

The Living Temple

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] And we'll read again at verse 4, and we're looking at these verses down to verse 8. 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.

As we've been following 1 Peter and the way that the teaching of the letter has developed, you'll remember that we looked at how Peter deals with how we've come through a spiritual rebirth, to be born again to love one another, but also to holiness of life.

That's the main bulk of the second part of that first chapter. And how in all of that we've seen the centrality of Christ and of the salvation that God has set for us in him.

And then last time we looked at the first couple of verses, the first three verses of the second chapter, where we saw that now he's moving into this, or continuing with the emphasis on growth. We are born not just to love one another to holiness, we're also born to grow, because as Christians that's essentially what the truth of God is like. We are to desire that, we are to crave that spiritual milk, so that we will grow from that.

[1 : 3 3] But now as we come to verse 4 and the next few verses, Peter is actually turning to the issue of the status belonging to God's people. And remember that the letter is written to people whose status is being questioned.

They are suffering some kind of persecution. We're not told exactly what it was, but we saw at the beginning of the letter, they're actually scattered throughout all the regions that are mentioned there, and yet they are the people of God, they are the chosen people of God.

And so Peter is seeking that he will again just focus their minds for them on their status as God's people, despite or against what's happening to them and around them in the world.

And that's always going to be important for ourselves. It's important in this present day that we live in as well, that we keep our mind focused on what we are as Christians, on what God has made us, on the status that God has given us, not what we'll give us, not what we'll be, although that's important, but what is already the case.

So that you have your confidence set in God and what he has done, in what he has made you already, as well as what is ahead of you and promised by God for the future.

[2 : 5 4] And as you do that, as Peter does that, he draws our mind to the imagery of the temple. He calls it, you are like living stones being built up as a spiritual house.

And that's essentially going back to the Old Testament, where the temple was often referred to as the house of God. For example, the two books of the Chronicles in the Old Testament, if you go through them, you can see how frequently the house of God is mentioned as a reference to the physical temple that was then, of course, in place.

And how the temple, as it's recorded there, as a physical entity, is something that Peter now uses, but is now turning into a spiritual way of thinking, so that he's really saying, you actually as Christians, you as the people of God, are actually now the temple of God.

You are the building, the spiritual building, in which God has chosen to place himself and to dwell. And as such, it is you as God's people, you as Christians, that God has chosen to use as a dwelling place for himself.

And it's from that, that he gives the privilege and the status to people, because that's what they are. That's a reminder by Peter of what these people are.

[4 : 2 4] And all of that is in relationship to Jesus. Everything really stems from their relationship to Christ. Just as he said at the end of verse 3 there, if indeed we've seen that that really means, since it is indeed the case, that you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, you've already come to this

experience, that he is gracious, you know him personally, in other words.

So from that, not only do you then grow as you take in the spiritual milk of his truth, but as you keep coming to him, you are being built up by God.

You are being built up as this spiritual house, this spiritual temple in which God himself dwells and has his presence.

So the three things we're just going to mention rather briefly, because I want to try and cover these four verses or so to the end of verse 8. The first thing we're looking at is the Lord we come to.

You come to him, he says, a living stone. He says, rejected by men, but chosen in the sight of God, chosen and precious.

[5 : 39] So we'll look at the Lord we come to. Secondly, we'll look at what happens through our coming to Jesus. What is it that happens when we come to Jesus or keep coming to him or have that living relationship?

Well, he says, you are being built up a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through him. And that takes us all the way down really to verse 7 and 8.

And at the beginning of verse 8, you find that, thirdly, we're going to look briefly at what happens when we don't come to Jesus, when he becomes a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.

Well, what is, first of all, this living stone, this Lord we come to? And why is he called this living stone? It's interesting that Peter is using this imagery and he's saying, as you come to him, a living stone.

Now, he's not just pointing out that Jesus is a living person as against the stones, naturally, that you'd have in the Old Testament building of the temple.

[6 : 50] There is that to it, of course, there's the contrast. He's now spiritualizing it, if you like, but there's also the fact that he is the living stone and as we'll see, the cornerstone of the building that gives life and direction to the rest of the building.

And you go back in your mind to what he had near the beginning of the letter, blessed be God. He says in verse 3, according to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The cornerstone of the building is Jesus Christ. He's the living stone. He's the living stone because he himself is living on the other side of death.

