

"Only Made Holy Through Jesus" 1 Peter 2:1–12

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Date: 15 February 2026

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[0:00] The first reading for this morning is taken from the first letter of Peter, chapter 2, verses 1-12. As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men in the sight of God, chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, for it stands in Scripture.

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

So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

[1:58] Keep your conduct amongst the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

So as we all know, or most of you know, the Olympics are going on right now. They happen every four years. And they're going on, and you see them on TV. You see them in the newspapers.

There's ads for it everywhere. I don't know if they still do it. I didn't check. But Olympians go into cereal boxes. They're all over the place. And what the Olympics is, is that there's these athletes who represent the countries from around the world, and they come and they meet.

The best athletes in sporting competition come together, and they meet. And they represent the countries. They represent the people of the countries as well, because we are compelled to get behind them, to lift them up so they can come, and they can compete on a world stage.

The text that we're looking at today talks about representatives. This may seem, this idea of having people represent us may seem like a foreign notion, but it's very present within our culture, and it's been present within all cultures through the ages.

[3:21] And the letter that we're looking at today is 1 Peter. And here we see Peter, who is one of the 12 disciples. He is one of the people who traveled with Jesus, who had the great privilege to learn from Jesus, who had the great, not, I wouldn't know about privilege, but he witnessed Jesus die.

He witnessed his torture and his execution on the cross. He witnessed Jesus' resurrection, and he witnessed Jesus' ascension. He witnessed Jesus' resurrection.

We see in the writing that he is writing to Christians who are dispersed. You may remember from a couple weeks ago, I preached on the letter of James, and he is also writing to dispersed Christians. And Peter, in his letter, in the opening verse, in chapter 1, he says who he's writing to. And he's writing to Christians who are dispersed. You can see, if you look on a map of the Middle East of that time, you can see it.

You can see all the places that he's writing to. And he's writing to Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia. And if you look on the map, you can see that they're all side by side.

[4:36] They're all side by side. So there would have been a letter runner who would have gone from each area, from each church as they go through. And in chapter 5, verse 12, it ends with saying that Silvanus helped write this letter.

And it would have most likely been him who would have done this, who would have traveled around sharing this letter. So Peter is writing to them because the Christians are facing, again, just like in James, suffering and persecution.

The main theme of Peter's two letters, especially 1 Peter, is that those who persevere in the faith while suffering from persecution should be full of hope, for they will certainly enjoy salvation, since they are already enjoying God's saving promises here and now, through the death and resurrection of Christ.

Now at the time of this letter being written, the decree out of Rome hadn't been written yet, banning Christianity. So they most likely would have been facing verbal persecution, verbal abuse.

They also would have been facing discrimination. And we all know that verbal abuse leads to physical abuse. You just look at history and you can see it happen.

[6:01] So that is what's going on in this letter, when Peter writes it, because we're just jumping into chapter 2. We're just hanging out in chapter 2 for this one Sunday. So we need to know kind of what happens, what the theme of the letter is, what's going on, what the Christians that Peter's writing to are doing.

So with this in mind, let's take a look. So if you haven't already, turn to 1 Peter chapter 2, and we're going to look at verses 1 to 12.

And it would make more sense now, because we just went over this. So let's look at it, and we're going to look at it in three ways, because this part of the letter has three main themes going through it.

The first thing we're going to look at is the nourishment through the word. Second thing we're going to look at is abide in Christ as the new temple. And the third thing we're going to look at is gospel life brings glory to God.

I'll say it again. Nourishment through the word is point one. Abide in Christ as the new temple, point two. And gospel life brings glory to God, point three.

[7:10] So let's look, verses 1 to 3. So put away all malice, and all deceit, and hypocrisy, and envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Notice in verse 1 of chapter 2, it starts with so. It could also be translated as therefore. So that means it's linking an argument from chapter 1.

Peter's continuing an earlier argument in this section where he gives the command, and it's in verse 22. And what he says in chapter 1, verse 22, is to love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

It was very helpful, Daniel, mentioning before we read the colic, about true Christianity, is one out of love. It's not one done out of have to. It's done out of love.

Everything is done out of love. So verse 1 is giving the example of how to do this, of chapter 2. How to truly love and treat someone is to put away all malice, all deceit, and hypocrisy, and envy, and all slander.

[8:29] So let's break this down. What does put away mean? What does he mean when he says to put away these things? The idea that he's getting at here is to give up. It's to get rid of.

To take off the clothing of this. He's using illustration. So the idea of these things is that they cling to us. It's like when you have soaked clothing on.

