

## **“LIVING STONES, HOLY PEOPLE.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

**January 17, 2016, 10:30AM**

**Text for the Sermon: I Peter 2:4-10**

### **Introduction.**

I remember being in a communications class at Wheaton College and being told by the professor to pair up and he would guide us through a series of questions to ask each other. The first question was easy, “who are you?” The second question was a little harder, “Who are you?” We had to give a different answer. The next eight questions were all the same and with each one it got harder as we had to drill deeper and deeper into who we are.

If you had to finish the sentence, “I am ...” how would you finish it and if you had to finish it ten times what might you say? How do we define ourselves, how do we think of ourselves?

Peter has shown us God’s salvation. Now he shows us how it defines us, what it says about us and how we should to live it out. Verse five is the key verse and the one that gives us an outline for unpacking this passage:

**I Peter 2:5** 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.

### **A Spiritual House, chosen and precious.**

The reason we are Christians is because there is a living stone chosen and precious to God.

God’s salvation is set on this one and only chosen cornerstone. Salvation is found in no one else, there is no other Savior, no other Son of God, no other cross or path to reconciliation.

Apart from Jesus there is no building, no spiritual house. The cornerstone is the first stone laid, from it the rest of the foundation follows. The cornerstone sets the angles and the lines and the level for the rest of the structure. All the other stones are set in reference to it. It must be straight and square and true.

**Isaiah 28:16-17** thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation ... 17 And I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plumb line.

**Ephesians 2:20-22** Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

This is the wonder of God's love and salvation, that as He honors His Son, so He honors us, and make us precious, and makes us living stones in God's house. Jesus is the chosen and precious cornerstone and whoever believes in Him is also chosen and precious, a living stone like Christ.

We are here because we are chosen and beloved like the Son. We are selected stone, handpicked material being built up in Christ, with Him as our foundation.

Make Jesus the cornerstone of your faith and the cornerstone of your home. Make Jesus your reference point for your personal life, your marriage, your parenting, your business dealings, your interactions with neighbors, church members and those in authority.

Think about this, this week as you high school students are preparing for finals.  
Think about this in your texting, Facebooking, Instagramming, and Snap Chatting.  
Think about this as you parents are preparing tax returns.  
Think about this as you make decisions about the future.

Before we move on from this point notice Peter makes a little *digression*. God has laid the stone for salvation, but some, instead of resting on it and being built on it, trip and stumble over it.

They stumbled in part because Jesus was not the kind of Messiah they were expecting, He didn't measure up to their expectations. The same happens today when people want to dictate to God what He should or shouldn't do.

You need to know that Jesus was hated and despised and rejected. Are you prepared to be treated the same way? Are you OK with being built into a house that might get egged at night or picketed or have nasty things said about it or vandalized or maybe even burned?

But before we consider giving up or running away, remember Jesus who was rejected, is accepted by God and chosen by God and precious to God. And so are those who are being built on Jesus.

Don't be put off or discouraged by any present rejection, any present negative press, there is honor for those who remain steadfast and built on the solid, unshifting rock of Jesus.

As our culture shifts and changes we must be prepared and we must prepare the next generation to suffer persecution and shame for standing with and for Christ. We don't want to be like the disciples who were unprepared when Jesus was arrested and all deserted Jesus.

**A Spiritual Identity.**

Having been chosen and being built on Christ the cornerstone gives you a special identity. Peter mentions it in verse 5 and expands on it in verses 9-10. You are a holy and royal priesthood.

Those who don't stumble over the stone and reject it are the true people of God, as true at Abraham and Moses and David. These are OT descriptions of Israel that are now being applied to the Church of Jesus Christ, to us. We are the fulfillment and continuation of Israel.

***Peter gives four descriptions of our identity.*** These are to be applied corporately, not just individually. This shows the privileged status of the church in God's eyes, and the blessings that are ours when we are a part of it.

But there is a problem with Peter's descriptions. He's using terms from his time and culture. How excited do you get to be told you are a royal priesthood? Maybe an Anglican or a Catholic living in England might be able to relate but we don't live in a country with royalty and we are protestant and don't have a thing for priests, so this description doesn't work very well for us.

To the average first century Jew being a part of any royalty was utterly beyond the realm of possibility. Royalty was inherited, so to be a part of David's genealogy or a Roman emperor's lineage was unthinkable. But the message of the Gospel is that if we are believers in Jesus Christ then we are adopted members of His family and connected to His kingship with all the rights and privileges and inheritances of royalty. And believe me it's way better than winning Powerball.

The same is true of the priesthood. It was an inherited privilege, from one tribe, and only they had the privilege of direct access to God. Only they had access to the special courts and the holy places, only they were the mediators standing between the people and God.

Peter is saying the highest statuses and privileges that once were inherited and belonged only to a few are now granted to us. We now have direct access to the King because we belong to Him.

We will see this tonight in a powerful way when we see the access we have to God in the New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven in Revelation 21.

What analogy to kings and priest could we use to make this more contemporary?

If we lived in India it would be like going from the lowest caste, the pariahs or untouchables, to the highest caste, the Brahmins. But see there I just went and did what Peter did, making an analogy from a time and culture foreign to ours.