He's living as the conqueror of death. He's living as the one through whom we also come to share in that triumph over sin and over death. You come to him as a living stone.

a living stone. The living stone. Living because he lives in resurrection life having overcome death. So much you could say about that.

[7 : 54] So much that's important about that. We looked at it in partly when we looked at the beginning verse 3 of the first chapter near the beginning but we have to move on from that to see what he's saying.

As you come to him. In other words, you keep actually coming to him. And the words there indicate that it's not just a once for all coming to Jesus.

What Peter has in mind is you have this as habitual continuous exercise on your parts. You keep on coming to him.

You maintain that contact with him through which you have life. You do that through your faith. You do that through your trusting in him. You do that through your living relationship with him.

You keep coming to him and the words also indicate that this is really a very close connection. A very intimate connection indeed. What is so close and intimate as the relation between Jesus and his people?

[8 : 55] Between those who are living stones and the living stone that is the cornerstone of the spiritual temple? you keep coming to him the living stone.

Is that life running through your life this evening? Is the life of Jesus resurrected from the dead triumphant over death and over sin?

Is that the life that characterizes your own life and your way of life? Is that contact yours with this living stone? Are you living in that relationship with Jesus?

I'm not saying it's perfect. It's never perfect on the part of any one of us. But it's a relationship that has such contact with him through faith and trust in him that you have life, spiritual life, life that God himself approves of.

and is given to you as one of his children. Well now he says this is the living stone that is the head or the corner stone. But you notice what he's saying.

[10:10] He's also saying about him rejected of men but in the sight of God chosen and precious. Now that's a glaring contrast isn't it? He is saying rejected by men and yet the opposite is true in respect to God and God's view of him and God's opinion of him.

rejected by men but chosen by God and precious. It's going back to the way that Jesus was examined and you remember in the gospels that the words of the psalm that's quoted here as well, this stone the builders rejected, Psalm 118, it's the idea of examining a stone for the corner stone of the building.

it's maybe not as apparent nowadays with all the technology that's available but when you were actually building especially if it was a large building like a temple with long walls, you had to have the cornerstone, the stone that you began with actually set particularly accurately because the angles of the rest of the building took their cue, if you like, from that cornerstone and if that cornerstone wasn't itself properly angled, properly set then as the first part of the building, then the rest of the building was going to be defective.

And what Peter is saying is this cornerstone that Jesus is, this spiritual cornerstone that determines what the rest of the building is going to be like, that determines its angles and its shape, the whole of its edifice, its rejected by men because when Jesus was examined by the authorities in his day, they were examining with view to his claim to be the Messiah, to be the Savior, to be the one promised in the Old Testament as the deliverer of his people.

What did they do? They rejected him. You see, they had their own specifications for whatever the cornerstone of the spiritual temple was going to be. Their own specification was what really determined what they made of Jesus.

[12:23] And so they rejected after examination, they rejected him. But actually God had chosen the very one that they rejected and strangely enough through the rejection in God's sovereign way, it was God's way of placing this cornerstone as the cornerstone of the building.

God's thanks to you. You can make a lot of that even today. The contrast between what is true and what remains true and what people make of it.

What people make of Jesus, of course, is hugely important. That's what sets the angles of our lives and of our communities really when we have Christ at the heart of our life.

and it's no surprise really to you or to me surely that there's such a concerted effort in our very day to displace this cornerstone to have some other sort of building and some other cornerstone instead of this Jesus everything that's going on around you that wants to actually change the local culture the traditional culture including the place of the church and the place of the gospel that actually comes back to this it's not just to do about with culture it's not to do with just everyday practices it's to do with a rejection of this cornerstone you see he doesn't fit the spec the specification of secularism he doesn't fit the specification of atheism he doesn't fit the specification of worldliness that wants to really just change even the gospel and even the church and even things that we have had valuable in our community for all of these generations he doesn't fit so he's got to be displaced something else if not instead of him certainly alongside of him well you see that doesn't make any difference to God they rejected this cornerstone this Jesus but what is he saying later on well he has become the cornerstone despite all of that and that's you see something you have to hold on to when you find yourself beginning to just become a bit disconsolate and cast down by what you see around you by decisions that are taken people can reject the truth of God and that saddens us it hurts us that people do that with the gospel but the gospel is still the gospel the truth of God is still the truth of God the facts that the Bible sets before you remain facts people can choose to say there's no such thing as eternity death is the end of it it doesn't change the truth it still remains true God's truth every single aspect of what he has revealed remains to be true and we need to remain true to that but here's what Peter is saying yes rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious and valuable in other words the very stone that the builders rejected the stone that they set aside is the very one that God had chosen specifically to be the cornerstone of his temple and so it's exactly right and it measures exactly as God himself had purposed and it's placed as God himself had determined it be placed

