

The Cornerstone and Community

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[0 : 00] If you'd open your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 2, verses 4 through 10 is what we're going to look at this morning.

Here's the word of the Lord. As you come to him, 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.

[1 : 25] 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.

Father, we thank you for your word. We pray that you would use it in our hearts to help us to think the thoughts after you, to know you, to love you, to honor you, to understand life from your perspective, to shift our own thinking and affections to the things that you love.

And Father, I pray that in all of this you would be honored and glorified. In Christ's name. Amen.

Now, Peter is continually dealing with the issue of suffering and persecution for these Christians. Remember, there's about five or so different cities or different places that are mentioned here in this passage. And he's writing to all of these Christians there, and they're about to undergo persecution. They're about to go through suffering. And so all that he's doing in these chapters is preparing them for such a time, to prepare them for suffering that is to come, to prepare them for the persecution that is to come.

[2 : 44] And sometimes he gives commands, things that they need to do, and sometimes he just describes who they are. And this section ends kind of a section in this letter where he's been describing salvation and all the things that go with salvation.

And in these final six verses or so, he's again just describing sort of who they are. He's not listing out necessarily commands, although because of who we are, it has implications.

And so we'll see those. But I want to couch it this way. If you remember the story from the Old Testament, Elisha is the prophet of God, and he has a servant with him. And there's been a king who's been angry with Elisha, sending out troops to try to capture Elisha.

And every time, they end up being destroyed. So he brings out his whole army, right? And Elisha's servant is so afraid. He's so afraid because as he looks, he sees all of these people around him, these soldiers and their swords and all their weaponry of war.

And he is afraid of what's going to happen. And Elisha prays to the Lord and says, open his eyes so that he can see we're not alone.

[3 : 59] And when his eyes open, he sees the hills filled with the host of the heavenly army surrounding this other army. And that scene is a great scene for us because what we have in front of us, as we look at the life that we're living in this world, we're promised a life of persecution.

We're promised a life of suffering. The whole tenor of the Christian religion is that we're going to suffer as our Lord and Master has suffered.

And even though it may seem to many people that perhaps the suffering is not coming to us nearly as soon as we might have thought at one time, never grow complacent because we are one generation.

We are one law being passed and being people who will be persecuted for our faith because we do not. We do not yield to the state the way that many people would have us yield to the state.

We yield to the state because of what God has said. And so persecution, suffering, is something that is definitely a part of our life. And what he does in this passage is he's been dealing with this idea of loving one another, building this Christian community, and he comes in these verses here to describe what real, genuine, Christian community is all about.

[5 : 31] And he lays out for us, I think, three big truths, and I want us to dive into those three truths so that we can understand what does it mean to really be a church? What does it mean to really be a Christian community?

Because what we need in our times of suffering, in times of persecution, is to not be alone in that, but to have the Christian community with us.

So we're going to look at the foundation, the identity, and the purpose of this Christian community. First of all, the foundation of the Christian community is the cornerstone, Jesus Christ himself.

You see in verse 4, he says, As you come to him, a living stone, rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious, he is letting us know up front that Jesus is the one who is this living stone, and that's a part of it.

He's this living, chosen, precious stone. And you think about that, a living stone, what a, that's a contradiction, right? At least last time I went to the side of the river, none of the rocks were living, right?

[6 : 41] They're just not living. They don't get up and walk around or anything like that. So we know that he's being symbolic here. We know he's using that image to help us understand something, and that is this, that there's something about a foundation and something about life.

That when we come to Christ, that's the only place that we can have life. He's the only one where there is life to be found. And it says that he's a chosen, he's a chosen stone, much like Adam was chosen and Israel was chosen.

God, as he advances his program and his plan with his people, always chooses a person who's going to be the head of that race, such as Adam. Adam was the head of the human race.

He was our representative. And we were born in Adam. Therefore, what Adam did in sin is inherited to us. We have that. But also, if we are in Christ, then Christ is our head.

He's our chosen stone. And it says that he's precious. Now, don't think of that as, oh, it's so precious. No, it's the word honor, right? It's the word honor.

[7 : 48] It's the same word that we see down in verse 7 where it talks about the honor is to you. It's this idea that the father loved and cared for and honored and kept his son as a valued treasure to himself.