When you try to take the shirt off, it clings to your body. It's really hard to get off. And that's what he's getting at. So malice. We're just going to rip through these examples really quick.

So malice is evil or wickedness. If you get to know me, I'm a big fan of The Lord of the Rings, of J.R. Tolkien's writings. My favorite book of his writings is The Silmarillion, which is the prequel to The Lord of the Rings trilogy.

And in The Silmarillion, there's this character. The character represents the devil within this. And this character, he describes him as, he's all bent on malice.

[9:29] He's full of malice. Every part of him is completely full of malice. The character is bent on destroying all that the God figure has created and sustains.

That's the idea of what malice is. Then deceitfulness is harming others through lying and falsehood. Hypocrisy is masking an inward evil by an outward show of righteousness.

Envy is the opposite of thankfulness for good that comes to others. And slander is speech that harms others or intended to harm the person's status.

But here, we have to remember, Peter is ascribing this letter. He's writing it to Christians who are dispersed and facing persecution. So what he's getting at here is that even though you're a Christian, is that you still have these inclinations in our hearts.

Peter knows this and you would think he would be saying, saying don't be like the non-Christians that you're surrounded with because you know you have the spirit within you. But that's not what he's getting at here.

[10:39] What he's getting at is because everyone struggles with these things. Everyone. And we will all struggle with them until Christ returns or we go to be with Christ.

And the thing that he wants to show is that if they run rampant within a person, it consumes the person. They become bent on it. Or it destroys a church that's built on that.

But how does one do this? How does one put them off as he says here, as he commands here, the do? Well, let's look again at verses 2 and 3. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up into salvation if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

See, there's this common belief that we all fall prey to from time to time is that we've made it. That we can pat ourselves on the shoulder that we've done a good job.

I have my faith. I come to church. I've checked off all my daily Bible readings and I've said some prayers. I don't need to do anything else. I can get on with my day. But the language that Peter is using here is one of earnestness.

[11:55] And the illustration that he uses is perfect. The longing to be like a newborn baby. To be like an infant. That's longing for the pure spiritual milk.

Peter was married. It never says if he had children. But within his culture, the idea of it takes the village is lived out within the culture. You see it in a lot of eastern cultures as well.

That this idea that the family, the community comes together and helps raise the children. So he would be very familiar with newborn babies. And what is a newborn baby like?

They're completely, utterly helpless. They're completely dependent on the parent, the parents, or the caregiver. And they like to drink a lot of milk. Newborns, when they're hungry, if you're not familiar with a newborn, is that when it's time to feed, they will give you the signals.

And when you go through, they go through a certain amount of signals. And once they hit that end, they let you know that you have missed the signals. They lose their minds. They become desperate for the milk.

[13:04] It almost seems like that if they don't get that milk right, then they're done. Like they're, they're gonna die. It's quite dramatic. And that's what's going on here.

And then there's also the time when babies are growing up, when newborns are growing, that they go through these seasons of cluster feeding. And cluster feeding is when they're growing, they feed even more.

And sometimes it can be two to four times within that hour, and normally it's at night. So the idea that Peter is trying to show here, he's trying to, these readers, and for us, because we're readers of this letter as well, is to put, the way you put these things off is to become like newborns, babies, and long for spiritual milk.

And when you're growing spiritually, it's normally through a hard season. The seasons where you don't feel like you should come to church. The seasons where you feel cold, your heart feels cold. You are to cluster feed on the pure spiritual milk.

To have an intense personal desire. But what is the pure spiritual milk? Well, we have to remember this is a letter, and Peter is continuing his argument, his writing through the letter.

[14:16] So we have to look at verse one. And verse one, what he's saying is that the pure spiritual milk, we have to go back to it, is the word of God. It's scripture. It's pure, unadulterated.

God's word is infallible, inerrant, and contains all things necessary to salvation. Look what he says if you have your Bible. It's very helpful because then you can jump around and see the main thrust of the argument or the thought pattern.

He says this in verse one, chapter 22 and onwards. Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.

For all flesh is like grass and all its glory like a flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.

And this word is the good news that was preached to you. So he's reminding them of what this pure spiritual milk is. And that is the word of God, the living word of God.

[15:31] And if you notice, we're jumping back now into chapter two, that he says to grow up into salvation. What he's talking about is a life of sanctification.

When you come to faith, it doesn't just end there, it continues on. It is a life of continual growth, of growing. And the way you grow is to intensely desire the word of God.

