

The Church as a Spiritual House

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[0 : 00] Verses 4 to 10, and it's on page 1218. Reading from verse 4.

As you come to him, the living stone rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to him, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For in the scripture it says, See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone, and a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.

They stumble because they disobey the message, which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light.

[1 : 40] Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Keith, I'm going to ask if you'd like to come up now and help us through and explain this to us a little bit more. Before you do, I'm going to pray for you and for us. Is that okay?

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you so much for bringing Keith and Cag here this weekend.

We thank you for their encouragement to Ralph and Cherry while they were away.

Thank you for their church family where they could belong and be a part of. We thank you for Keith for his gifts and abilities. And we pray that you would fill him and fill us with your Holy Spirit, that we may hear afresh your word, speaking directly to our lives and together as a church family, that we may understand who we are and what you have called us to be in this world.

So please bless us and may none of us leave this morning without being encouraged, challenged and transformed.

[3 : 02] We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, thank you very much, Johnny.

And thank you too to everyone for your very warm welcome this weekend. We've thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and so thank you to everyone.

Then selecting a passage for today, I was influenced by the fact that we just finished a six-week series on the church back at our home church in which we've been looking at some of the metaphors in scripture used to describe the church.

We looked at the church as a body, the church as branches on a vine, the church as a bride, the church as a family. But I've chosen this one today, the church as a spiritual house.

Now the building metaphor is a particularly relevant one, isn't it? In most cultures, I think it's true in your culture, it's certainly true in ours, that a great many people, when they think of the church, they automatically think of the building that the church occupies.

[4 : 11] Do you remember the old children's chorus? It's a little hard with one hand on the microphone, but do you remember the one that's sort of, there's the church, there's the steeple, you open the doors and there are the people.

You know, that is what a lot of people think, isn't it, of the church. It's a building. But obviously in looking at the church this morning, we're not looking at the church as a physical structure.

We're looking, though, at the church as people. And it's this metaphor here in 1 Peter. You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house.

Not a physical house, but a spiritual house. Now just a little bit about the people that Peter's writing to. He's writing to Christians who are undergoing suffering.

The letter begins with that in chapter 1 verse 6. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

[5 : 12] And the very end of the letter, chapter 5 verse 10. And the God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ after you have suffered a little while.

So if you like, the bookends of 1 Peter are suffering. And you'll see quite a lot of references in between to their suffering. Now these Christians may have thought that because they're suffering, something has perhaps gone wrong.

As we might too. But Peter assures them of the great reality and the great salvation that is theirs in Christ. And the eternal inheritance that nothing can destroy.

Their suffering should not surprise them. Because they follow one who suffered for them. That is, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now I'm going to look at our passage in three parts.

In many ways, verses 4 and 5 lay out the teaching that the remainder of the passage, verses 6 to 10, sort of unpack. Under three headings. A new temple.

[6 : 11] A new identity. And a new purpose. And I appreciate the work of a chap called Angus Maclay in his short commentary on 1 Peter for that sort of structure.

So a new temple. A new identity. And a new purpose. And if you want to put those headings roughly a third down your helpful sheets, that would be good. So firstly, a new temple.

Let me read again the first verses. Verses 4 to 8. As you come to him, that is Christ, the living stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For in Scripture it says, See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and a precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame. Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. Now to those who do not believe, the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. And a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.

[7 : 18] They stumble because they disobey the message which is also what they were destined for. Now whenever you find a large building site, whether it's for residential or commercial purposes, what you usually find at the entrance to that building site are large advertising boards, usually with the name of the builder on the outside.

So in England we might have said it's Costain, Balfour Beatty or Barrett Homes. And I asked Ralph on Friday when we arrived, who are the main builders in Ireland? And he said, well there's Pearson, was it McNamara's?

But unfortunately I think they've both gone bust, have they? Which is rather a shame. So you're not seeing so many new building sites. But that is what happens, isn't it? When a building site is happening, you'll see the builder advertising who's doing the construction.