And then it says in verse 6 that he is this corner stone. Verse 6 says, For it stands in Scripture, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a corner stone, chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

So the honor is for those who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the corner stone. In this passage, Peter is quoting from both Isaiah and the Psalms, and he is putting forth the scriptural background for Jesus being this corner stone.

And we get this idea that God himself is the one who gives this corner stone. He's the one that lays this down. And you can either accept him or reject him. And those are the grounds on which we come to face this stone.

But what does it mean to be this corner stone? I want to show you a picture up on the screen. I don't know how many of you know what this is. How many of you know what these things are?

[9 : 05] Does anybody know? Just raise your hand. I just want to see who knows, who doesn't know. Okay, there's a couple of people. All right? All right, that's good. That's good. It's time for a little education here this morning then. This is what you call a 3-2-1 block.

A 3-2-1 block. It's a machinist tool. It's a measuring, marking type of tool. It's 3 inches by 2 inches by 1 inch. It's milled to perfection.

It's always that way. And it's square. So you can use one by itself or you can connect some of them together to find square on things for machinists of all kinds. It is the key part that you start with because you have to have a standard in order to make something square, flat, plum.

Then you compare it to this in order to make sure that what you're building, what you're constructing is something that is square, plum, and level.

Right? Well, that's exactly what a cornerstone is. It's an ancient 3-2-1 block. It's completely level, completely square, completely plum.

[10:13] And it goes at the corner of the building so that when you bring the next block over, if it does this, you know there's a problem not with your cornerstone but with the next stone added to it.

The whole point of this is that Jesus then is the foundation. And as one, He is level, He is square, and He is plum.

He is the perfect standard of righteousness. And upon Him is where the foundation for the Christian life is built.

the Christian community is built upon Him. But He's also, according to verse 8, He's a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. He's a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense that this idea is that as this cornerstone, either you line up next to Him or you trip over Him.

He becomes an offense to you. He becomes one that you reject because you refuse to believe in Him. You refuse to follow Him. You refuse to obey Him. And the tripping over Him, the stumbling over Him is a doom, is a judgment upon you because you refuse to line up and be connected to Him.

[11:28] So the foundation of the Christian community is Jesus Christ. Now that sounds pretty straightforward and simple, right? I mean, you've been in church all your life. That's not a new revelation.

For me to say, Jesus is the cornerstone. Jesus is the foundation of the church. This Christian community needs to be built upon Jesus. It's like you're preaching to the choir. We already know all of these things.

We've read our Bible and been alive longer than you. Yes, we know this. Well, yes, and I get that. This is not a new idea. However, we need to make very careful application of this because Christ Jesus as the foundation means that we must get right who He is.

We must get absolutely right who He is and what He has done. Without getting right who He is, then we're building on a wrong foundation.

The Mormons are fine with Jesus. Right? They're perfectly fine with Jesus.

[12:42] It just happens to be that their Jesus is the brother of Lucifer. This is not the same Jesus. The Jehovah's Witness, they're fine with Jesus.

Right? They are fine with Jesus, but their Jesus became Michael the archangel and then became Jesus and then became Michael the archangel again. This is not the same Jesus.

The Muslims, they honor Jesus, but they think that He was one prophet among many. The point is is that if He is our foundation, we must get absolutely correct who He is.

Without that, we are talking about someone completely different. there is another guy by the name of Brady Owens. Did you know that?

I mean, I thought they broke the mold, right? And so, if you began to say, you know, I need Brady Owens to come help me with something, and you googled Brady Owens, depending upon what kind of help you needed, you might come across this Brady Owens.

[13:59] He was an assistant football coach. Now, he and I are very different. I don't even watch football, let alone coach football, let alone ever played football, but he was an assistant football coach, coach, but also, he led a secret coup against the head coach to get the head coach fired from where he was serving.

Well, I've never done that either, so I don't know what kind of help you might need, so whichever kind of help you might need depends upon which Brady you're going to call, but you know, here's the other thing about this Brady Owens.

He's actually a fictitious character in the movie called Facing the Giants. If you start attributing to me things that he did, you're completely wrong.

