

## **Pairs in Peter Once you were, now you are.**

*[New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Hello, and welcome to the latest in the series entitled “Pairs in Peter.”

Our theme today comes from Peter’s first epistle. It’s a short phrase but one that carries enormous weight: “You were once... but now you are...” It actually reflects a broader pattern that appears right across Scripture. Again and again, God reminds His people of their past condition and contrasts it with their new identity in Him. “You were once lost... but now you are found.” “You were once slaves... but now you are sons.” It is the great gospel pattern: God calls us out of something and into something else entirely. One of the most well-known and well-loved hymns tells this exact story, Amazing Grace. “I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.”

And in the first letter of Peter, we find one of the clearest and most beautiful expressions of this. Let me read to you from 1 Peter 2:9–10:

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light, who were once not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

That little phrase — “once you were... now you are” — is like a wake-up call. It’s a reminder. It’s a re-setting of our identity. In a world that constantly tells us who we should be and how we should act, Peter pauses and says, “Wait. Don’t forget who you really are.”

So, today, I want to take some time to walk through this passage together. I want us to look honestly at two things:

1. What we once were, and
2. Who we now are in Christ.

And then at the end, we’ll think practically about what this means for everyday life in 2025 — in our homes, our workplaces, our churches, and our relationships.

### **1. Once you were... — remembering our former condition**

Peter doesn’t sugar-coat anything here. He’s writing to Christians who were scattered across the Roman Empire. They were experiencing pressures, hostility, misunderstanding, even persecution. And yet Peter isn’t primarily concerned with their difficulties — he’s concerned with their identity. He says, “Once you were not a people... once you had not received mercy.” In other words, before Christ came into our lives:

- We were disconnected from God.
- We were spiritually scattered.
- And we were searching for meaning, even if we didn't consciously realise we were searching.

The Bible sometimes describes that condition using strong phrases — “dead in sin”, “far off”, “alienated from God”, “without hope and without God in the world.” Now those are not comfortable words. But they are truthful words. And actually, they help us appreciate the sheer grace of God. Only when we know where we were, can we fully appreciate where God has brought us.

I want you to imagine for a moment being lost in a forest. No map. No compass. No phone signal. Just miles and miles of trees. The sun is going down. There's a growing sense of panic. That, spiritually speaking, is what we once were: lost. But then imagine someone coming into the forest, calling your name, finding you, and leading you safely home. That is mercy. That is grace. And that is exactly what God has done.

Peter reminds his readers of that former condition. Why? Because remembering what we were makes us more grateful for what we now are. Gratitude is one of the most powerful forces in the Christian life. We never move beyond grace. We never graduate from mercy. The longer we walk with Jesus, the more amazed we become that He saved us. I often am quite ashamed as someone who was brought up in a Christian home and saved at a very early age that my appreciation of what it really means to be far from God and spiritually lost is not as real to myself as someone such as John Newton, the ex-slave trader who wrote the Hymn I have just mentioned, must no doubt have had. Indeed, it is said of him that he said words similar to, “I am not yet what I should be, nor am I what I will be in eternity, but I thank God that I am not what I used to be.” Surely, we should always seek to never lose sight of who and what we once were!

## **2. But now you are... — embracing our new identity**

Now look at the contrast Peter makes: “But now you are the people of God... now you have received mercy.”

Just pause and let that sink in for a moment. You are the people of God. That's not just a nice phrase. It's a totally new identity. Once You didn't belong — now you belong. You once were far from God — now you are brought near. You once were in darkness — now you are in His wonderful light.

Peter piles up four beautiful descriptions of the believer:

1. “A chosen people” — this reminds us that God went looking for us. We didn't initiate the relationship. He chose us. He loved us first. Let that cut through any nagging voices that tell you you're not good enough or that you've somehow been forgotten. You were chosen.
2. “A royal priesthood” — the Old Testament priest had the privilege of drawing near to God and offering sacrifices. Peter now says that all believers share in that privilege. You can draw near. You can intercede for others. You can offer spiritual sacrifices of praise.
3. “A holy nation” — God sets His people apart. We're called to be different. Not in a proud, self-righteous way — but in a joyful, counter-cultural way. Holiness in Peter's letters is always connected with hope. Because our real citizenship is in heaven, we live differently on earth.
4. “God's special possession” — this is such a tender phrase. It literally means “a people for His own.” You are not a commodity. You are not just a number. You are deeply known and deeply treasured by God.

Then Peter tells us why God has done all this: “that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.” In other words, your new identity leads to a new purpose. You have been saved to declare. You have been changed to shine. You have been called out to point others in.