Jesus is the cornerstone the angles of the temple are exactly as God intends that according to the master plan the blueprint is being followed out because the cornerstone is who he is and nothing's going to change that tonight that's where we take our encouragement from when we're discouraged

that he is chosen and precious in the sight of God and that what Peter is saying is despite the fact that men chose to ignore him or to reject him after examination when God examined him and when God placed him in this world and when God looked at his life in this world when God looked at his death and his resurrection from the dead God said this is the stone that's worthy to be placed as the cornerstone of my temple that's how it will be and that Jesus tonight remains as he's always been the cornerstone of God's temple rejected by men but chosen by God and precious worthy fitting to be this very important cornerstone of the building so that's the Lord we come to and then secondly what happens through coming to Jesus well you know what he's saying firstly as you keep coming to him you yourselves living stones or as living stones that's again a remarkable thing isn't it that description living stones as if as if as if Peter is really saying um think about what a stone naturally is you don't think of a stone having life but here he's saying you are living stones God has done something to you and in you that has transformed your life that's transformed who you are that's transformed your status you're different to what you wear in relation to God um you are living stones and as you come to him as you keep coming to him notice what he's saying it's as you do this it's as you have this contact with Jesus that you are being built up by God to be a spiritual house and as we said at the beginning the images of the temple in the old testament but now the temple is comprised of saved people the people of God are his people are his temple and we think of this building of course other buildings that we refer to as the church and that's understandable and that's quite proper in its own place but actually in the highest sense the church is not a building the church is not made up of different buildings the church is made up of people it's made up of these people of God it's made up of these Christians who have a living relationship with Jesus the cornerstone the living stone and they themselves have become living stones in the spiritual sense that every time people come to Jesus and come to know him and come to be saved through him they're placed in the spiritual temple they're given their own place in the walls of this temple and it's valuable to think of that imagery you can follow it through more than we're able to tonight really but you think of the walls of this building the stones that are used in different buildings made of stone the stones are not all exactly the same they're very different shapes and different sizes some of them need a lot more work done to them than others before they're finally placed in the walls of the building but they're all placed in the walls as they take their angle from the chief cornerstone they all have their own place

[20 : 04] they all have their own contribution they all have their own importance as far as God is concerned in the building I once heard an account from an elder in South Lochs a venerable Christian still living and he said that one time a stonemason had been building a wall and he hadn't had time to take to look out a large stone that would cover the entrance and be a lint to lower the entrance so he said leave it to yourselves men the men who are helping him look out a stone of all the stones that are around there that you think would be actually fitting for this and when he came back then on Monday they had the stone ready and he said oh that looks it looks fine but we need to test it and he had a wee hammer and he just gave it a touch with a hammer or he gave it a crack with a hammer and he heard a ping he said no that's no use it's got a flaw somewhere there's a flaw in the stone never mind he said we'll just smash it up and every little bit of it we'll use as a little sliver underneath the stone that we'll put up so it'll actually be used the little slivers of it will help to maintain or to keep the large stone that'll be over the top and that's how it is in the church as well every little stone if you like even if you see yourself tonight as a little contributor to the church or to the gospel or to the kingdom of God every single slice of stone every little smallish stone that goes into the wall maybe isn't as prominent as the big ones maybe they're buried inside the wall but they're still providing the support they're still providing their own valuable contribution to the building that's what the temple is like it's made up of different kinds of people different shapes and sizes in a spiritual moral sense but backgrounds personalities gifts but they all fit into their own space in the wall and for you and for me it's important to know what our gifts are and to use them for the Lord but it's important first and foremost that you're actually in that wall that you're fitted into the walls of this spiritual temple that you are a living stone that you are a stone along with other stones that God is using to build up his temple to build up this spiritual house and it's a holy priesthood you're changing the imagery a bit it's not just the spiritual house it's also a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ well we're not individually priests