I don't care how sincere you're trying to be, and if you call on this person and try to get a hold of him to help you, you're going to be sorely disappointed because he doesn't exist, and that is the point, is that when we come to understand something about the foundation whom Jesus Christ is, who he is, and getting that right is of utmost importance, and we cannot, we cannot give ground on anything about who he is and say, well, you know, they believe a little differently here, but we can sort of get together and kind of, you know, because we all have the same morality after all, we all vote in the same political parties after all, no, we stand on Christ and Christ alone, that is our foundation, he is our foundation, and apart from that, we have no common ground with anyone else, and so that

means that you're going to have to learn who he is, and you're not going to learn who he is in any other way than the word of God, and you're either going to read it, you're going to go to Bible study, you're going to be under the preaching of the word, the three most important things you'll ever do in your life, read the word, be in a Bible study, and be under the preaching of the word, this is how you come to know who he is, and what he has said about himself, because that is what we need, that's the foundation of Christian community, now we want to turn to the identity of Christian community, who is this Christian community, what are they like, and let me just tell you the bottom line is that we're a covenantal community, we're covenantal community, now before we dive into that, there's this section right here, that speaks basically to someone who's not a Christian, you'll notice in verse 7, it says, the honor is to you who believe, then he says, but for those who do not believe, and he gives a little description about those who do not believe, he quotes from both Psalm, as well as another place in Isaiah, and he talks about the cornerstone being this stumbling stone, this rock of offense, and what Peter is doing is he's basically saying there's two groups of people, and the cornerstone is the sifting of the two groups of people, either you believe in the cornerstone, you trust in the cornerstone, you've been saved by the cornerstone, or you reject the cornerstone, and you walk away from the cornerstone, there is no middle ground, there is no room for neutrality when it comes to

[17:29] Jesus Christ, every single human being on the face of the planet right now is either in Christ, or they're rejecting Christ, there is no halfway covenant here, there is nothing here to put anybody in the middle, you're either one or the other, and I know that a lot of people would not really appreciate me saying that because it feels very exclusive, it feels very pushing out, it doesn't, it smacks of the whole, some people are in and some people are out, well I just have this to say to you, you're going to have to get over that because Jesus himself is a closed minded God, as my friend said back when we were young, when you go to John chapter 14 verse 6, Jesus says this, he says, I am the way and I am the life and I am the truth, there is no way to come to God except through Jesus Christ, he is the cornerstone,

God, and to not trust him, and to not follow him, and to not obey him, is to live on the outs, that doesn't mean that somebody can't come and join our services, that's not what we're talking about, we're talking about that eternal destiny that one day when we stand before the Lord, when we stand before the Lord, he will separate us into two groups, not three, not four, but two, those who've trusted, and those who have not, and it is my begging of you today, do you know where you stand? Do you know where you stand? Are you a part of that covenant community because you've trusted Christ, or are you out? And if you're out, then we love you, we long for you, we beg you, trust in Jesus Christ, and turn to him.

But what is this covenantal community? What is the identity of this covenantal community? He gives us several things, I'm going to wrap them up in about four little points, maybe five, we'll see. But the first one is that we're a temple. You see that in verses four and five, where he talks about that you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house. Peter is talking to Gentile Christians telling them that the church is the temple of God.

[20:01] We don't need a temple built in the future somewhere, we are the temple of God, which means we are, as God's people, his saving presence here upon this earth.

This is why being a lone ranger Christian, doing your own thing without a commitment to a local congregation doesn't work because the saving presence of God is with the church.

So I know that he's with me, that when you go to work tomorrow, when you go to whatever group you go to, we know God's saving presence goes with us because we're committed together as a body of Christ.

And because of that, we are his temple. The second thing is also there in verse five, we are a community of priests. He says that we're being built up into this spiritual house to be a holy priesthood.

A priest is someone who offers sacrifices to God. We're offering sacrifices as a way of worship, as a way of intercession.

[21:02] And so as a community of priests, it's our responsibility to intercede for this world. Christ has died for this world, and it is our job now to take and both pray for and take the gospel into this world.

That is a part of the duty of a priest is to take the gospel into this world. So we're a temple, we are priests. Third thing is that we are the new Israel.

We are the new Israel. Look at verse nine. Verse nine says, but you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession.

He just lays out these four descriptions of the church. And remember, he's talking to all these different cities with all these different churches full of Gentiles.

And he calls them the chosen race. He's using the language that he talked about, Israel being chosen so that he saved them out of Egypt.

[22 : 05] He didn't do that for any other nation, but he chose them and saved them. He's saying the church is his chosen race. Now, we are his chosen people.

We're the ones that he has saved. He then calls them a royal priesthood. Now, that's a difficult sort of phrase, if you think about it for just a second.

Because in Israel, the priesthood and the line of the king could not come together. That's why when Uzziah was struck with leprosy, he was trying to be both the king and priest at the same time.

But the priesthood and the king were separated in Israel, but now in the church, because Christ is our prophet, priest, and king, he calls us a royal priesthood.

We have this responsibility to represent God to man, and man to God. He calls us a holy nation.

[23 : 13] A holy nation. We're not just a chosen people, but we belong to God because he has saved us. You have to understand that who Israel is is no longer determined by DNA connection.

Just because someone can trace their lineage back to Abraham does not mean they're a part of this holy nation. The only reason they're a part of this holy nation is because they have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then he calls them a people for God's own possession, which is what the King James calls a peculiar treasure. The church belongs to God now in a way that Israel once did.

We're not a geopolitical entity, but we are a people of God from all nations. And the last thing he says to them as this covenant community, their identity, is he tells them that they are the people of God.

You'll notice verse 10. Verse 10, if you read it, you should recognize it, right? Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you've received mercy.

[24 : 16] That's an allusion to Hosea chapter 1, where Hosea takes a wife of Hortum and has three children with her, and the second and third children that he has.

God says, listen, this is the name of the first one, Loami. Loami means not my people. And the third child would be called Loami, which means no mercy.

Because as Hosea was casting judgment because of what God had given him in the prophecy, upon Israel, he's basically telling Israel, Israel, you're like the Gentiles. You're not my people.

You haven't received mercy. And now here under Peter, he's turning that all the way around and looking to the Gentiles and saying, you once were not a people, but now you are God's people.

You once had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. You see, the point is, is that in all of these descriptions, what he's getting to in a big picture is that the church is a covenantal community.

[25 : 18] All of these titles, all of these things related to Israel are supposed to give us that idea that as they were a covenant community, so also we are a covenant community.

under Abraham, there was a covenant community. Under Moses, there was a covenant community. And if you were a foreigner, and you came to this covenant community, you could join this covenantal community.

They had a way for you to join. And if you were a male, it meant circumcision, right? But they were a covenantal community. And a covenantal community has three things.

A covenantal community has three things. The first thing it has is a relationship with God. Everyone who was under the covenant had a relationship with God.

You were a part of this covenant because God had a covenant with these people. A covenant is God's way of condescending to us to save us and to put that salvation on terms that we grasp and understand, humanity, maybe not us in Texas, but humanity.

[26 : 26] That we might understand the solidity, the certainty, the power, and the promise, and the faithfulness of God in that salvation.

He made a covenant. And we don't make covenants here really in the United States. That's not something we are familiar with. But that's the way the Bible is structured. God made a covenant

with Israel and they had this relationship with him as one who was their redeemer.

A covenant community also has membership in that community. Under Moses, for you to come into the covenant meant circumcision. And now, according to Colossians 2, verse 12, baptism has replaced circumcision.

So, to join a covenant community, baptism is the means by which you join. Now, that's why we as Baptists have, for so long, done two things.

we have either said someone who has a baptism of like faith and order is someone that we will accept their baptism in that other church because they were baptized there.

[27 : 34] There's no need to be re-baptized because they're of like faith and order. They've already joined a covenant community. They're just transferring to a new covenant community. But someone from another denomination that's not like faith and order that there's lots of differences with, that's why we as Baptists have said you need to be re-baptized in order to join this covenant community because baptism is the way that you join the covenant community.

And the third thing is that the covenant community always has commands for worship. In the old covenant, they had all the sacrifices, they had all the feast days.

Remember Leviticus, right? Well, in the new covenant where we are, we still have commands for our worship. Our worship, we're commanded to have the preaching of the word, the praying of the word, the reading of the word, and the singing of the word, the Lord's Supper, and baptism.

We're supposed to have elders and deacons. Those are the things that are commanded for the worship of God's church. This is a description of who we are in Christ.

We are a covenantal community with a relationship with God, membership and commandments for worship.

[28 : 55] This is why joining a local congregation, being a part of a local congregation is vital because as suffering and persecution comes, you have fellow members of this covenant community who are under God's covenantal obligation to care for you.

Now, oftentimes we don't do that. Oftentimes we fail to do that. We don't want all the benefits and obligations of that community without obligating themselves to that community.

In other words, too many people try to date the local church, getting the benefits of membership without taking up the obligations, without making promises to one another.

