

PM 1 Peter 2:4-5

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[0 : 00] To look at is a picture of the church. The church as the true spiritual temple.! We'll be contrasting it with what the temple was like in the old days chapter 6 from the beginning.

In the 480th year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the Lord.

The house that King Solomon built for the Lord was 60 cubits long, 20 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high. The vestibule in front of the nave of the house was 20 cubits long, equal to the width of the house, and 10 cubits deep in front of the house.

And he made for the house windows with recessed frames. He also built a structure against the wall of the house, running around the walls of the house, both the nave and the inner sanctuary.

And he made side chambers all around. The lowest story was 5 cubits broad, the middle one was 6 cubits broad, and the third was 7 cubits broad.

[1 : 30] For round the outside of the house he made offsets on the wall, in order that the supporting beam should not be inserted into the walls of the house. When the house was built, it was with stone prepared at the quarry, so that neither hammer nor axe, nor any tool of iron, was heard in the house while it was being built.

The entrance for the lowest story was on the south side of the house, and one went up by stairs to the middle story, and from the middle story to the third. So he built the house and finished it, and he made the ceiling of the house of beams and planks of cedar.

He built the structure against the whole house, 5 cubits high, and it was joined to the house with timbers of cedar. Now the word of the Lord came to Solomon, concerning this house you are building.

If you will walk in my statutes, and obey my rules, and keep all my commandments, and walk in them, then I will establish my word with you, which I spoke to David your father, and I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel.

Just to the air, may God bless to us this reading. Now we're going to sing Psalm 122, and we're going to read from verse 4 to verse 12. And this is entitled, A Living Stone and a Holy People.

[2 : 56] 1 Peter chapter 2 from verse 4. 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, 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 honour 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 offence.

They stumble, because they disobeyed 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 marvellous 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. Beloved, I urge you, as sojourners and exiles, to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

[4 : 40] Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds, and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Just there, may God bless to us this reading. Now, let's again join together in prayer. Verses 4 and 5. 1 Peter chapter 2, verses 4 and 5.

2 Peter 2, 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.

Now, if you asked what the church was, you could know the learned books, and study the subject at that level, and come up with some sort of definition that would clearly lay out what the church is. And that would no doubt be of benefit. But there's another way in which that sort of question can be answered. answered. And it's by way of pictures. The church is like this.

[6 : 03] The church is like that. And you won't probably remember. But that's what we did the last time we were here. Namely, we thought about the church as a body, which is quite a common picture in the New Testament.

And indeed, it's used in slightly different ways in different passages. But we saw the diversity of the church. Every part of our body is different. It's different in function.

It's different in form. So, the members of the church are different. Different backgrounds, different experiences of life, different abilities, different experiences of God's grace.

And yet, although there's that diversity, there is also unity. The properly organized body, the normal body in good health, the different parts of the body function together in complete harmony.

there's an organization there that brings them together and makes them one. So that you don't look at a person and say, oh, that's a collection of limbs. You look at a person and say, that's a person.

[7 : 07] You see the unity. And that's the way it should be with the church. Diverse we may be, different backgrounds we may have, different gifts may have been given to us, but because we're united through the operation of the Holy Spirit, there's a unity about us.

That's the church. The church is a body. That's one picture. The picture that we're taking up this evening is another one that is fairly commonly used in the New Testament, the New Old Testament as well.

And it's used also in different ways and different places. And we are going to confine our attention to what we've got in the passage in front of us here.

The church is a house. The church is not just any house. The church is a spiritual house. The church is God's house. The church is a spiritual temple.

That's the sort of idea that we've got here. And all that we want to do is explore the three ideas in connection with that and that will give us some idea of how we should be thinking ourselves as a church of Christ.

[8 : 12] And it leaves us open to the challenge, is this indeed a picture of the way that we see ourselves? And is this something that we are implementing in the way that we do church today?

As they say. So let's look at this in that sort of a way. There are three prominent ideas that I want to deal with briefly. Here we've got a firm foundation, we've got gradual growth, and we've got spiritual service.