To read, to mark, to inwardly digest it. It nourishes you through all seasons of life. The same way milk nourishes a baby. And as they grow up strong and healthy.

Some of you might be thinking, and I've gone through seasons of this as well, is how can you trust the Bible? How do you know it's inerrant? How do you know it's truly the word of God?

If we just take a moment, just a little sidetrack here, and we just talk about the New Testament itself. The books of the New Testament have a staggering amount of original manuscripts.

[16:32] They were copied and copied and copied perfectly. Some focus on certain areas, some focus on other areas. But there's a continuation of many manuscripts.

Atheistic historians, non-atheistic historians and archaeologists all agree that there is a staggering amount of manuscripts of the New Testament.

And it's interesting because some of the famous battles that you learn about in school, of the Roman battles and the Greek battles, they only have, some of them only have two manuscripts written about them.

And they're written over 100 years later. And we take them as gospel. But the New Testament manuscripts were written a couple years after or within the same period.

It's staggering how many manuscripts there actually are if you look into it later on. It's quite impressive. And we can rest in that. We can rest that what we read here, what we read daily at home, is truly, in fact, what was written so many years ago when the apostles and the disciples wrote the New Testament.

[17:47] So what does it mean in verse 3 when it says, to take the word daily into our hearts, to taste, to allow us, to taste and see that the Lord is good.

That is to take the word into our hearts daily. But the word that is described here is the same word that John in his gospel at the beginning describes. The word was made flesh.

And that is Jesus. That is, Jesus is the living word of God. In the beginning of John's gospel, he describes it. As Christians, you gain nourishment through the word of God.

The word does not lead one astray. Other things claim to give nourishment but require you to die for them. But God's word, the word made flesh, died for you and died for me.

So now as we go into the next part of Peter's letter in this section, let's keep that in mind. That the word of God is the one who nourishes. It's through Christ that you gain nourishment and through God's word you gain nourishment.

[18:51] The next section that we're going to look at, the next verse uses Old Testament imagery extensively. So I'm going to give a little background for it to make sense.

Bear with me here because I have to give some background. There are two main images that are used in the next section. And it's the temple stones and it's the priesthood.

The temple stones, the idea is coming out of 1 Kings when the son of David, Samuel, builds the temple. Or Solomon, sorry.

And then the second image is the priesthood, which comes out of Exodus from Mount Sinai when the law is given. In Exodus, God calls Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, where they have been slaves for 400 years.

This is the account where you read about the famous ten plagues and Moses and Aaron pleading with Pharaoh to let the people go. And eventually they are let go.

[19:49] And they cross the Red Sea. And Pharaoh and his army are swept away when the waters return after the people of Israel have crossed. Moses and the people of Israel are led by God to the base of Mount Sinai.

And Moses goes to the top to represent the people and commune with God. This is where the ten commandments and other laws are given. And this is where the command for the priesthood is given.

The priesthood was only for a select family line, the line of Aaron. And no one else could be a priest except for those born in that blood line. In 1 Kings, Solomon, the son of David, builds the temple.

And it's beautiful. It's beautifully built. And this is another thing that's worth looking up later on. A lot of Bibles have pictures of the temple. It is a beautiful building. It is well crafted.

And the temple symbolizes where God meets his people. There were two courts where one court had everyday worship, everyday sacrifices.

[20:50] This is where people would gather. And then the inner court had the inner chamber, the Holy of Holies. And only the high priest would come once a year to offer the sacrifice of atonement for his sins and for the people's sins.

So let's take a look now at verse 4. As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious.

The stones of the Old Testament, regardless of how beautiful they were, no matter how much skilled mainstream work they put into it, they're dead stones.

They're just stones. It's like when you walk into a beautiful old church. It makes you feel moved by how grand it is, by the skilled work that's gone into it.

But it's made up of dead material. But here, Peter is describing Jesus as the living stone, as the chosen and precious. Well, what does he say next?

[21:52] What is he talking about here? What does he mean? In verse 5, he says this, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as spiritual houses to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices accepted to God through Jesus Christ.

Two things are going on here. Christians are living stones being built up as spiritual houses, and Christians are holy priesthood who offer sacrifices to Jesus, through spiritual sacrifices to Jesus, or through Jesus, sorry.

When I first read this, I struggled with how I would explain this. But luckily, when I first read it, I struggled. I didn't know what I would say. But Peter does it for me, which is very helpful.

In the next verses, we're just going to look at them right now. For it stands in scripture, behold, this is Isaiah, I am laying in Zion, Zion's Jerusalem, 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 is stumbling and a rock of offense.

[23:09] They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. So this idea only makes sense through the gospel. When Jesus went to the cross to bear our sins, to die the death that we deserved, and rose from the dead, this did away with all the Old Testament sacrificial and ceremonial laws.

The old stone was the law, and everyone was crushed by it. The new stone is a living stone, chosen and precious. It's a cornerstone, as described here.

It frees those who trust in it, who build on it. But those who reject the stone, as it says here, they stumble, and they are offended by it.

houses that are built of stone, obviously new houses are built with wood, but old houses were built of stone. Old buildings were built of stone. And the way these are built is that it has to have a cornerstone, that you dig down and you lay a cornerstone.

And this stone, everything is built off of it. It is the foundational stone that everything else rests on. Without it, the house will not be structurally sound, the building will not be structurally sound, and eventually the ground will move and the house will start to fall and collapse.

[24:33] No longer are those who trust in the living God required to go to the temple to make a sacrifice, to give to the priest to make the sacrifice for them. They simply have to trust in this cornerstone, in Christ, and build their lives on him.

No longer is the temple in one place. Those who trust in Jesus are the new stones, which make up the new temple, the church. As we gather here, we are stones built of the church, and this is built on the foundation of Christ.

We are the church built on the sure foundation of Jesus and the word of God. But those who don't build their lives on Jesus will eventually collapse, just like a building collapses. No church can stand without him or replace him.

So what's the priesthood that Peter's talking about here? Let's look at verses 9 and 10. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you're God's people. Once you have not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. The priesthood was, as I said, only for a select family line.

[25:57] And these people would represent the people of Israel. They would be the ones who come before God to offer the people's sacrifices on behalf of them. But no longer is this the case, as Peter says here.

Not only are we the stones of the church, we are also the priests of the church. No longer do we need someone to be the middleman. between us and God and enter the holy room for us once a year.

We have direct access to God through Christ, through his work on the cross. That is the glorious thing of the cross. That through Christ's work, the finished work, we are given access to God.

And it's only through faith that happens. Do I still need to make these animal sacrifices? No. We are required, though, to make spiritual sacrifices, not out of duty, but of a willing love for Jesus, the precious stone, the cornerstone, freely given to us.

And it's through prayer, it's through worship, it's through scripture, it's through attending church, it's through giving up our time and possessions, helping the poor, and sharing the gospel as it says here.

[27:09] See, why is church so important? Church is so important because it edifies us. We get to come and encourage one another, we get to worship God together.

It's like, it describes here stones. A stone, when you look in a farmer's field or in a field, it's just a stone on its own. It's useless. But when stones come together, it builds the church and it is a beautiful thing.

Everyone's lives here makes up a beautiful artwork of the church. And we are the church through Christ. Because God has made us his royal priesthood, his holy nation, his own possession.

He called us out of darkness. He is merciful, loving, and steadfast. He has given us the great privilege to be his people. He has given us the great honor to be his people through his son.

So the gospel gives nourishment. God's word gives nourishment. we abide in Christ as new temple. And here we see the gospel life brings glory to God.

[28:22] Look at it verses 11 to 12 with me. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

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

A very well-known apologist now, Canadian apologist, is Wes Huff. And I was listening to a talk he gave to a church, and it was called How to Look, How to Not Look Like an Idiot While Sharing the Gospel.

And he gives this talk, and he gives this illustration that I'm going to take right now, because I think it's really good. He says this, there's actually, in your Bible, there's four Gospels, but there's actually five Gospels.

There's Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in your Bible, but then the other Gospel is you. It's the spirit within you. And he's given this talk about how to give good arguments, and he says this because he says people may never listen to your argument or be persuaded by them.

[29:40] But the way we live out our lives amongst those who don't call themselves Christians, who are hostile towards Christianity, speaks louder and is more persuasive.

They may not be listening, but they are watching. How are we living out our lives? In light of being part of the new temple, in light of being God's holy priesthood, how are we living out our lives? Can people see the Gospel through us? Are we isolated or are we living in community? Gospel living builds up the temple. Ungospel living destroys the temple.

And if you continue in 1 Peter, he gives examples more and more on how this looks like to live it out in a society that is very anti-Christian. He gives more examples. But I need to wrap up here.

Friends, brothers, sisters in Christ, we have been given a great gift. Jesus is the chosen and precious cornerstone laid for us.

[30:44] Build your life on him. Long for him as the pure word of God. Offer spiritual sacrifices through him. You have been chosen and been made God's possession of love through his son, Jesus.

■ of God.