### **3. What does this mean for us today?**

So how do we take this beautiful truth — “Once you were... now you are” — and apply it? Let me offer three practical encouragements with examples of characters in the Bible who did just that.

#### **a) Live Thankfully**

Christianity is fundamentally a response. God acts first. We respond. In fact, that’s what worship is: responding with our whole lives to who God is and what He’s done. And the best place to start is with thankfulness. Take time regularly to remember what He’s brought you from. Don’t wait for the worship leader to stir your heart — start stirring it yourself. Maybe even take a few minutes each morning and pray, “Lord, thank you that I once was but now I am. Thank you that I once didn’t belong, but now I belong to You.”

Gratitude isn’t just polite — it’s powerful. It resets our perspective. It dethrones self. It softens our hearts. It keeps us humble. It reminds us that everything we have is of grace. In relation to this I would like to draw our attention to two incidents in the Gospels. They are so similar in many ways yet are two separate occasions.

One is when a woman anoints Jesus with very expensive and fragrant oil. In Matthew chapter 26, Mark chapter 14 and John chapter 12 we are told it was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and it took place in Bethany. In Luke chapter 7 we are told of the other incident that took place in Galilee in the home of Simon the Pharisee. Luke does not tell us the name of this woman, but we are told that she was a woman of the city who was a sinner, that is, a prostitute. We are told that this woman was so appreciative of being in the presence of Jesus that she stood behind him, washed His feet with her tears, dried them with her hair and then anointed them with the expensive anointment. We are not told the value of the oil in this story, but Mark tells us that the value of Mary’s oil was more than 300 denarii which was roughly a year’s wages. The alabaster flask in Luke 7 was itself very expensive and while in this incident we are not told it was broken we can assume that it was a similar type of expensive oil that was held in such a costly container. For both of these women it was a massive sacrifice in order to show their thankfulness to their Lord. It was their act of true worship. Yet, in both stories their appreciation was underestimated by those around. In the story of Mary in Bethany we are told that the disciples were indignant by what they considered a waste of money and in the other incident it was Simon the Pharisee in whose house they were who felt that such a woman was not fit to be touching the Saviour. The Lord Jesus then challenged him as to whether a big debtor or small one would be more appreciative once their debt had been forgiven. Simon rightly said that the one who had been forgiven most would love him most. Proving the very point I mentioned earlier about, for example, John Newton. So, irrespective of what this world might think is important, we should never underestimate the value that the Lord Jesus and God the Father puts on the appreciation and thankfulness of Christians for all that we have been brought into because of the grace, love and mercy of God. In Luke chapter 7 this woman is told that her sins which were many had been forgiven and that she should go in peace. At the end of the other incident, in Matthew chapter 26, the Lord says that wherever the Gospel is preached in the whole world, what Mary did will be told as a memorial to her.

#### **b) Live differently**

It’s striking that straight after these identity statements, Peter says:

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts... (1 Peter 2:11).

Another translation uses the words foreigners and exiles. In other words, let your identity shape your lifestyle. You're a holy nation — so be holy. You're a chosen people — so live as someone who's been chosen. Don't simply blend in. Let the light of Christ show in the way you speak, the way you handle pressure, the way you treat others. Ask yourself: "Does my life make sense in light of the gospel?" Sometimes the most powerful witness is simply living differently. Quiet faithfulness in the workplace. Gentle patience at home. Integrity when no one is looking. That's "declaring His praises."

Perhaps one of the greatest examples ever of someone who once was something but became something else was Saul of Tarsus who boasted greatly in his standing in Judaism, his education, his heritage and his zealous desire to stamp out the name of Christ and persecute the Christian believers. Yet on the road to Damascus, he was struck to earth by that great light, heard the voice of the risen Lord from heaven and was gloriously converted to Christ and his soul saved. These two terms, converted and saved, are perhaps used less now than in years gone past, and yet they sum up exactly what took place in the life of that man on that day. We read of Saul as a young man in Acts chapter 7 being complicit in the stoning of Stephen the first Christian martyr, and in the early verses of Acts chapter 8 we read of him seeking to make havoc of the Church of God in Jerusalem and scattering them abroad. Then in chapter 9 his zeal drives him to persecute believers further afield and head for Damascus; he could have had no idea that day as he set off what a change would come about in his life that very day. He initially lost his sight and after he had this restored, he spent some days with the believers in Damascus but by verse 20 of Acts chapter 9 we read;

Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

What a turnaround, what a change and what an example of someone living differently. It is worth noting that in each of the three times that Paul's Damascus Road conversion is mentioned the light that shone from heaven is described as being greater each time, this appears in Acts chapters 9, 22 and 26. Paul then goes on to write to the Romans in chapter 12 of his epistle to them perhaps the most challenging words in respect of living differently. In verse 1 he encourages them to present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God; and then in verse 2 what seems like a prerequisite for this and that is not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. It is often said that what we think about today, we will believe tomorrow and will act upon or be the next day.

### **c) Live missionally**

Finally, remember the purpose Peter gives us in First Peter chapter 2 verse 9:

That you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.

This isn't just about what happens inside a church service. It's about the whole of life. We are called to proclaim or declare — to show and share the goodness of God in our homes, our neighbourhoods, our workplaces and beyond. Think for a moment about the people around you — the colleague who seems distant, the neighbour who rarely opens their door, the family member who keeps everyone at arm's length. They may not realise it, but spiritually speaking, they might still be walking through that forest — lost, disoriented, unsure where to turn. But you know the way. And God has placed you there not by accident, but by design.

You don't have to have all the answers. You don't need a theology degree or even to be trained in evangelism. You just need to declare His praises. That might look like a kind word, an invitation for coffee, an honest testimony of what God has done in your life. It might be as simple as "I'll pray for you" — and then genuinely doing it. We all have different skills and talents as well as things we

enjoy or don't enjoy doing. Many people find it difficult to speak in public but would be entirely comfortable helping a homeless person in a very practical way. We should always remember that even a cup of cold water given in the Lord's name will be taken account of. There are so many varied and different ways in which we can be involved in mission whether at home or abroad. Many conferences and conventions have mission updates. The Keswick convention, to mention just one, has a huge display of many things that people are involved in, and I am always greatly encouraged and challenged by the breadth of skills that are required to make these things happen.

Then of course we need to remember that even if we are unable to do anything by reason of age or disability, we can still pray, and this is the most important thing that every ministry needs. It is therefore imperative that we are aware of the many things that God is doing at home and abroad so we are able to pray effectively and be able to help when and where we can.

A great example from scripture of a person who was once something and became something else and immediately went on to be mission focussed was the woman of Samaria who we read about in John's gospel chapter 4. Jesus, being weary from His journey, sat by a well called Sychar and when a woman came to draw water at the very hottest point of the day, Jesus asked her for a drink. The woman answered Him as to why being a Jew, He asked her, being a Samaritan, for a drink as the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus then went on to give her a very profound message, we read in chapter 4 verse 10:

Jesus answered and said to her, "if you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

The woman still did not understand and further enquired as to how Jesus could give her living water as He had nothing to draw with and the well was deep. He was then able to explain that the water He was offering her was Living Water, a spiritual thirst quencher, and that once she had drunk from that source she would never thirst again. The woman immediately responded and accepted this offer. It was only then that Jesus revealed to her that He knew her true moral standing and showed His omniscience, He asked her to call her husband. Jesus knew that she had had five husbands and the man she was now living with was not her husband. She fully admitted this and confessed that she knew the Messiah was coming. Jesus then spoke to her of true worship of God as Father and then we are told she immediately left her water pot and went into the city to tell everyone, as verse 29 tells us,

Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?

She had come to the well that day, ashamed and afraid to meet anyone but now she went with boldness to tell everyone of Jesus the Christ, the Messiah.

#### **4. A final word of encouragement**

Before we finish, let me say this: some of you listening today might still feel as though you are in that "once" category. You might think, "Yes, that's me — I feel far from God, I feel unworthy, I don't feel like I belong." If you've never taken that step of faith, if you've never said "Yes" to Jesus, let me encourage you: God's invitation is open. He is still calling people out of darkness into His wonderful light. You don't need to clean yourself up first. You don't need to know everything. You just need to come. And if that's you today, why not pray — even now — "Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You that You died for me. Forgive me. Make me new. Bring me out of darkness and into Your light." He will hear. He will answer.

And for those of you who are followers of Christ but maybe feel weary or discouraged... let Peter's words refresh you. You are a chosen person. You are part of a royal priesthood. You are part of a

holy nation. You are God's special possession. That is who you are. It's not based on your performance. It's not cancelled by your mistakes. It's secured by the grace of God and the blood of Jesus.

So, as you go into the rest of today — whether you face easy things or hard things — carry this in your heart: "Once I was... but now I am." Walk in light of that. Live thankfully. Live differently. Live missionally. And declare His praises wherever He has placed you.

Thank you for listening to this talk today, number T1437, Pairs in Peter, 'Once you were, now you are.'

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