So let's look at these one by one. Firm foundation. As you come to him, the living stone, rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to him.

The Christian life is described here as a coming to Christ. It's like the stones of a building. Here is Christ, a living stone.

And we come to him. And the idea, of course, is that we're building on top of him. As this passage says later on, he's the cornerstone.

[9 : 20] He's a solid stone that gives orientation to the whole building. From the cornerstone, the foundations are laid.

On this, layer upon layer of building goes on. And we've to come as living stones and we've come to Christ, the living stone. And we've to rest upon him.

And that's the idea that we've got here. And that, you see, is a basic understanding of what the Christian life involves. We come to him as to him.

We find ourselves as needy sinners. We have a sense of guilt, a sense of frustration, a sense of despair, a sense of fear, perhaps. And we come to Christ and we lay ourselves upon him and we build our hope upon what he has been doing for us.

And in that way, we come to experience forgiveness. We come to him day by day with whatever situation confronts us that causes us any concern or anything in need like that.

[10 : 24] We are anxious over a situation. We come to him. We lay ourselves upon his mercy. We rest upon him and draw from him whatever we need. We come to him for guidance when we don't

know which is the way forward.

We come to him with words, asking for words to speak when we're seeking to give witness to others. We come to him and lay ourselves upon him as one stone is laid upon a foundation stone, a firm foundation.

That's the way that we have to think about it. We come to him when we're happy and we come to him with gratitude. This coming to Christ as one stone is laid upon another, that's basic to Christian experience.

That's what Jesus is, the one on whom we can rest, the cornerstone on whom we can build. It's a foundation.

These ideas are absolutely foundational. It's a firm foundation. Now, what makes me say that? Well, there's two ways of looking at this stone.

[11 : 28] He's rejected by men but in the sight of God he's chosen and precious. He's rejected by men. Now, later on in this chapter it takes an illustration from the Old Testament about this.

Here's a builder's yard or perhaps a quarry where they've been hewing out stones and shaping them making ready for building. And they're looking around for a stone that will serve as a cornerstone.

And they come up on this one and they say, no, that doesn't fit. That's not what we want. And they pass it by. But the master builder comes along and he looks around and he says, that's the one that I want.

That's the chosen cornerstone. And that's the experience of Christ. People have rejected him as a cornerstone. But the master builder has chosen him.

That's who we've got here. And you see, that was true in Jesus' own life. He came to his own and his own did not receive him. He was despised and rejected by men.

[12 : 35] He was a cornerstone that they were invited to build on. But they would have none of it. And that stone was rejected by them to such an extent that of course he said, away with him, crucify him.

Rejected by men. That's written into the Old Testament. It's written into the experience of Christ in his earthly ministry. It's written into experience today.

This is what Paul said on a more long-term basis. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom but we preach Christ crucified a stumbling block to Jews and foolish to Gentiles but to those whom God has called both Jews and Greeks Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Not a cornerstone but a stumbling block. That is what Jesus is to many people today. So there's one way of looking at this cornerstone. Not worth it.

You can't rest your hope upon a person that died. There's no message that would give us confidence in somebody that was so weak as to let themselves be crucified.

[13 : 48] That's not what happens to a man of God. That's nonsense. We look for something that commends itself to human experience. We look for something outstanding and startling and miraculous.

Jews and Greeks thought different things but they found fault with this cornerstone and that's what's happening still today.

People find fault with the cornerstone and refuse to lay themselves upon Christ and to rest upon him building their whole experience and grace upon him. The cornerstone is rejected.

But it's only rejected by men. There's another perspective to this but in the sight of God chosen and precious as the master builder chose the stone that had been rejected.

So this one that is presented to us here as the one upon whom we may rest as a foundation for our lives this one has been chosen by God. Before the world began he was elect he was chosen by God to fulfil his plan of salvation.

[14 : 57] He was appointed in order that he might redeem his people from their sins. He was the original chosen one in whom the elect are chosen. Chosen in him because he was chosen first.