I'm not a priest and you're not priests individually but collectively together we are a priesthood of believers that's one of the things that Scottish theology always emphasized against the tendencies

of those who would claim that the church ought to have priests in an individual sense that's not what the reformers at all emphasized they said you are a priesthood you're a priesthood together of believers you form a spiritual building and a spiritual priesthood because as a priesthood you are here to offer spiritual sacrifices worship to God not just when you come to church but collectively together gathered together as this or at other times still you're engaged in the worship of God in the service of God in witness to God you're offering up spiritual sacrifices to him and you see he's saying acceptable to God through Jesus Christ well is that not encouraging you look at your own life and I look at mine look at the sin that's still there the faults and the flaws that you still see in your life in your heart in your mind in your thoughts you think of coming to church like we are this evening to offer spiritual sacrifices praise worship to God and the wonder that from such a person as I as this sacrifice leaves my soiled hands with sin staining them that that could be acceptable to God well it is why is it through

Jesus Christ that's what makes all the difference that's what gives us the encouragement that's what gives us the confidence that what we offer to God sincerely what we offer to God as far as we possibly can in a clean sense yes it's still leaving us who are still sinful human beings but through Jesus Christ your worship tonight is acceptable to God your person is acceptable to God everything about you is acceptable to God as he sees you in him despite the fact that we still have sinned to confess and we still need further sanctification but here's your encouragement when the devil will actually say who are you to offer a spiritual sacrifice who are you to offer yourself for the service of the church who are you to take office in the church who are you to actually come and be a communicant in that congregation you're not good enough for that and the Lord is saying that's not my opinion because it's not dependent on who you are in yourself who I am in myself who all of us are together even together as we are in ourselves it's all about him and what he has done and because he is worthy and because he's the cornerstone and because through him and in him God is accepting of us in our persons and in our offerings they are pleasing to God all that we offer him all of our spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to him through Jesus Christ and then he goes on to say that to him to you therefore is the honor in verse 7 he quotes there and then he comes in the Old Testament he comes so the honor is for you who believe but for those who do not believe and what does he mean the honor is for you who believe the older translations have so to you who believe he is precious I'm taking the reference to be to Jesus and of course that's true to those who believe he is precious but really it's a better translation we feel here in the ESV in this instance at least so the honor or the worth is for you who believe remember what we said at the beginning that Peter is dealing with status dealing with our status before God dealing with what we are as God sees us in Christ and because of him and he's saying well for you then this is the honor it belongs to you you have the status you have this privilege from God you are his people you are his children and as you are his children you who believe for you to you the honor belongs to have that status he's going on we'll see next time

God willing that he's expanding on that because not only are they a priesthood they are a royal priesthood they have royalty about them they have that status given to them by God that they are the children of the king they belong to the palace and therefore to them is the honor to them is the privilege to them is the status to all who believe but for those who do not for those who do not believe the stone that the bill has rejected has become the cornerstone and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense what is it that keeps people from coming to Jesus well Peter is quite simple and matter of fact for those who do not believe it's that they don't believe it's that they don't actually want their lives committed to him it's that they don't have a trust which is really what believing is as well as believing things to be true faith as the bible speaks of it is the trusting of yourself into the hands of Jesus and placing your life there for time and for eternity that's what's lacking for those who do not believe they don't come because they don't have that desire that trust that giving of themselves to him but nevertheless that stone that has become the cornerstone has come to be to them a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense now cast your mind back to when we looked at Peter's life and in chapter 16 of Matthew you remember

[30 : 04] Jesus gave him this designation this name the rock you are Peter you are Petros the rock and then immediately after that he had to rebuke Peter for being very different to the rock that he had been named as because when Jesus taught them about the need for him to go to Jerusalem and for him to be examined and for him to be rejected and put to death who was it who took him aside who was it who found that a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense Peter did and Peter very vehemently began insisting this shall not happen to you Lord and what did the Lord say get behind

me Satan you see the crucified Jesus at that moment was a stone of stumbling to Peter he could not actually fit into his thinking how Jesus dying was going to be of benefit to him or to God's people how God could have chosen a deliverer a king who needed to die in order to be that very person and I think that's behind what Peter is saying here he was once himself in a position of finding a difficulty with the idea of Christ crucified of the cross of the demands of that of course that didn't mean he came he stayed like that he came to see that he was wrong and that