Well when we look at the church, it's very important we never ever forget who the builder is. The builder is God himself. From our passage we are told, aren't we, the living stones are being built into a spiritual house.

The living stones don't build themselves into the living house. They're being built. Being built by someone else. They're being built by God. And God's first act in the building of this spiritual house is to lay the foundation stone upon which the whole house stands.

[8 : 44] And that foundation stone is Jesus Christ, we're told, who is chosen and is precious. And Peter quotes part of Psalm 118, doesn't he, in verse 6, when he says of Christ, he, see, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and a precious cornerstone.

Now the cornerstone was literally the first stone to be laid. It was the stone upon which the rest of the building rested.

The walls that went out from the stone that way, and the walls that went out that way, and the walls that went up that way, all rested and depended on that cornerstone.

So basically if you had a wonky cornerstone, you'd end up with a very insecure structure rising up from it. The walls wouldn't be in line.

So the cornerstone is absolutely central to the whole building. So Jesus is that chosen and precious cornerstone upon which the spiritual house is built.

[9 : 48] But we read something more of him. He wasn't just chosen, he wasn't just precious, he was also rejected by men. Now a story probably most of you have heard at some point in the Bible is the parable Jesus tells of the tenants.

And in that story we read, don't we, how a man planted a vineyard. He rented it out to some tenants and he went away, didn't he? And as with all landlords though, he expected some rent to be paid. So he sent back from time to time servants to collect the rent from the tenants. But of course the tenants beat up the servants and sent them away empty handed. Finally the owner of the vineyard thought, well I'll send my son, surely they'll respect him.

But when the son was coming, the tenants, the wicked tenants, saw the son coming and said, well if we kill him, then the vineyard will be ours. So that's what they did, wasn't it? Well how did the owner react?

Well Jesus said that the owner would come and he would kill the tenants. He'd give the vineyard to others. Well this was of course a parable, a story. But then Jesus quoted the very same line that Peter quotes here.

[11:00] That the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone or the cornerstone. Then we read that the chief priests and teachers of the law looked for a way to arrest Jesus because they knew he had spoken this parable against them.

See the parable of the tenants speaks of the fact that Jesus Christ would be rejected by men. Just as Peter says in the passage, he would be arrested, he would be beaten, he would be nailed to a Roman cross and left to die.

Man would do this wicked thing. But his death in God's bigger scheme of things was integral, wasn't it, to the building of the spiritual house. His death was God's way of dealing with sin as we've sung already this morning.

And the proof that his death was sufficient to deal with sin was that God raised his son to life again on the third day. Hence Peter describes Jesus here as the living stone.

The one who died but the one who rose again. And it is on this crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus Christ that the building is erected. The spiritual house is built.

[12:15] And who are the living stones that become a part of the spiritual house? Well the identity of the living stones runs right through the passage. Look firstly at verse 4. As you come to him.

Secondly in verse 6 as part of the quotation from Psalm 118. The one who trusts in him. And thirdly in verse 7. Now to you who believe.

That could be now to you who believe in him. See to be a part of the new temple or the spiritual house. To be like living stones depends entirely upon putting your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. See when we put our faith in him we become like living stones because we're born again. Of the Holy Spirit. Peter said this in chapter 1 verse 3. He's given us new birth into a living hope.

And chapter 1 verse 23. For you have been born again. So God's building this new temple. He's building this spiritual house.

[13:19] And it's built upon the living stone. The Lord Jesus Christ. And we become a part of the spiritual house. Once we put our faith in him. The living stone.

Jesus Christ. Now let me apply this in a couple of ways. Firstly to Christians. Who maybe like these first readers of this letter. Are perhaps suffering and being persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ. See when opposition against God and his people is raging. It would be quite easy wouldn't it to think that somehow God's put on hold the building process. But the reality is nothing can stop God building his church.

Jesus said didn't he one day. I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. It's very interesting isn't it. In the parts of the world. Often where the persecution and the opposition to God's people is most intense.

Are the places where the church is growing most. Clearly. And most strongly. So that's the first thing. This should be an encouragement to us.

[14:25] That when we face opposition. Nothing can stop the building of the spiritual house. Secondly. To a person who's not yet a Christian. There's no way of ignoring the living stone.

He's either the stone who is your eternal security. Or he is the stone. That you will stumble and fall over. The passage makes very clear doesn't it.

That some will put their faith in him. And will not be put to shame. But others who do not believe. We're told. Will stumble because they disobey the message.

Which is also what they're destined for. See to not believe. To disobey the message. It's the same thing. Is actually to reject the gospel.

It's to reject the only one. Who is your hope. The living stone. Jesus Christ. Now you may think that there's sort of some middle ground. That you can occupy.

[15:21] A sort of a neutral zone. A place where you can sort of stay on the fence. With regard to Jesus. Jesus. I sometimes say to our church. You know when it comes to Jesus.

You can't be Switzerland. You cannot remain neutral. He is either your eternal security. Or he is the stone. Upon which you will stumble.

And fall. So that's the first thing. He is building. A new temple. A new spiritual house. Secondly. What of our new identity. As living stones. Well foundational. To the life of God's people.

Throughout the Old Testament. You'll probably know this.

Was the tent of meeting. Or the tabernacle. Which later became a more permanent structure. In the temple. And this was the place. Where God presented himself. In a cloud.

[16:18] Known as his Shekinah glory. There over the mercy seat. In the Holy of Holies. But now. God has revealed himself. Personally. Hasn't he? In his son.

The Lord Jesus Christ. And he has made his dwelling among us. He's taken up residence. As well. In us. By his Holy Spirit. That's why we have no need.

For that physical temple. That building. We have become. A new temple. A spiritual house. And very prominent. In the old temple.

Were the priests. Weren't they? They were the men. Who were the ones. Permitted by the law. To conduct. The various practices. There in the temple. Particularly.

The sacrificial practices. So it should come as no surprise. That if there's no need. For the temple. Any longer. There's also no need. For the priesthood.

[17:15] And twice. In this morning's passage. It's interesting. How we are described. The new spiritual house. The living stones. Look with me at verse 5. You also.

This is our new identity. You also. Like living stones. Are being built. Into a spiritual house. To be. A holy priesthood. Also look further down.

At verse 9. But you are a chosen people. A royal priesthood. A holy nation. A people. Belonging to God. So those who've put their faith.

In the Lord Jesus Christ. And have this new identity. They are the new priesthood. Holy. And royal. Now I quite often get asked.

Are you a priest? And up until now. I've always answered. No I'm not a priest. But I think from now on. I'm going to answer. Yes and no. You see. Yes I am a priest.

[18:13] Christ. In that as a follower of Jesus Christ. Along with each other. We are set apart aren't we? We are a priesthood. Holy. And royal.

In that we serve the king of kings. So perhaps look around. At your fellow priesthood. There we are. But no I'm not a priest. And this is often the question.

Behind the question. No I'm not a priest. If by that people think. I'm operating as some sort of mediator. Or intermediary. Between people and God. Someone who has the hotline.

The scriptures make very clear. There is only one such priest. And that is our great high priest. Jesus Christ. Through whom we all have access.

To God. And that's great joy isn't it. To us. But Peter doesn't limit himself. To just describing Christians. As a holy and a royal priesthood. He calls us doesn't he. A chosen people.

[19:11] A holy nation. A people belonging to God. I wonder are these just sort of random descriptions. That Peter is using. Of the spiritual house.

Of Christians. Well incredibly. And it is incredibly. Incredibly. Peter is using here. Words to describe. The church. That God had used.

To describe. His Old Testament people. Hear these words. From the book of Exodus. This is the Lord to Moses. This is what you were to say. To the house of Jacob.

And what you were to tell. The people of Israel. You yourselves. Have seen what I did in Egypt. And how I carried you. On eagle's wings. And brought you to my cell. Now.

If you obey me fully. And keep my covenant. Then out of all nations. You will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth. Is mine.

[20:06] You will be for me. A kingdom of priests. And a holy nation. Could you see the similarity? We're a treasured possession. A kingdom of priests.

A holy nation. But did you also notice. Is the conditional nature. Of the promise. The Lord made to Moses. Now. If you obey me fully. Then out of all nations.

So. It seems conditional. Doesn't it? That if they obey him fully. Then they will be a treasured possession. A chosen people. And so on. But there are no such conditions. Applying to us. Are there? From first Peter. Peter's not saying. That we're a chosen people. A royal priesthood. A holy nation. A people belonging to God. If we obey the law. There's none of that there.

So why the difference? Is God applying different standards. To his people in the Old Testament. And the New. Well the difference is once again. Christ. See Jesus succeeded.

[21 : 04] In fulfilling the law. Where Israel failed. He perfectly kept the law. He perfectly obeyed his father. And he did it for them.

And he did it for us. He was the one who lived the perfect life. That Israel could not. And we can't. So the Old Testament believer. Could not be saved by their own law keeping. And neither can the New Testament believer. They look forward in faith. To the perfect life of Jesus. And we look back in faith. To the same one.

And in verse 10. Peter brings this marvelous truth home. To his readers. By reminding them of what God has done for them. In Christ. These are some of my favorite verses in the whole Bible.

When he says this. Once you were not a people. But now you are. The people of God. Once you'd not received mercy. But now you have.

[22 : 04] Received mercy. And just cast your eyes across the page. To chapter 1 verse 18. He says this. For you know that it was not with perishable things.

Such as silver or gold. That you were redeemed. From the empty way of life handed down to you. From your forefathers. He describes their pre-Christian existence.

As an empty way of life. See an empty life. It smacks of futility. Doesn't it? It smacks of meaninglessness. And then in chapter 4 verse 3.

He says this. For you've spent enough time in the past. Doing what the pagans choose to do. Living in debauchery. Lust. Drunkenness. Orgies. Carousing.

And detestable idolatry. And then the next verse. This old life. Is described as a flood of dissipation. Now dissipation.

[22 : 58] Again it describes. A futile and an aimless. Wasting away of something. Now if you're a follower of Christ. As I'm sure many of you are.

Then there was a time. When you were not. It's quite a pointed question. By Johnny this morning. To my wife. Have you always been a Christian? The answer was no.

There was a time. When she didn't know Christ. There was a time. When she and I. And you too. Did not know him. And had not received his mercy. A time when we lived.

Under the condemnation. Of our sin. Now for some of us. Our pre-Christian lives. Were morally fairly respectable. But for others of us.

And I'd certainly include myself. My pre-Christian life. Was more akin. To the readers of Peter's first letter. I did spend enough time.

[23 : 54] Quite enough time in the past. Doing all sorts of stupid things. And ungodly things. But the scale of our immorality. Is not the issue. What we're to celebrate.

Is the fact that God chose. To rescue us. From that meaninglessness. From that wasted life. So the second point.

First point is. Is that we are a new temple. We are a spiritual house. The second is our new identity. And we can be confident. Because of what God has done for us in Christ.

I have been chosen by him. And I belong to him. There was a time when I wasn't. But now I am. And no one and nothing can rob me.

Of that. This is my new identity. Again. Let me just apply this. In a fairly simple way. About four years ago.

[24 : 52] I was looking through my emails. I have looked through them since. You'll be relieved to know. And I received one from our bank. We still had a bank in the United States. Where we used to live.

And I've maintained an account there. And the email from the bank. Looks totally legitimate. And so I answered it. I provided them with all the information. They were asking for.

Anyway. About a week later. I happened to be out in the States. At our old branch. Checking some things. And the man behind the counter. He said.

He had asked me. Where I've come from. I said. Well I've just arrived this morning. And so on and so forth. And then he looked at the screen. And he looked rather perplexed. He said. Well. There's two maximum withdrawals.

From an ATM machine. In West Virginia last week. Was that you? And I said. No it wasn't. I've never been to West Virginia. And he said. Oh. I guessed as much.

[25 : 50] You see. That email. Was complete bogus email. It was people wanting all my information. Which I freely provided for them. And I will never again. It was a scam.

Someone had stolen what? My identity. And they profited from it. But you know what. There's someone else. Who is in the identity theft business.

He's not interested in your bank accounts. That person is Satan. Few things Satan wants more. Than to rob us of believing. That in Christ.

We have a new identity. He wants us. You see. To feel condemned. He wants us. To wallow. In self pity. He wants us.

To doubt. God's goodness. And God's grace. He wants us. To believe. He rather. Does not want us. To believe. That in Christ. I and you. Are a new creation.

[26 : 48] The old has gone. And the new has come. And sometimes. He does a pretty good job. Doesn't he? At robbing us. Of that security.

Of robbing us. Of that new identity. So we're a new temple. We are being built. Into a spiritual house. And we have a new identity.

In Christ. Lastly. We have a new purpose. For our lives. And this is really. Verses 9 and 10. Think back to the priests.

There in the temple. One of their major roles. Wasn't it? It was the offering. Of sacrifices. And if you want. To read about. What the Old Testament. Priests did.

Then maybe this afternoon. Curl up. With a cup of coffee. Or tea. And read. The book of Leviticus. And if you get. To the end of it. And you wonder. What on earth. Was all that about?

[27 : 42] Then turn to the New Testament. And read the book of Hebrews. Because that will make. Sense. Of all that you've read. Because here you'll read. That the old. Sacrificial system. Detailed for you.

In Leviticus. Was based upon. The sacrifice of animals. And it could never truly. Deal with the hearts. Of the worshippers. It was.

God's plan. Initially. But it was a plan. That pointed forward. To the ultimate sacrifice. Who would come. Who would be able to deal. With the hearts.

And consciences. Of people. That of course. Is Jesus Christ. And how he laid down. His life. And shed his blood. For us. So it shouldn't be.

It shouldn't surprise us. Should it. If. There is no need. For the old temple anymore. And that we're being built into the. New temple. The spiritual house. There's no need. For the old priesthood anymore.

[28 : 37] Because we have become. This. This holy and royal priesthood. There is no need. For the old sacrifices anymore. But there is a sacrifice. That it does take place.

Verse five. You also. Like living stones. Are being built. Into a spiritual house. To be a holy priesthood. What's our sacrifice? Offering spiritual sacrifices.

Acceptable to God. Through Jesus Christ. So what are. Spiritual sacrifices. Acceptable to God. Through Jesus Christ. What do they look like? Well thankfully.

We haven't got a guess about it. Or brainstorm the subject. Verse nine tells us. You are a chosen people. A royal priesthood. A holy nation. A people belonging to God.

And here it is. That you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness. Into his marvellous lights. So the sacrifice.

[29 : 32] That all of God's people offer to him now. Is not killing animals. And sprinkling things with blood. But it is the sacrifice of praise. It is doing in part what we have been doing here together.

Singing God's glory. Praising his name. Now this isn't just a New Testament concept. Isaiah says this in chapter 43. The people I form for myself.

That they may proclaim my praise. The writer to the Hebrews says. Through Jesus. Through Jesus. Therefore let us continually. Offer to God a sacrifice of praise.

The fruit of lips that confess. His name. So God's people are delighting in him. Because of what he has done for us.

In Christ. Calling us out of the darkness of our old lives. Where it was futile and meaningless. Bringing us into the light of his son.

