

THE PEOPLE OF GOD

1 Peter 2:4-10

November 9, 2008 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

Our text this morning concludes Peter's long introduction to this letter written to the scattered saints in Asia Minor. Peter wrote to those who, as we will begin to consider next week, were experiencing and would continue to experience persecution and suffering. Peter's introduction establishes the hope and joy these believers should have and gain respite from during these tumultuous times. Here Peter concludes with a grand crescendo of what it means to be the people of God by reminding them not of their individuality as believers, but of the corporate entity that was established by God in calling them a people. Peter clearly establishes *the necessity of the body of Christ, the spiritual house, His Church, in all its splendor.*

I submit this morning that many do not understand the importance of this corporate identity of the people of God. We live in a culture that is defined by a rugged individualism, a "live by what is best for you at the expense of others" mentality. Simply put, we live in a time, not unlike others, that is consumed with selfishness. And in many places, the church has not only succumbed to this worldly mentality but in many places is encouraged in their individualism from the pulpit. Consider the title of Joel Osteen's best selling work, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential*, with sections entitled "Enlarge Your Vision," "Develop a Healthy Self-Image," and "Discover the Power and Thoughts of Your Words." Don't misunderstand my contention here. We are called as believers to live according to our full potential. Peter sets forth that very truth in this introduction. But Osteen's focus is on all on self. The danger is he sprinkles in a little God-language and skews what it means to live a life that is saturated with Christ and marked by repentance of sin. His potential is based upon the good found in you apart from the gospel, a gospel that Peter considers to be the very foundation for our hope and joy.

But even among those who see through the dangers associated with those like Osteen, there are those in solid evangelical churches, places where the gospel is supreme, that fail to understand the necessity of the church. They too are influenced by the individualism of the age. These look at how the church can serve them while failing to recognize how they are to selflessly serve the church. They fail to understand the covenant relationship that exists between them and the body of Christ. In a very real sense, Peter shows us in our text that the moment one comes to faith in Christ, they are incorporated into a body that, while made up of individuals, is no longer individualistic. The body is one of which they are a part.

Peter describes this new look of the people of God in three ways: 1) A New Temple, 2) A New Identity, and 3) A New Purpose.

I. A New Temple (2:4-8)

The focal point of this first section is what Peter called "**a spiritual house**" and "**a holy priesthood**" (v. 5). The allusion here is to the temple, the central place of worship. However, Peter sets this temple, this "**spiritual house**," in apposition to that material temple in Jerusalem that to the Jew still served as the central place of God's habitation and of their worship. The destruction of that temple was still to come in A.D. 70. Much of the persecution that these believers would undergo would be tied to that event. Peter's designation serves to contrast this "**spiritual house**" and its "**holy priesthood**" with Israel's "material temple, a type and a symbol

of the spiritual house that Israel itself was to be, but failed to be.”¹ So Peter sets out to distinguish this “**spiritual house**” and its people, “**a holy priesthood**” from that of the material temple and Israel, the people of God who failed to live up to the covenant that God had established with them. In other words, Peter reminds these scattered saints in Christ, made up of predominately Gentiles, of their new covenant status in Christ. There is a new temple made up of new people in the new covenant. Peter sets forth this apposition in three ways.

1. The living Stone (vv. 4, 6)

The spiritual temple that Peter describes is unlike the material temple first and foremost because of its Cornerstone, Jesus Christ, who Peter calls “**a living stone.**” The term itself is paradoxical because we do not think of stones as “**living.**” Stones are dead and lifeless, but Peter’s choice is intentional. The figure of a stone in the Bible is common. It speaks of strength, of endurance, of security. We sing, “On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand,” praising Him who alone offers this strength, endurance, and security. In times of trouble, our hope rests on this “**stone**” that Peter describes. Not a dead, lifeless stone, but “**a living stone.**” Crucified—yes; buried—yes; but now risen and living and enduring in strength. Jesus said in John 14:19, “Because I live, you will live also,” a foretelling of His death, burial, and resurrection and the promise of life to all who believe in Him. He is the “**living stone.**”

Peter gives greater detail by way of Scripture to solidify his argument. This “**living stone**” was chosen by God and precious in His sight (v. 4). This thought is echoed in v. 6, where Peter quotes Isaiah 28:16. Christ as the Chief Cornerstone is established by God, “**BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION.**” It is God Himself who established or set this “**stone**” for the spiritual house. He initiated it and He continues to build upon it. Christ was “**A CHOICE STONE,**” chosen by the omniscient and omnipotent God, an elect Cornerstone. Christ was not of man’s own choosing, but God the Father’s. Christ is “**A PRECIOUS CORNER stone,**” esteemed by God, costly and valued by Him. Why? Because this house was established “with the precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ” who “was foreknown” by the Father “before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet. 1:19-20). This Christ, Peter says, is the “**choice and precious**” “**living stone.**”

2. The living stones (vv. 4-7a)

Having established Christ as the Chief Cornerstone of the new temple, Peter turns to those whom he describes as “**living stones.**” These are identified first as those who have come to the living Stone, Jesus Christ (v. 4). The believer is described as one who has come and continues to come to Christ, who has approached Christ by faith, believing that He is alive and capable of helping him. They have understood the merits of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection for them, by faith accepting His work of salvation for their sins. They have come to Him as the fountain of life and the water by which they will never thirst. They have not merely given an intellectual assent to the truths of the gospel, though this is important, but in coming to Him they grasp the reality of the relationship that they now have with Christ. They have come to cherish Christ because of the life He gave for them, dying in their place, bearing the wrath of God’s judgment for their sin, knowing that now their status in Christ secures for them eternal life.

Peter reminds his readers of the wonder of those who know Christ savingly. In v. 6 Peter again quotes Isaiah 28:16, “**AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.**” This is true because “**living stones**” have their life from the “**living stone.**” As much as life was granted to Christ, it is granted to them. Richard Belcher described Christ as “One excellent to

¹ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*, 90.

know—one knowing Him will not be ashamed. One knowing Him will never be forsaken by Him, will never be disgraced by any failure in Him, never disappointed in His power, one knowing Him *never ever*... a double emphatic in the Greek—emphatic NO!” His translation of the double negative, “The one believing in Him shall never, never, under any circumstance, at any time, at any place, anywhere, be embarrassed by failure or absence.”² Imagine the encouragement this gave to these who were in the midst of suffering! These scattered Christians may well have been feeling weak and feeble, wondering if their commitment to Christ was worth it all. Peter says, “YES!” It is worth it all because of the worth you have in Christ Jesus, who suffered and died so that you might endure the very onslaughts of hell as **“living stones.”** You have what you need in Christ alone to overcome!

Peter says these **“living stones” “are being built up as a spiritual house” (v. 5).** Those who have come to Christ are not left to themselves as spiritual Lone Rangers but become building stones in the construction of the new temple, the Church. Paul described what Peter suggests in Ephesians 2:19-22,¹⁹ “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household,²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*,²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.” Those who have come to Christ are now part of God’s household, in union with Christ and with one another. There is no room for independence. Our dependence is in Him and in His body.

So Peter sets forth what the believer has in Christ and the result of having come to Him. They are members of the Church of Jesus Christ. Have you done that today? Have you come to Christ? Do you long to draw near to God, understanding that to truly know Christ means to renounce your old ways, your old desires, your old passions and ambitions, and your independence? Have you truly submitted and surrendered to God through Christ? If you have, then Peter says in v. 7, **“This precious value, then, is for you.”** All that is Christ’s is yours. Because He lives, you live!

3. The rejected Stone (vv. 7b-8)

If you have not trusted Christ as **“the living stone”** then Peter describes you. In v. 7 we read the word **“but.”** Here Peter contrasts the life of those who know Christ with those who don’t; those who have come to Him with those who reject Him. This contrast is set forth in its severity in v. 4 where Peter says the **“living stone”** was **“rejected by men”** and again in v. 7 in quoting Psalm 118:22, **“THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone.”** Hear Richard Belcher’s harrowing commentary on these verses, “Marvel of marvels! The Living Stone has been rejected by puny, dying, weak, helpless men. ‘Rejected,’ a perfect participle—having been rejected, having been disallowed and still disallowed, having been refused recognition and still refused recognition, having been denied His claims and still denied His claims. By men—created men, finite men, spiritually blind men, needy men. But chosen of God and precious.”³

Peter of course refers to the Jewish nation and its leaders who rejected and crucified Christ. To them, Christ was an obstacle to their preconceived notions of prominence in a temporal kingdom. They looked at Him as **“A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE.”** For them, Christ did nothing more than stir up opposition and evoke anger. He was the cause of

² Richard P. Belcher, *Ministry Helps in First Peter*, 41.

³ Belcher, 39.

revulsion. Christ literally made them sick to their stomachs. To them, Christ meant not life, but death, so they had Him put to death to remove the obstacle.

You remember it was this same Peter who quoted these very Scriptures to these leaders in Acts 4, interestingly, after healing a lame man at the gate of the temple. There Peter rebuked them for rejecting Christ, Acts 4:10-12,¹⁰ “Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this *name* this man stands here before you in good health.¹¹ He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, *but* WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*.¹² And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

What was the reason for their stumbling? Peter says in v. 8, “**They stumble because they are disobedient to the word.**” The very Word that was given to them as the people of God they refused to believe. They rejected it in whole or in part. And in rejecting the written Word, they rejected the living Word. Here again we see the contrast between the believer and the unbeliever, between those who are born again in obedience to the truth (1:22) and those who remain dead in their sins because of disobedience to the truth.

What is the result of this disobedience? They will receive the “**doom**” to which “**they were also appointed.**” Does Peter suggest that these were actually appointed by God for destruction? Does Peter mean that just as God chose a people for Himself before the foundation of the world He also has chosen who would not be His people? My answer is that this is absolutely what Peter suggests! This verse has been translated in such a way to get God off the hook for man’s damnation. After all, what kind of God would leave man without a chance? Scholars have interpreted Peter to suggest that God has determined that those who disobey the word would stumble. But such an interpretation leaves man’s destiny in man’s hands. The danger here is in looking at things entirely from our perspective and not God’s. The Scriptures set forth both God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. If one chooses not to come to Christ, he alone is responsible. God will not be blamed. Conversely, God remains sovereign over the evil actions of men and yes, even uses evil for His own purposes. The prophet Habakkuk struggled with this and questioned God. God set Him straight by reminding him of His sovereignty and justice.

So what does this all mean? Simply that man is responsible to obey God’s truth. For those who obey, eternal life. For those who disobey, eternal wrath. Have you trusted Christ as Lord and Savior this morning? Are you a part of the people of God?

II. A New Identity (2:9-10)

What has been stated so far is that Christ is the living Chief Cornerstone. Believers are the living stones making up the spiritual house and to whom Christ is precious. Unbelievers stumble and are offended by Christ. They reject the God of the Word and the Word of God.⁴ Peter closes his introduction stressing God’s sovereignty in salvation by showing what those who have truly believed the message of the gospel have become. He uses four different phrases, all taken from Old Testament passages and phrases which speak of Israel as God’s people, to demonstrate the new identity of the Church, the spiritual Israel. Notice that none of these phrases gives any hint of an individual living the Christian life on their own. All reveal the corporate nature of this new identity. And Peter is emphatic in his description, contrasting the true people of God with those who reject Christ, “**But you are...**”

⁴ Ibid.. 43.

1. A chosen race

This is drawn from Isaiah 43:20 where the designation “a chosen people” refers to the people of Israel. In Isaiah there is the promise of a second Exodus of this people from Babylon, a picture that Peter draws upon here in referring to the corporate identity of both Jewish and Gentile believers. The word “**race**” speaks to a common ancestor through whom each member is vitally related. Believers have a common heritage as a result of their new birth into His kingdom. The word “**chosen**,” used for the fourth and last time in the epistle, reminds us that it is by God’s initiative that Christians are made a distinct people who no longer belong to the world. In Jesus Christ the unity of believers is to be treasured, especially in times of persecution. Again, Peter stresses the reality that just as Jesus was chosen by God to be the way of salvation and the cornerstone of the Church, so those who comprise that Church are called by Him according to His good pleasure.

2. A royal priesthood

In v. 5 Peter refers to those who are being built up “**a holy priesthood.**” Every stone in the house, every Christian is a priest because of their relationship to Christ. They are sanctified and set apart to God and separated from the world, sin and evil. Again we see the corporate nature of the people of God. It is a fallacy today among some Southern Baptists to speak of “the priesthood of the believer,” singular. But that is not what Scripture teaches. The priesthood is always plural, referring to a people, singular. Therefore, it is “the priesthood of believers.” This clearly seen in the richness of covenant language in Exodus 19:5-6 where God speaks to His covenant with Israel, ⁵ “Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; ⁶ and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Here we see that the Old Covenant was based on their obedience to the covenant, which they failed to keep. In the New Covenant, Christ has fulfilled the obedience required according to the covenant and it is through His perfect obedience that the believer receives the promises of the covenant.

The adjective “**royal**” adds this dimension of kingdom and king. Simon Kistemaker points out, “In the kingdom of priests, there is a king. In fact, the Messiah is both priest and king, as Zechariah prophesied: ‘He will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne’ (6:13). Whereas Zechariah prophetically portrays the Messiah as the royal priest, Peter reveals that believers are priests in a royal priesthood.”⁵

3. A holy nation

A “**nation**” is marked by a community of people held together by the same laws, customs, and mutual interests. I recognize that is a rather loose definition when we look at our nation today. But that simply shows how far down the slippery slope we have come. In biblical terms, nation was sometimes used in this way to distinguish Gentiles from Jews and Christians. Other times “**nation**” was used of Israel as the people of God united by their covenantal relation to Him, making them distinctly His nation. That is how Peter applies the term to the church, which forms a unique “**nation**” having a common spiritual life from God and committed to His rule.⁶ Peter again uses the word “**holy**” to show how this nation, the church, is separated from the nations of the world and consecrated to God and His service. This suggests that the members of this nation must not, like the Israel of old, succumb to the idolatry and sinfulness of the world.

⁵ Simon J. Kistemaker, *NTC: Epistles of Peter*, 92.

⁶ D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 143-144.

4. A people for God's possession

There are certain eschatological things that we do not have time to get into here, but for the sake of simplicity I would suggest that in calling the church **“a people of God's possession”** at a minimum suggests that the church, the spiritual house, temple, Israel, fulfills the promises made to national Israel. Now, both Jews and Gentiles who come to faith in Christ are part of the true Israel and are the new people of God.

III. A New Purpose (2:5, 9)

1. Offer up spiritual sacrifices

In the Bible there are two different kinds of sacrifices. In the Old Testament, there were sacrifices made for the guilt of sin and then there were sacrifices made to the Lord because sin had been removed. Jesus Christ fulfilled the first of these priestly ministries by His full and complete sacrifice of Himself on the cross. But in response to that sacrifice Jesus had made to bring us the forgiveness of sins, believers in Jesus Christ are called upon to make sacrifices of thankfulness and praise in response to him. Romans 12:1ff. Present your whole bodies as living sacrifices. Michael Bentley grasps the import of Peter's analogy, “‘Coming’ is a term used for approaching the place of worship in the Old Testament. Therefore the members of the church are those who want to draw near to God. They are prepared to leave their own ways and submit to God's way. They are willing to give up their independence and surrender everything to God and His purposes.”⁷

2. Proclaim the excellencies of God

The spiritual sacrifice that we offer to God is *praise*. Derek Thomas asserts, “It's important for us not to individualize what Peter is saying. Peter seems to be describing what we do when we gather *together* as living stones to form the temple of the Lord: in our *worship* we are all like priests carrying the sacrifices of praise and thankfulness into the presence of the majesty on high. We want Him to have everything. We want Him to have all our souls, strength, and energy... to bring to Him as we come together into His presence the praise that is His due. We are a great assembly of priests, bringing all our hearts and energies to Him and saying, ‘Lord, receive our praises because you are worthy of them.’ Think of how the priests in Joshua took the ark of the covenant which was the symbol of God's presence, took it into the River Jordan, and how we may reflect the psalmist when he says that God is enthroned upon the praises of His people. It is almost as though we feel the weight of His glory bowing us down; it is glorious to be in His presence.”⁸

Peter then gives a motivation for the body to worship Him. When we gather together as saints corporately we have one thing in common that should prod us to worship God and Christ together in a symphony of praise—we all have been **“called out of darkness into His marvelous light.”** I will look at this phrase a bit more in detail next Sunday night when I deal with irresistible grace. It speaks to an effectual call that draws one in the darkness of sin, of ignorance, of rebellion to Himself. Peter illustrates this marvelous grace of God by quoting Hosea 1-2. Notice the darkness of the harlot and what God does for her.

⁷ Michael Bentley, *Living for Christ: 1&2 Peter simply explained*, 70-71.

⁸ Derek Thomas,

http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/Derek%27s_SERMONS/1%20Peter/02apeter2.4to10.htm, accessed 11/09/2008.