He's the chosen one that was appointed to undertake the task of redemption. He was chosen to represent his people to make himself responsible for them. He was selected by God the Father for that particular role.

And what happened? he fulfilled that role exactly. He came into this world to accomplish that purpose. To do your will I take delight he said.

Indeed he fulfilled the purpose for which he had been sent as the representative of his people. Acting on their behalf he went about doing good and fulfilling the demands of God's law. Acting in their name he gave himself up on the cross taking the guilt of their sin upon him and feeling the weight of God's judgment directed towards them. He took their place just as had been appointed.

[16:03] He was chosen for that task and he fulfilled that task and he did it so fully that he received the commendation of his father. Even in his earthly life he received commendation from the father.

At his baptism when he was setting himself apart to take the place of sinners which is what he had just done when he was being baptized. The voice from heaven commends him.

You are my son. With you I am well pleased. So this chosen one when he starts out to accomplish this task and practice in this world then the voice from heaven says I'm well pleased with what you're doing.

You're doing the task that I asked you to do and I'm delighted to see you're doing it. And later on there was other occasions of a similar nature where heaven spoke and commended Jesus as being doing what was asked of him and the father was delighted with what he was doing.

And Jesus himself could say the reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again. Why does the father love the son? Well I'm sure we could supply other reasons as well.

[17:23] But Jesus himself said this is why he loves me. Because he gave me this task and I'm doing this task. Because I was asked to represent my people and I'm doing just that.

I'm laying down my life for them. And that's why he's so pleased with me that he pours out his affection on me. He loves me because I'm doing the task that was given him to do.

And that's why it says he's chosen and he's precious. He's precious in the sight of the father because he's been appointed to a task and he's done that task exactly with the approbation of heaven.

And the ultimate proof of this is that he was raised from the dead. His work was acceptable and he was raised from the dead and taken to the place of honour at God's right hand because he had become obedient even to death of the cross at the father's command.

chosen and precious. That's what the stone is in the father's sight. And that's what I say this is a firm foundation.

[18:28] Okay men may say rubbish we're not going to believe that nonsense we want something wiser than that we want something more miraculous than that. It's not for us today.

But God says this is the one that I've chosen. This is the one that's done the task perfectly. You can trust in him absolutely because I found him trustworthy and I can commend him and he's precious to me because he accomplished the task for which he was chosen.

So here you see is an encouragement for us to say this is a firm foundation. The father himself chose him for this task and approved of the way in which he accomplished it.

You can count on him. He's absolutely trustworthy. He won't let you down because he never let the father down. And this is the reason why we can say day by day this is what I'm going to do.

I'm going to come to Christ and lay myself upon him. I'm going to build my life on him. The cornerstone the living cornerstone. A firm foundation. That is the first point that we've got when we're thinking of the church as a building.

[19:39] Let's make sure that this is us from day to day. Coming to him in all our problems and all our thanksgivings as well. Laying ourselves upon him, looking to him, resting upon him as the sure foundation of our lives.

The second thing that we've got here is gradual growth. As you come to him, a living stone, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house.

Now I'm not going to say much about this but just to point out this. you are being built up as a spiritual house. Now we could think of the church as a completed building and if we think about it in those terms then that's probably the way that we think about it.

And we could imagine a wonderful building, beautiful, everything in its place, a polished piece of workmanship. And that's fine because that's the goal.

But it's not where we are at the moment. What we've got here is gradual growth. We are being built up. It's not the work finished that we're looking at, it's the work under construction that we're looking at.

[20 : 58] And that's the situation of believers today. We're not there but we're getting there. We haven't arrived. The blueprint has been sketched out.

We're constructing in accordance with that. But the work is not done yet. We are being built up. And that should be a characteristic of God's people.

It's not that they've arrived, nor is it that they're stagnant. It's that they're moving from one stage to a higher stage, to a better stage, day by day.