But we can even be members of a local church and not actually live out that covenantal community connection, obligation, and promises. We fail to pray for one another.

We fail to check on one another when someone's absent. We fail to hold someone accountable when they've done something that they ought not do. Because we actually live by the Bible that says, live and let live, rather than what scriptures teach.

[30 : 23] And so if we're going to withstand the onslaught that will come, we must understand our identity, that we are a covenantal community. And the third and final thing is the purpose of this community.

What is the purpose of this community? Why are we even together? What is it we're supposed to be doing? And you ask anyone, you ask ten different people and they will tell you ten different things about what the church is supposed to be doing.

Everybody has an opinion. Peter gave us a very specific why or purpose here in verse nine. He calls them and says in verse nine, you are that chosen race, that royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light, that you may proclaim.

To proclaim is to tell forth the message. It's a mix of the word message and the preposition for out, which means to message out. It can be done through preaching, it can be done through teaching, it can be done through sharing, it can be done in the church, in a classroom, at a restaurant, at a ball game, over coffee, or at the mailbox.

It's an evangelistic endeavor, which means that the gospel message is proclaimed. It means that we're proclaiming the excellencies of Christ, right?

[31 : 55] And sinners need to hear that gospel because apart from hearing that gospel, they'll never be saved. They will not be saved by hearing my testimony, they will not be saved by listening to my song, they will not be saved by me handing them food, they will be saved by the gospel because that is the power of God unto salvation.

But Christians need to hear that gospel as well. And so often what we've done is we've relegated the gospel to just lost people and we want something different, more, and better, and greater for Christians.

But Christians, you need the gospel. We're told by Paul in Hebrews chapter 12 that it is the considering and thinking about the gospel that helps us to not grow weary and lose heart.

It is a proclaiming of his excellencies. This is a very uncommon word in the Greek text, this excellencies, but it literally means uncommon worth of character.

Uncommon worth of character. You can think of it as the sum total of all the glories and splendors that are Jesus Christ. It is his worth and his work altogether lovely.

[33 : 10] And so that makes this endeavor a worshipful endeavor. We're proclaiming his excellencies. So as I'm proclaiming the gospel, I'm talking about him, but I'm talking and extolling him.

I'm raising him up. It's the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. The purpose of the church is that we are to be worshipful missionaries. We're to be worshipful missionaries.

And don't get in your mind that worship means singing. Singing is the expression of worship, but worship is something different from singing. Singing is just the expression of worship.

Worship is what happens in my heart between me and God. And that can happen without me ever singing. But it's my love for him, my affections for him, my praising him, my lifting him up, my thinking great of him, my being satisfied in him.

[34 : 15] And that's why it can happen while I'm peeling potatoes or standing here preaching. It's why it can happen while I'm fishing in the river or standing here with you singing. Because it's about what's in the heart.

The singing is just the external expression of what's already in the heart. And so our purpose is to be worshipful missionaries everywhere we go.

You know, you all know the Heinz, missionaries, and there's a lot about what they're doing that many of us might think to ourselves, man, there's no way I could do that.

I mean, they've traveled halfway across the world. They're not near family, and there's all kinds of things that they have to put up with. And many of us would go like, I just don't even know if I could. You just haven't left.

It's okay. It's okay that you haven't gone halfway around the world. You don't have to go halfway around the world to be a missionary. You are a missionary here, right now, in your world.

[35 : 18] And you have people in your life that need to hear the gospel. The purpose of Christian community is to help sharpen the focus of this Christian community, that we are to be worshipful missionaries.

It's not our goal to be travel guides for the masses. It's not our purpose to be entertainment centers for bored teenagers, and it's not our purpose to be a supply house for household needs.

It is our goal and our purpose to proclaim the excellencies of Christ. All these other things may get to be a part somewhere, but that's not our purpose.

this is our purpose. We are a gathering of once lost sinners saved by grace, heaven sent, and fully bent on telling the story of his glory and his greatness.

We're just simply a gathering of saved lost people who love Jesus and want everybody to know him. This is what a Christian community is.

[36 : 30] Anything else we begin to tack on to that just begins to add golden calves to the problem. Tradition is fine if we know why we're doing it, but tradition without a reason and without being connected to the primary purpose can just become another golden calf.

So let us put our hearts where they need to be, upon the greatness and the glory of God, being ready to proclaim his excellencies.

let's pray.