity, verse 9:

> **But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION,** (vs. 9a)

You know one of the things that we probably struggle with most, and I think it was true of these people in the churches that Peter was writing to, is that question of "*Who am I?*" trying to find our identity. People look all over the world to try to find their identity and our identity here, he says, is found in our connection to Jesus Christ and what God has said, now, is true of who we are. These are not statements of things that we *ought* to become. He didn't say, "*You ought to become a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation."* He says, *"You are these things."*

This is someone who has built their life on Christ; this is at the core of who you now are. In other words, when we put our faith and trust in Christ, something radical happens at that moment of salvation; we take on a new identity. We become a new creation in Christ. We are now part of God's chosen race. That is we are now His chosen off-spring. This is a similar language to what you and I would say as if a couple says, "*We are trying to start a family; we are taking steps towards having and building a family."* God chose to have us be a part of His lineage and His family; we are chosen by God.

He says we are "a royal priesthood." We have access to God and we are royalty. We are from the royal line of God; we are from Him. We are coming forth from Him, born again from the Spirit. And we have unlimited access. We have an incredible royal standing before God. We are royalty and priests before God with unlimited access to Him; that's who we are! We are "a holy nation" He says. We are a nation that is set apart for God's purposes; we are a group that belong together, and set apart by God for some special purposes..."a holy nation." And he says we are a people "for God's own possession." In other words we are uniquely created as His people to be God's very own, to belong intimately to Him. That's who you and I are, if we are in Christ. That's who the body of Christ is, worldwide. We are "**a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession."**

Now the challenge with that is that we just have a hard time really believing that. And there is quite a radical change that needs to happen over the course of time. We understand and we talk about it a lot here at church, that in order for us to really come and receive salvation, we need to see ourselves as sinners, misfits and losers. Because that's what we are apart from Christ, we're doomed; we're destined for destruction. We're full of sin and unrighteousness. So in order to receive salvation I need to see myself as a sinner, desperately in need of a Savior, with nothing to offer to God of my own.

But when I come as a sinner, misfit and loser to the foot of the cross, and believe in Him who died there for me, I am given a brand new destiny; I am given a brand new identity. That's what he's talking about here. I'm no longer just a sinner, misfit and a loser. I'm "chosen"...a part of God's chosen race, His royal priesthood, His holy nation. I'm part of the people that are for His own possession. That is an amazing new identity that is given to us by God at the point of salvation.

But we have to make progress in embracing that new identity. We will increasingly see ourselves as these things as we hunger for God, as we long for Him. As we meet with Him we will increasingly agree with God and believe that these things are really true about who we are. But that is a journey of a lifetime. I think one of the saddest things for me is to watch people who have been

redeemed by God and transformed by God for years, who are still seeing themselves back here as just worthless, barely hanging on, that God has no reason to really love them and they question, constantly, God's love for them and who they are in Christ. God wants something better for us. He wants us to embrace this new identity. And what happens as a result of grabbing a hold of that new identity? Why are we these things? Look at the second half of verse 9:

> **...so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.** (vs. 9b-10)

The point of the matter is that we have this new identity, not because we've done something to deserve it or earn it. It's a gift of God because we were, at one time, a people who "were not a people" at all. We were cut off and separated from God, but now we "are the people of God." Once we were outside of God's mercy; now we've received God's mercy. This new identity we have is because of God's work in our life. It's because of what God has done. We talk about that again and again and again, that it's all what God has done, not what we've done. We're not talking about performance; we're talking about grace.

But as a result of God's grace, we have this new identity, in order that we might do what? "Proclaim His excellencies!" The word really is one similar to our word advertise. We are to be a living, breathing advertisement for the glories and wonders of God. That's the calling of God in our life. Your new identity is who you are, but your calling is to proclaim God's wonders, His excellencies. We ought to be the first to brag about God, to talk about what He's done in our life. Sometimes we make evangelism and sharing our faith so complicated. We think we have to make a presentation and we've got to have all these facts. But it's so simple, in reality, just to let people know what God has done in our life, who this God is who's made us who we are today, by His grace. It's our job to brag about this God, to talk about what He's done and who He is as we come to know Him. And the more we hunger for Him, the more we become intimate with Him, the more we have to share with people, the more excited we ought to be about who God is and what He's doing in our lives and what He can do in other people's lives. But our calling comes out of our identity to proclaim His excellencies with our mouths.

In verses 11 and 12 he talks a little bit more about what this ought to look like:

> **Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.** (vs. 11-12)

Here he's expanding a little bit on what it means to proclaim God's excellencies. It not only means to verbalize to others the greatness of our God, to be willing to talk about who He is and what He's done, but it means to live a holy life. He takes us back here, really connects us back to verse one: that we understand that in order for us to really live out this new calling and for us to really proclaim God's excellencies, we need to live a holy life. We need to not have lives dominated by sin. Our sinfulness shouldn't be the defining characteristic of who we are as God's people. So we constantly have to be putting it aside, confessing it. We have to be aware that there's an enemy who wants to trip us up, who wants to cause us to sin. And we ought to constantly be on guard so that we're abstaining from those things that would bring us down and diminish our calling, the effectiveness of our calling.

There's a war going on; it's a war that's internal that he's talking about. It's the war against sin that each and every one of us faces. Day in and day out we have to be on guard that we're going to make our proclamation what it should be. Then there's an external element to it in verse 12...that "our behavior ought to be excellent." Here the word is noble. We ought to be a noble people; we ought to be like nobility in the way that we treat and respond to the world around us. There should be an excellence to our lives, that our behavior ought to be exemplary so that other people would look at us and even if they would slander us for our faith or make fun of us because we believe in Jesus in a world that's just way too smart for that, they would look at our lives and they would see such an excellent way of life, such good deeds, such good activity in our life, such *other* focus, such love and patience and joy that they would have to stop and take notice that something is radically different about us.

This is an incredible calling that we have and we ought to be making progress in that calling. We ought to be more and more people who are grabbing a hold of our true identity and then living out this incredible calling and proclaiming His excellencies in the way we live and the way we deal with sin and the way we speak about God.

Now it's important again for us to go back to talk briefly about what I mentioned at the beginning, that this is not just an individual pursuit. This is something that ought to be increasingly true of all of us, collectively, together, not only here in our local church but in the broader church of Christ around the world. Is the body of Christ making progress? Is there a God hunger among us?

Do you see the people around you that are hungry for God and diving into His Word to meet Him there? Is there a growing desire for intimacy with Christ? Think about that; talk about that. How are you and I encouraging those we are connected to who are believers, to spur them on to a deeper hunger for God? How are we sharing in that experience of meeting with God and learning about Christ through the Scriptures? How are we talking about that with each other? Are we sharing stories of what God is doing? Are we interacting around this new identity that we have? Are we helping each other grab a hold of this new identity? When we see somebody groveling in the past, hanging on to those things that used to describe who they were, are we helping pull them into the reality of who they are now in Christ? This is part of our journey together.

Are we helping each other live out this calling to be proclaimers of His excellencies, of His greatness? That's why we meet together. That's why we get in small groups together, because we need to spur one another on towards fulfilling and growing in these things, making progress in our faith. Now, as you look back to six months ago, where are you in relation to these things...laying off the old life, hungering for God, embracing your new identity and living out your calling? Where are you today as opposed to where you were six months ago? Is there progress? Are we making progress together as a people? Are those four things increasingly true of us: we are God hungry; we're putting aside the old; we're embracing our identity; we're living out our calling. Those things ought to become increasingly true of us.

It's very important I think for all of us to have some points in our lives where we stop and really take account of whether or not we're making progress. Otherwise life just tends to flow day after day, moment after moment and we find ourselves years later, suddenly coming to this horrible realization that we really have not progressed in our faith, in the thing that is most important.

When I think back over these last six months, there have been a lot of things that could have distracted us from making the main thing, *the main thing*. There's been an incredible economic

upheaval that has people thinking about a lot of things. Has that stood in the way of your spiritual progress? There's a huge political life that's gone on in our country that's captured people's attention and time. We sit glued, often times through months, to the television. Has that stood in the way of making spiritual progress?

Or are we, this morning, like newborn babies, hungry, hungry for God, embracing our new identity, desirous to live out our calling with everything that we have? And how can we encourage one another? How can we connect with each other in a way that allows us to make progress in the next six months? In just a minute Donn Stoner's going to come talk for just a couple of minutes, as we close, about some things that we want to do so that you and I can make progress together, even more effectively be on mission, to embrace our identity, to be deeply connected, intimately connected with Christ, and to be forsaking our old life. Let's pray.

Father, I pray that we would, indeed, make progress both individually and collectively. That, as Peter lays out, these things that ought to be increasingly true of us, that they truly would be true. Stir it within us, God; don't let anything stand in the way of our making progress. Help us to realize the One on whom our life is built, the cornerstone, the choice and precious one, nothing matters more than the life we have in Him. May we embrace that with all of our being today and everyday. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2009 – Mark Kremer. All rights reserved.

February 28/March 1, 2009

Study Questions
Discovering True Identity and Mission
I Peter 2:1-12

Pastor Mark Kremer

Opening Discussion

1. What words/descriptors do you commonly use to describe who you are to others? Ask others in your group if those words accurately reflect who they see you to be.

2. Where did your identity come from? What people/experiences/factors have most influenced your identity? Both your real identity and your perception of yourself?

3. What is the connection between who we are (identity) and how we live our lives? How does your identity influence the way you live every day?

4. What difference does being a Christian have on your identity?

Bible Study

1. Read I Peter 1 and talk about the major point Peter is making in that chapter. How does the truth of chapter 1 form the basis for what is discussed in chapter 2?

2. I Peter 2:1 describes taking off an old way of life, like taking off old clothes. How does this happen in the life of the Christian? In what ways is our old life dealt with once and for all when we believe and in what ways is "putting aside" an ongoing process?

3. How does Peter describe what our desire for God and truth should be like in vs. 2? What does that kind of hunger or longing look like in your life? Where does it come from (see verse 3, chapter 1)?

4. What is the result of drinking spiritual milk? What should we expect to be the result in the day to day life of a Christ follower?

5. Who or what are we looking for when we come to the Word? Is it possible to come to the scriptures looking for the wrong thing or come and miss the true essence of its revelation? What did Jesus say to the religious leaders in John 5:39-44 concerning this issue?

6. How does this text describe Jesus? (vs 4, 6-8) What is the contrast between the way the world has seen and responded to Jesus and the way God the Father and those who believe see Him?

7. How is Jesus the cornerstone of all of human history? How is He the cornerstone of the Church? Your life?

8. Having come to Christ, who are you now? What is your true identity? (vs 9) How does each phrase add to the overall richness of our true identity?

9. What modern images/ideas capture the way Christ-followers are described in vs. 9?

10. Has this always been our identity? (vs 10) Who or what has given Christ-followers this new identity? What difference does it make that we understand where our identity comes from?

11. As a result of who we are, what is our primary mission in life? (vs 9) What is the focus of our mission?

12. How should we live out our new identity and mission according to vs. 11-12?

Application

1. Are you God-hungry? Do you see the Church as God-hungry? Our church? In what ways have you been nourished and grown recently? Is our church growing spiritually and in what ways?

2. How can Christ-followers move from our old identity as "sinners, misfits and losers" to seeing ourselves as we are described in this chapter? What difference does it make? How can we remain humble and remember where we came from and still embrace our new identity?

3. How can we help each other embrace our new identity in Christ and our new mission in life? What specific things will you do for each other in this regard?

4. How are you, in both action and words, "declaring His excellencies" (His goodness, perfection) to those around you? Close your time together by declaring to one-another and to God his many "excellencies".

Copyright 2009 – Mark Kremer. All rights reserved.