This is the general tenor of their Christian experience, growth. Gradual growth. I suggest that given this illustration there are two ways that we can look at that growth.

One way is to look at it in terms of who we are ourselves. And we are stones. And we have to have the rough corners knocked off. And we have to have everything spoofed and polished.

[21 : 57] And we have to be shaped and moulded and chiseled out until we reach the pattern that God looks for us to have. So there should be gradual growth in our understanding of God's word.

There should be gradual growth in our Christian experience. There should be gradual growth in holiness of life at a personal level. But it's not a bundle of stones that we're going to look for at the end of the day.

We're going to look for these stones all fitted together as one construction. And so it's not just am I growing in the sense of becoming more mature, more useful, more godly.

It's not just am I growing, it's am I growing along with others. Am I taking my place in the overall structure of the building more and more?

He's moulding us, yes, in order that we might fit into that particular place that he has in mind for us when the great building is completed. That's the idea that we've got here.

[23 : 04] And I think you see that's something we should reflect on. It's not just me getting on better, but me getting on better with others, me fitting into the church better, me putting my weight more, me praying more for others, me feeling at home with others, contributing what I can and taking from what I need.

It's that sort of aspect of things that we've got to have as well. So it's development and personal experience, development as a community because this is a picture of the church.

We are being built up. It's gradually growing. So this is first of all comforting. A building under construction probably looks pretty ugly.

And sometimes the church looks pretty ugly. And it's ugly because it's just in process of development, that's fine. and we shouldn't be ashamed of that. Rome wasn't built in one day, if we could use that illustration here, and neither is the church built in one day.

Half buildings don't usually look very great. And we shouldn't be too dismayed if we have to reflect on what hasn't yet been done, because that's the nature of gradual growth.

[24 : 22] So in one way this can be a comfort for us. the church surely still get blemishes as we have, and we shouldn't despair just because we see the blemishes, because we've always this hope for the future, we're building, we're building gradual growth.

And so it can be comforting to think in this, but of course it is especially challenging to think about this. Is this indeed the way that we look at life? Have I reached a point, am I stuck there?

Am I stuck there intentionally with no intention of going beyond this point? Or am I looking for the future that God will shape me and mold me for something better? We'll take away this sin and that deficiency and he'll be at work to build me up to something better.

Are we willing for that to happen? Are we willing that the mason should take his hammer and chisel and go to work on us a bit to shape us for what he wants us to be in the final construction of the building?

Gradual growth should be a consideration when we think about what the church is, what a congregation is gradually growing. The third thing here is spiritual service.

[25 : 35] Now up to this point we've got something quite natural that could be applied to any building, really any building of any worth at least. You lay the foundation, you build on it and you smooth out everything and make it nice.

But it's not just any house that's in mind here. He does say like living stones are being built as a spiritual house. But then he goes on to say to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

And it's quite obvious that what he's speaking about is not any house, but it's the temple that he's speaking about. It's the house of God we're talking about here. And what he's got in mind is that

here we are and we have to be a spiritual temple in the way that the building that Solomon constructed and was reconstructed by Herod, that we have got to be the spiritual equivalent of that. And that's quite a big idea and I could develop it a lot, but I'll just develop it a wee bit. To my mind we should recognize how materialistic the Old Testament worship was.

What was the beauty of the temple? The beautiful stones, so that the Galilean fishermen could look at this building and see what beautiful stones we've got here. It was the outward splendor of the building that caught people's attention.

[27 : 09] And what went on in that building was something that was pretty materialistically minded as well. not only was the building itself pleasing to the eye, but there were other things that were pleasing to the eye as well.

Think about the priests for example. What caught the eye? Their beautiful garments. Garments that were made for splendor and glory as the Old Testament tells us.

But it was an outward splendor. You didn't look at the priests and say, oh what holy people they are. You said, oh look what splendid clothes they're wearing. And even the qualities of a priest were not spiritual but material.

You had to be a member of a certain clan before you could be a priest. You had to have no bodily defect before you could be a priest. No man who has any defect may come near, says the Old Testament.

No man who is blind or lame, disfigured or reformed, and so on and so on and so on. A whole list of deficiencies, physical deficiencies, that debarred from the priesthood.

[28 : 17] It was all physically based. And of course what they offered up to God was physical sacrifices, animals, the blood of animals sprinkled on the altar and things of that nature.

And that's the way it was throughout the system. It appealed to the sense of sight. It appealed to the sense of smell as well.

There was a distinctive odour in the temple. There was the blood that was flowing and offered on the altar, which must have made some sort of impression in the atmosphere.

And there was the incense combined with that that was distinctive. You couldn't use this sort of incense for any other purpose. So in the temple there was a smell that you didn't get anywhere else.

It appealed to the sense of smell. And it appealed to the sense of hearing. The choirs that there were of the priests and the musical instruments they used.

[29 : 16] Outward things that impressed with the sounds that they made. And the whole thing is based upon physical things. And that's the background of this, as it seems to me.

This was the temple that Peter knew, that he was familiar with, that people he was writing to were familiar with. And he's saying, look, you know what the temple's like. Well, we have to have a spiritual version of that.

Not one that's based upon outward beauty and splendour. Not one that's based upon physical qualifications. Not one that's based upon a nice smell or anything of that nature or a nice noise. Nothing like that. We want the spiritual equivalent for that. And that's the sort of thing that we've got to have in mind here. We are a spiritual temple.

You don't look at the priests any longer. Well, we'll come to that in a minute. Everything in the Old Testament is a sort of parable. That's what the writer of Hebrews indeed describes it as.

[30 : 15] He speaks about the fact that these things are a parable of what is to be. And that's the way we're to see things. The Old Testament is a sort of illustration, no more than that.

An illustration in the material realm that applies now in the spiritual realm. And that's the big thing that we are. We are a temple of God in a spiritual sense.

Now, what does that mean? Well, I could say an awful lot about that. But there's two things that are mentioned here as specific examples of that. What have we to do? We have to be something and we have to do something.

We have to be a holy priesthood. Now, here you see the difference between the Old and the New. The Old Testament, the priesthood was based upon physical qualifications, the right tribe, no bodily defect.

But now we're a spiritual priesthood. And who's the priesthood? It's not limited to a few folks. It's not limited to a particular branch of a particular family or anything of that nature. It's not anything to do with outward qualifications at all.

[31 : 21] The people of the church are a holy priesthood. We have a right of access to God. That means we don't need to go to any human priest to find access to God. We have direct access to him through our Lord Jesus, the great high priest.

And in that sense, we are priests. And that's the great teaching of the New Testament that we need to catch hold of always. That we have free access to God through Jesus Christ because we are a priesthood ourselves.

We don't look to a separate priesthood because we believe in the priesthood of all believers. But what a holy priesthood. Not a priesthood that is characterized by bodily qualifications so that you couldn't have worn on your forehead if you were wanting to be a priest today.

Nothing of that nature. It's spiritual qualifications because we are a holy priesthood in the spiritual sense. And what is it that we have to wear that attracts people to us?

Not outward garments for glory and beauty but the beauty of holiness. That's what we have to display. And that's what should attract people to us as they were attracted to the Old Testament priesthoods by the splendor of what they wore.

[32 : 35] We have to wear the garment of holiness so that they may see our good deeds and give glory to our Father in heaven. So there's one example of what it means to be part of the spiritual house.

It means that we exercise priesthood, access to God, and we do so displaying the holiness that is fitting in our lives. And that you see is again very encouraging.

Yes we can go to God, we can go to him freely. Ask and it will be given to you he says. That's freedom of access given to all believers. But we must remember too we have the beauty of the outward life.

The beauty of our lives should commend our witness to others and that's something else. not so comforting but very challenging indeed.

Are we by the style of our living showing a holiness of life that makes people say wow look at that person hadn't they different from us hadn't they changed. A big demand that a big challenge that is.

[33 : 39] And then there's the other example. We are to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. spiritual sacrifices we have to offer up.

They offered up animals, they offered up incense and other things as well. Outward material things. That's past now because Christ has fulfilled these demands of the law and he is the one sacrifice that has been made forever.

But nonetheless although that is true and we must always hold to it. Nonetheless this passage does speak to us of an ongoing sort of sacrifice that we have to offer.

But it's nothing like the Old Testament sacrifice. It's spiritual sacrifices we have to offer. And that's something that we should reflect on. God delights in a contrite heart.

I didn't have that written down so I can't quote it exactly any longer. But there's a passage in Psalm 51 I think it's something about a contrite heart being an acceptable sacrifice to God.

[34 : 44] God. But also we've got this one from the writer to the Hebrews. We have to, he speaks of us offering up a sacrifice of praise to God.

So there is something that we offer to God. A sacrifice of praise. It's not something visible and tangible. It's a spiritual thing. A heart that is grateful to God.

An attitude to life that is full of thanksgiving. We offer that to God. We offer up our praises to God from the heart. That's what's acceptable to God. And if we could go into other things as well where as we quoted this morning Paul says, present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God which is your reasonable service according to the old translation which is a spiritual act of worship according to some translations.

But you see it's working along the same lines as this. We offer up our bodies not animals. We offer our capacities, our faculties. We offer our minds.

We offer our money. We offer our abilities. We offer our talents. We offer ourselves to God as a sacrifice. But a living sacrifice. In other words we give ourselves to him in obedience and devotion giving it all over to him making our lives his.

[36 : 06] that's the sort of thing that we have to offer to God. And that's what makes us part of the spiritual temple. If we act as priests and show the beauty of priests and if we offer up spiritual gifts of thanksgiving and praise and obedience to God.

That's our role as priests in the holy spiritual temple that is the church. Well, what does that teach us?

Well, it teaches us, if I may say so in general, the way that you can deal with the Old Testament.

Especially the rites and ceremonies of the Old Testament but not exclusive to these.

There's so much outward and material things in the Old Testament that just don't find a place in the new. Because they were just a picture of spiritual realities.

And this is what we're doing here. We're taking the building and we're seeing it's the church. We're taking the beautiful garments and seeing it's holiness of life.

[37 : 13] We're taking incense and seeing it's prayer. We're taking the outward and the physical and we're giving them spiritual equivalents. And we're doing so on the basis of the scriptures themselves.

That's what we did here. And that's a good principle of interpretation to have when dealing in general with Old Testament passages that we might find difficult. That was an age where spiritual realities were depicted in outward and physical things.

Now the reality is here. And the physical and outward and carnal things have passed away. And the spiritual realities are with us. A general principle of interpreting Old Testament things.

this is a challenge to us. Is this indeed us? We would like to think that we belong to the church. We profess to be members of the church most of this year.

But do we conform to this pattern? Are we coming to Christ day by day and resting ourselves upon him? Building our experience in him? Are we finding access to him as priests?

[38 : 21] Are we cultivating holiness of life? Are we growing in our experience of grace? Are we growing in relationship to others within the church? The whole picture is a very challenging one.

And we should sit down and think about this and say, how can I better fulfil my role? Because I see myself as part of the church. How can I fulfil this picture in my own life?

A very challenging thing for us all to think about. But then it is a comfort to us. And we come back to this church. The church has been built and nothing can prevail against it.

The foundation has been laid and it will be completed. The one that began a good work in us will go on to complete it. We are growing, growing, growing until the day comes when the work will be done.

And that's a picture that we ought to have in our minds. We may say, well say, I'm failing at the moment, but one day. I could do better, but one day I'll arrive.

[39 : 25] And that's the hope that this picture gives to us. I hope that we'll all take seriously what it means to be part of the church, part of a spiritual temple.

May God bless to us his word. Now we're going to sing Psalm 15 in conclusion. That's on page 16. Lord, who may stay within your tent, your sacred dwelling place.