Could we imagine being president or related to the president; being a CEO of a huge corporation or related to one; suddenly becoming a billionaire? Can we picture such a massive social change in our lives? That's what happens to believers, we are elevated to the highest place in God's kingdom, a member of the royal and priestly class.

We will rule with Christ and through us He ministers His grace and forgiveness to others.

The same message comes through the other descriptions, we who are Gentiles are now grafted in and are part of the chosen race, part of His electing love; we who were unholy are now made holy not by the blood of animals offered at a holy place but by the blood of Jesus offered once and for all on the cross.

Peter is challenging our thinking about our church, how we view this motley gathering of sinners who are saints. A lot of you have been together here for a long time, you know each other well. You know each other's past, you know each other's families and relatives, you went to school with some of them, you work or do business with some of them. You even know some of the sins and failures and weaknesses.

That can work in two directions. It can make us a critical or judgmental or skeptical. Or it can make us more aware of God's grace and mercy, that He has rescued and saved the likes of us, none of whom are worthy and has made us His people.

These terms should help turn back our criticism and quick judgements to say, "We are not what we once were, now by God's grace He has made us a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God."

Do we know who we are in the eyes of Jesus? Do we believe what He says about us? It would help if we started thinking and acting and talking like this about each other. Remind each other who you are in Christ.

**Hebrews 10:24-25** And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Peter uses some very high sounding and lofty words. Do you think the churches he was writing to in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia were very different from ours? Do you think maybe they weren't as full of sinners as ours?

Of course not. Every church then, just like every church now, is full of redeemed sinners. Remember after that list of sins Paul gives in I Corinthians when he says, "And such were some of you" (I Corinthians 6:11). Of course there are sins and weaknesses in all of us and in our church and in the pastors and leaders here. We can make criticism and accusations all day long.

But do we see the inherent beauty of who we are and are being made to be in Christ? Do we ever look at this from God's perspective as He looks at us through Christ-colored glasses?

Friends, someday this church is going to be so full of God's glory and the glory of Jesus that it will utterly stagger your imagination. The dullest, most simple or spiritually lacking Christian

here will one day be a being so radiant in the brilliance of Christ's glory you might just be tempted to bow down and worship him.

**Matthew 13:43** Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

**I John 3:2** Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Church of Jesus Christ, we are God's cherished and prized possession, the apple of His eye. He loves us as a Father loves His own children. Consider each other in this light, that together we are living stones being built into a spiritual temple and God has made us a royal priesthood.

### **A Spiritual Service.**

Our identity carries a purpose, spiritual sacrifices. In the OT the priests were the ones who offered sacrifices on behalf of the people. The priests made intercession for the people. But now Jesus has fulfilled any need for blood, He has removed any need for a physical temple. What was once done for us by priests is now done by us.

Our mission as a cooperate body of priests is to reflect the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to reflect His salvation, to be a tangible expression of His love and grace and mercy and forgiveness.

We have been called out of the world, into the house and family of God and this is cause for worship, for praise and adoration, cause for proclaiming the excellencies of Him who called and saved us. That praise should come from our lips and from our lives, with acts of worship and acts of love, being rich in good works deeds.

Filling baby bottles for WCPC, making meals for those with needs, visit the sick and shut in and lonely, praying for each other as a spiritual act of worship and sacrifice, serving one another. Offering ourselves as spiritual sacrifices as a spiritual priesthood.

**Romans 12:1-2** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

If our spiritual sacrifices are going to be acceptable we must be holy, having separated ourselves from darkness, from evil, from sin. And if our sacrifices are going to be acceptable we must treasure Christ, count Him more precious, more treasured than anything in the world.

Consider the darkness you once were in, consider the darkness from which God has delivered you. Why has God called us out of darkness? To proclaim His excellencies. To whom? To those still in darkness. God calls us out of darkness to show us the light and send us back into the darkness with that light. Back to those in bondage to sexual sin, abortion, greed, lies,

deception. If we say nothing how will they hear, how will they know the excellencies of God and of His truth, light, hope, mercy and forgiveness?

### **Implications and Applications.**

We have considered why we are here, because God has chosen us to be a spiritual temple.  
We have considered who we are, a holy and royal priesthood in His temple.  
We have considered what we are called to do, offer spiritual sacrifices.

Who are you? How will you define yourself? How will you answer Satan's lies and accusations that you are worthless, that you are a loser, that you are the sum of all your sins and weaknesses?

Yes, you were chief among sinners, but now you are chief among the recipients of God's grace and mercy. Define yourself as God does and be set free from shame and guilt and condemnation. You are Christ's and He is yours.

Don't let your identity be only externals, where you are from or where you live, what you do, what your titles or accomplishments are, whether you are married or have kids or grandkids.

You are a living stone in the spiritual house of God, you are a holy and royal priesthood, a chosen race, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, who once had no mercy but now have mercy.

**Isaiah 43:1** Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

And in that freedom stand on the cornerstone and make known with your lips and with your lives the excellencies you have experienced of God.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, we come to you and ask you to continue doing your masterful work of transforming our lives. By your Holy Spirit, fit us all together with your other living stones in this place for your glory. May we always cling to you as our Chief Cornerstone, in your name. Amen.