Jesus was right but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense that's what not believing in Jesus does you see you stumble over the stone instead of coming to have a living contact with it you stumble over it you trip over it and are likely to end up being lost this is so important for you and for me what's our relationship tonight to Jesus what kind of view do we have of him what kind of contact do we have with him is he for us too still a stone of stumbling a rock of offense can you accept tonight all that

Jesus says about himself in order to really give yourself into his hands into his custody into his safety well if not then he's still a stone of stumbling to you please don't stumble over Jesus don't let Satan persuade you or your own heart persuade you that you don't need to go as far as to give yourself to him to trust in them and to trust yourself to him because that is to make him a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense they stumble because they disobey the word is in the next line they stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do and that brings in the sovereignty of God the overarching sovereignty of God the sovereign will and purpose of God but nobody will be able to say that they stumbled over this headstone this cornerstone of the building that God is building instead of accepting him and receiving and being built upon him that they stumbled over none will be able to say Lord you made me do this this is your fault I had no option you determined it no the Lord is saying I am sovereign but I'm giving you a choice I'm giving you a choice of either accepting my way of salvation in Christ or rejecting it and if you reject it it's on your head it's your eternity that's at stake and it'll be your own fault and it'll be your fault forever more and you'll regret it for all eternity and you won't be able to blame

God or anyone else but yourself please don't stumble over Jesus don't let him continue to be for you if he is that tonight listen to what he's saying to come to him to have living contact with him to give yourself to him to let him be the savior for you as well as for others and then you will really be a living stone part of this building that God is building as a spiritual temple for himself and you will share with all others who are living stones in the privilege in the honor that it is to be a Christian to be one of gods to have him as your God and king let's pray almighty

[36 : 03] God we do give thanks this evening anew for the way in which your own truth sets before us that you are building your church that the gates of hell will not prevail against it and we thank you that we can come and take out encouragement from the great facts of what you are doing and have already done and the truth of your promises of what you will yet do in the history and salvation of your people grant us Lord tonight that our concern may be to be living stones set in the walls of this spiritual temple mercy upon us we pray and grant to open our hearts if we have not already come to give our heart to you enable us to do it oh Lord even this night even as we see the thaw setting in to turn the ice into water into liquid we pray that our hearts will know that same thawing out through your spirit and through your truth coming to bear upon us receive our thanks we pray continue with us for

Jesus sake amen let's conclude our worship then this evening singing in psalm 27 psalm 27 that's something psalm in the Scottish Psalter sorry on page 236 and we're going to sing verses 4 to 6 to June Belmont verses 4 to 6 to the end of the double verse 6 one thing I of the Lord desired and will seek to obtain that all days of my life I may within God's house remain and so on through to the end of the verse 6 these five stanzas one thing I of the Lord desired one thing I of the Lord desired and will seek to obtain that all days of my life my life within

God's house remain that I the beauty of the Lord behold me and admire and that I in his holy place may reverently inquire for he and his power and shall me hide in evil days in secret office tend me hide and on a rock me raise and now in not this present time my head shall lifted be above all those that are my foes and round then come past me therefore unto his tabernacle

I'll sacrifice his bring all joy all joy fullness I'll sing yea I to God will praise his sing you may already have heard of the death the passing of the Reverend Kenneth MacDonald former minister of Roskin Free Church Kenny was a well-known minister throughout the church not only during his time of serving as a minister but through the sad loss of his daughter Alison who has of course went

missing in Kashmir all these many years ago and Kenny spent the main part of his life since then looking for information back and forth and bearing a very constant and faithful witness to all who came to interview him and do programs of his faith and trust in God and his quiet way of leaving matters in the hands of God he'll be a great loss to the church a loss to the community and we bear in mind his wife

Rita and her family at this sad time and do please continue to bear them in your prayers in the days to come I'll go to the main door after the benediction now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always Amen God Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen