

1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Corinthians 12:27)

Living Stones of the Spiritual House

October 14th, 2018

1 Peter 2:4-10

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please open your Bibles with me to 1 Peter 2:4-10. As you may remember, Peter speaks to a people who are feeling the impending danger of coming persecution. In real pastoral fashion, he reminds them of foundational truths and then calls them to action based on those truths. In verse 1-3 of this chapter, he charges them to put off evil and long for the spiritual milk of God's word.

But if we were to be honest, to most this would seem like very foolish advice. When the rains fall, and the winds blow, how is longing for God's Word going to help? How will it help when the shingles are flying off your roof and you're scared for your life? Shouldn't the imperatives give some tips on how to place sandbags or cover the windows?

Peter does not give time for this kind of scepticism to even begin. He immediately explains exactly why longing for God's Word changes everything – because God's Word reveals your identity in Christ.

God's Word reveals your identity in Christ – and what you do with Jesus changes everything.

He may look like a simple rock to the world that holds superficial value and utility. But if we come to Jesus, then we find a foundation upon which God has secured our identity and calling. This will be our shelter and confidence in the storm.

Hear now the Word of the Lord:

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”

and

“A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. – 1 Peter 2:4-10

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

We might be very eager to jump in to learn about ourselves. But notice that Peter does not start with us. That’s our tendency as we live in a very individualistic, self-centred culture. Our identity and our destiny are something that we think we can determine or can change on a whim – nothing outside of ourselves can tell us otherwise. But Peter says that when we encounter Jesus, and believe in him, we are built into something extraordinary. So, if we want to know who we truly are then we need to first behold the person and work of Jesus.

Peter begins with Jesus because Jesus fulfilled all the promises and anticipations of the Old Testament and applies the benefits to us through faith. So first we need to see,

How is Christ our Foundation?

Peter describes Jesus as “a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious” (vs. 4b). We might wonder why he calls Jesus a stone and then quotes several Old Testament passages that use this same language. What does it mean that he was a stone?

For that answer we need to start at the beginning. God delivered the Israelites out of Egyptian captivity to worship Him in the wilderness. God desired to dwell with his people, so he commanded them to make a tent – the Tabernacle – where his very presence would reside. Even when they moved around in the desert, they would carry the Tabernacle where God promised to meet with his people. When they finally conquered the Promised Land, God commanded a permanent temple be assembled for him in Jerusalem. For hundreds upon hundreds of years, this temple remained the dedicated place for worship and sacrifice before the Almighty God. It was a continual reminder of God’s blessing upon the people of Israel, their chosen status before the nations, and the future coming of God’s kingdom through them.

But one day, Jesus comes. And he begins to rattle some cages.

Early in his ministry, Jesus cleanses the temple and is immediately confronted. Jesus says,

So, the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” Jesus answered them, “**Destroy this temple**, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But **he was speaking about the temple of his body**. (John 2:18-21)

Jesus identifies himself as the new temple.

Another instance, near the end of his ministry, he cleanses the temple again. After this, he tells the religious leaders a parable about an owner of a vineyard that continually sends representatives to his tenants he left in charge of it to get some fruit. But the tenants beat or kill them. So, he sends his son. With greed in their heart, they kill him as well! Finally, Jesus confronts the religious leaders by saying,

When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.” Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “*The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone*; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? Therefore, I tell you, *the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits*. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. Matthew 21:33–45

Jesus condemns their temple worship and their leadership. They had failed to produce the spiritual fruit God had called them to yield. They have discarded God’s messengers and rejected God’s Son. Rather than a house of worship and sacrifice to God, it had become a place of idolatry. Therefore, God would destroy the temple and rebuild upon a better stone – a precious, living stone – named Jesus.

Blinded by their greed for power, the Jewish leaders saw nothing worthy in him and put him to death. But, as he predicted, Jesus rose as he was predestined to do since the foundation of the world. God had chosen him to be the first, new, living stone from which he would build a better Israel

And Jesus accomplished what Israel failed to do in every realm – the temple, the sacrifices, and the priesthood. In Jesus, all aspects of Israel’s identity are found fulfilled in Christ. We don’t go to the Jerusalem temple to meet with God, we go to Jesus. We don’t go to the marketplace for our sacrifices to God, we go to Jesus. We don’t go to the priests to serve as our mediator before God, we go to Jesus. Jesus changes everything!

Not only did He set His Son as the foundation stone from which he would build his kingdom, but in Christ’s resurrection, he would cause all the stones that were laid upon him to be living stones as well.

Peter proclaims Jesus not only as the foundation but also as a builder. We read in our passage:

“you yourselves like living stones **are being built up** as a spiritual house...” (1 Peter 5a)

We are not the contractors in our Christian life or our church. Jesus is the one who plans, places, and perfects his living stones to become a spiritual house where God is pleased to dwell. And in this house – God’s house – we have a new identity and calling.

So, let’s see what this glorious truth means for us. The first thing we want to ask is:

What Is Our Identity in Christ?

Peter says that we are:

1. A Chosen Race

Look at vs. 9: “You are a chosen race.”

The election of the Jews as God’s chosen people was clear in the Old Testament. In

Deuteronomy, God tells them that he will give them the Promised Land by clearing away seven nations that are more numerous and mightier than they. He says,

“For you are a holy nation to the Lord your God. The Lord your **God has chosen you out of all the nations** on the earth, to be His own.” (Deuteronomy 7:6)

They were special – selected and separated by God. There were Jews and Gentles – Jews and everyone else. But Christ has broken the dividing wall of race. No longer are God’s people known to be his by lineage or race. Now, Gentiles, who were outsiders, are brought in through faith.

Paul exclaims,

Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? **Yes, of Gentiles also**, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised **by faith** and the uncircumcised **through faith**. (Romans 3:29)

And if this is true – inclusion by faith – then ALL people, without distinction, who place their faith in Christ are part of the chosen race.

We might wonder why God has done this. Why has he seemed to change his mind about Israel?

Reading further, we find that He didn’t falter, his people did. The Jews stumbled over Jesus as their cornerstone. They wanted to build upon the works of the law. The Apostle Paul says,

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.

Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” (Romans 9:30-33).

We have been brought in through Christ and God has made us his people out of all the nations of the earth. Many walk upon the easy, wide path to destruction. Few walk upon the narrow and hard path that leads to life and God has granted it to you by faith. Praise God!

Secondly, we find that we are:

2. A Royal Priesthood

Continuing in vs. 9, Peter says that we are a royal priesthood. Interestingly, in verse 5, this is part of our calling as well which we will get to in a moment. But first, we need to know what it means

that we are now all priests.

The priesthood started with Aaron, Moses' son. He, and the Levites that followed him, were set apart to have intimate access to the holy God for the benefit of the sinful nation. They took the sacrifices of the people to God and returned to the people to proclaim what God had said. The priests could go in to the Holy Place of the Tabernacle and the High Priest was able to go in to the Holy of Holies to approach God face-to-face.

But the priests were limited. They were also limited by their own sin, their frailty of life, and their number compared to the need. Jesus, however, becomes the High Priest and fulfills this office in a spectacular way. The author of Hebrews says,

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but **he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever**. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:23-25)
In being the constant, permanent high priest, we are given direct access to God through him. That makes us priests – people that can have a personal, deep relationship with God without any other person, pastor, or Pope assisting us.

Our High Priest will never be corrupt and the Holy Spirit will never defile God's temple. We are a new people who are positioned and equipped to be God's representatives to a lost world.

Now, through Christ, he has made a people who are all priests. All – both lay and elder – have direct access to God and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Can you grasp that? God is HERE! He is in you and me, RIGHT NOW!

God does not have to be conjured or cajoled. He has made himself present through Jesus Christ. And he will never leave you nor forsake you. There may be situations in life that cause you to feel like God is distant. Don't trust those feelings. Storms will never prevail over this truth in God's Word. If you are truly in Christ, God is always present. Run to Jesus and he'll show you afresh that God has never left.

This brings us to our next point that is closely tied to this one. Peter says, we are

3. A Holy Nation

The language of being a royal priesthood and a holy nation are pulled from the same reference in Exodus 19. We see here:

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me **a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

These concepts are tied together. To be a kingdom of priests, as we just mentioned, means that we have access to God on behalf of other people. To do this you faithfully, you must be both distinct and yet engaged.

Israel was continually commanded to be different from all the other nations – because they couldn’t fulfill their identity as God’s people if they didn’t. They were no use to the nations if they became like the nations. If they adopted the culture, gods, and lifestyle of the pagan nations then they would be cut off from God. A holy God cannot dwell in the presence of an unholy people. And without access to God, they could not be the nation that God used to pour his blessings out on the other nations.

Peter knew that these people needed to hear this and I think we do too. The storm that is coming will be hard. It will be hard for us not to want to be a Christian while trying to look exactly like our neighbor. We will deceive ourselves into thinking that we can fully engage with culture, adopt a few harmless practices to accommodate our friends, and only hold to the core of the Red Letters. Brothers and sisters, if we do this then we will lose everything. We will harden our hearts to God and we will be of no eternal use to our unbelieving friends and family. We cannot afford to forget this part of our identity.

Just to be clear, this does not mean that we retreat into a commune. It means that we must be holy as God is holy, even in our interactions with the world. They must see that we are different. They must see that God is present here unlike anywhere else. We are the place where people should encounter the glory of God.

Finally, we see that we are also

4. A Beloved Possession

There is an intimacy in this characterization of us. We are God’s treasure whom he loves.

The first thing we saw is that we are chosen and sometimes that can seem a little impersonal. We can see ourselves as only tools. But let's read the passage from Deuteronomy 7 again and go a little further to see why Israel was chosen:

“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people **for his treasured possession**, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord **set his love on you** and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but **it is because the Lord loves you** and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers... (Deuteronomy 7:6-8a)

Do you hear that? God loves you and keeps you for himself because he loves you!

Peter uses the language here from the book of Hosea. Hosea is about a man whose wife continually cheats on him with prostitutes, but he continually draws her back because of his love for her. He proclaims that he will allure her back to be his wife forever. It is narrative imagery to portray God's relationship to Israel. God betrothed himself to Israel, but she whored after other gods like the other nations. Yet, in Christ, he has shown us his immense love and is making us his bride. Hosea says,

I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'" (Hosea 2:23 NIV)

We have been brought into an intimate relationship where the sovereign God of all Creation delights to love us. We need to hear that. We need to know that when the storm comes, God is not contemplating divorce. God loves us and will remain faithful to our relationship even when we're faithless.

When I got married to Miranda, my identity changed. I am hers and she is mine. If everyone else abandons me or turns against me, I know that she loves me. If anyone comes against her, you'll see a very frightening side of me. How much more is our identity changed now that we are God's beloved in Christ? How much more will he comfort and fight for us when the storm comes?

Peter reveals to us that, just like our living cornerstone, we too are living stones. Our new identity causes us to have a new calling as well. We are active participants in this spiritual house that God is forming. So, let's next answer the question,

What Is Our Calling in Christ?

Peter is kind in giving us some purpose clues in vs. 5 as to why he is making us into a spiritual

house. First, we see that we are called,

1. To worship with acceptable sacrifices

The end of vs. 5 says,

to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5b)

Because Jesus has paid the ultimate atoning sacrifice, the sacrificial system is different. Instead of us taking our sacrifices to a priest to be offered on our behalf, we are made priests who are commanded to bring our own sacrifices to God through Christ. Instead of animals being killed as sacrifices, our sacrifices are those which are given through the PERSON of Christ. Instead of offering things by empty ritual, our sacrifices are given spiritually, by the POWER of the Holy Spirit.

So, what are these sacrifices that we should offer?

The author of Hebrews gives us a little more help here. He says,

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of **praise** to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to **do good** and **to share** what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. (Hebrews 13:15-16).

Our lives should be marked with praising God for who he is and what he has done. Last weekend's thanksgiving theme ought to permeate our Christian life. For he has shown us mercy, he has brought us out of darkness, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope, he has loved us beyond measure – it does not make any sense to look at your true identity in Christ and not lift your voice in boisterous worship.

But it's important to see that the spiritual sacrifices are not immaterial. They involve doing good to others and giving generously. As Christians we have been shown forgiveness, love, and mercy in Christ. As we behold Christ's glory, how can we not also show the same to everyone we see? – especially those who are in the position that we were! And as Christians we have been blessed with such a rich inheritance that any earthly treasure pales in comparison. When we grasp the immensity of our blessing that has been purchased and kept through Christ, how can we not give all that we can spare for the sake that others can behold it as well?

But we must stress that any of these sacrifices – whether praises, deeds, or gifts – must be done

through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Only through faith in him are any of these pleasing to God the Father. In fact, if they are done without reference to Jesus – if they are built on any other cornerstone – they are an abomination to God.

For the author of Hebrews tells us plainly,

And **without faith it is impossible to please him**, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

We also see that we are called

2. To proclaim the excellencies of Christ

The end of vs. 9 says,

“**that** you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Our identity as priests gives us unlimited, unhindered access to God the Father. We can enter his presence at any moment through Christ. And as Spider-Man says, “with great power comes great responsibility”. So what are we called to do as holy priests? We fulfill what the priests were supposed to do – we mediate between a holy God and sinful people.

The author of Hebrews understands the impact of this and gives us some guidance on what this should mean for us. He says,

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **let us draw near** with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. **Let us hold fast the confession of our hope** without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And **let us consider how to stir up one another** to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Let us draw near! Christ has torn the temple curtain, so we can enter the presence of God. So, draw near with confidence and faith-filled hearts! Come and behold the glory of God. Bathe in the beauties of his truth. Stay there until your face shines like Moses.

Then pour out the blessings that you have received from being in the presence of God. Stir up your brother and sister in Christ through proclaiming God’s truth. Announce to the nations God’s glory.

After listing characteristics of our identity, Peter gives a summary of why he has made us into this spiritual house when he says in vs. 9,

that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)
You are saved so that you can declare the majesty, the honor, and the glory of God to everyone you see.

Start in here and continue it out there. You don't need to be a theologian or a pastor. You simply need to have placed your faith in Jesus Christ. If you have that then you have everything that the world needs to know. Peter even gives you fodder for the message:

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:10)

It really is that simple! Soak that truth up in here week after week and then share it!

Conclusion

So, my friends, the storm that draws near may be able to shake you. But if you are in Christ, this is your identity and calling. You can rest in him and be built to withstand it.

The text indicates that spiritual transformation is due to continual contact with Jesus Christ for the purpose of God's glory – AS you come to him, you are being built into a spiritual house.

If you have never put your faith in Christ that is the first step you need to make today. If you have put your faith in Christ, come again – today and every day – to the rock of your identity and calling.

So, I plead with each of you in this room.

Come to Jesus!

He is the cornerstone of God's spiritual house.

He is the rock that will not fail.

If you continually stand on his truth, you will not be put to shame

If you build your life on him, you will not crumble in the storm.

If you unite yourself with others upon him, your fellowship will strengthen you through the most furious winds.

Come to Jesus.

Let's pray together.