[30 : 30] Filling us with his spirit. And giving us a new purpose for our very existence here on earth. That we would declare God's praises. What does it look like to declare God's praises?

Well we declare God's praises alone. And we declare God's praises together. We can declare God's praises as God's people. And in some instances. Non-Christians within earshot. Can be impacted. By God's people declaring God's praises. And worshipping. We can declare God's praises. When we share the good news of Jesus Christ. With someone else. We can declare God's praises in prayer to God.

In our speech to one another. And in the songs of worship that we sing. And we can declare God's praises. By the very manner in which. We live our lives. As Paul tells the Romans.

Therefore brothers in view of God's mercy. To offer your bodies as living sacrifices. Holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. So the very offering up of our lives to God.

[31 : 33] Is a declaration of praise to him. Now these are all ways that we can declare God's praises. But I wonder. I'll end with this.

How? How can we be a people that want to declare God's praises? How can we be a people that don't want to conform to the world around us?

How can we be a people from whom the good news of Jesus Christ spills out? How can we be a people that delights in Christ?

That it is visible and evident to others. Would you like to be a people like that? I know I'd like to be a person like that. I know I might. The church at home would like to be like that.

Well look at the very first five words of this morning's passage. Because I think there's our clue. If you have your own Bible in front of you. Feel free to underline those first five words.

[32 : 39] As you come to him. As you come to him. See these first five words are not just the way into the Christian life.

But they're the way on in the Christian life. We don't simply come to Jesus as saviour and lord in repentance and faith. Once and that's it. But the whole Christian life is continually a process of coming to him.

And the reason why many of us live sort of substandard Christian lives. We lay ourselves continually open to the attacks of the enemy.

And his arrows do hit home. Is that we don't come to him regularly. We need to learn to savour him. We need to learn to delight in him. We need to learn to treasure him more than anything else. And when we allow our minds and our hearts to be renewed by the truth of who he is.

[33 : 42] What he has done. And the reality of who I am in him. Then it is far harder for the enemy's arrows to hit home. They will just bounce off.

Now when I preached on this passage a few weeks back. I happened to say to people the first thing in the morning I do is make coffee. Probably like some of you. I sit down.

I try to have a bit of a quiet time. And I joked. I said what I need is a mug that says. As you come to him. And do you know about ten days ago I found in our porch at home.

Someone had left a little box. And in it was a white mug. With five words on it. As you come to him. I was going to bring it as a prop. But we got on the plane and I said to Cag.

Blah I've forgotten my prop. But someone had got a little mug printed. As you come to him.

Because that's something we need to do daily isn't it. Not as an insurance policy.

[34 : 41] Not as a sort of superstitious thing. But as an absolute necessity. As we come to him. The living stone. Then we will be built as living stones.

So we're a new temple. We're a spiritual house. No need for the old temple. It's us. We're being built into it. We're God's people all around the world.

No need for the old priesthood. We are the priesthood. We're royal. We're holy. We've been set apart by God. No need for the old sacrifices. New sacrifices.

A sacrifice of praise. Delighting. In God. Let's pray. Dear Lord God.

We thank you for your truth. We thank you for your word. We thank you Lord for. The fact that Lord you have called us out of darkness. Into your most marvellous light.

[35 : 41] Thank you there was a time when we did not know your mercy. But now we do. Thank you Lord that you've chosen us. From before the beginning of time.

Thank you Lord that you've given us a new reason for living as well. That we could delight in you. We could marvel at you. We could treasure you.

And that Lord we could declare your praises. Help us Lord to be a people that delight in you. In speech. In thought.

In word. By our very lives and how we live them Lord. Christ would shine through us. And as and when Lord you give us those opportunities to give reason for the hope that we have.

May we declare with great grace. And yet too with great courage. That it is Jesus Christ. Who is the answer. God bless you.

[36 : 40] Our name is Jesus Christ. Let us Center for courage. The musicians are going to come up. Shall I hand back to you Johnny? All right. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Let us pull. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.