

1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
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, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and
unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
(1 Peter 1:3-5 ESV)*

A Spiritual House
October 14th, 2018
1 Peter 2:4-10
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning church! I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to 1 Peter 2:4; that's on page 1014 in your pew Bibles. We're going to take a pretty simple approach this morning because the passage itself is a little bit complicated. The content isn't complicated – but getting at it is a little bit tricky. This passage is kind of like one of those child safe Tylenol bottles. You have to know the trick about pressing down before turning clockwise in order to get at the medicine that is inside. But once you know that trick then using that bottle and getting at the good stuff it contains is pretty simple. So it is here. There is a bit of a trick to reading and understanding this passage. The trick is that you have to look at the middle part first. In English if you have three points then your main point is usually given last. If the main point is foundational to the entire argument then it is usually given first. But in the Jewish world arguments are often presented holographically – that is to say – with the main point in the middle and the stuff on either side directing attention inward. Once you understand that, then this text is pretty easy to deal with. This text is fundamentally about who Jesus is and what he has done and everything else flows out from there.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 4.

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 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.

6 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.”

7 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,”

8 and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

9 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. 10 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. (1 Peter 2:4–10 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

Jesus Is The Beginning Of A Whole New Thing

Well as I mentioned I think we will understand this text a lot better if we begin by looking at the middle part first. Look at verses 6-8. You can see there that Peter is quoting from several different Old Testament passages that all have to do with a very special type of stone. In the Old Testament there was a stream of prophecy about a time in the future when God would judge the whole leadership structure in Israel – the whole temple complex in Israel. He would GRIND IT DOWN TO THE FOUNDATION and start again. And actually, more than that – not just down to the foundation – but down to ONE SINGLE PRECIOUS STONE in the foundation. Look at verse 6. Peter quotes here from Isaiah 28:16 and he says:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” (1 Peter 2:6 ESV)

God is going to blow the house down – he is going to turn Israel upside down and shake it by the boots – he is going to LEVEL the entire structure and start again. And only those who are connected to the precious corner stone will be survive that judgment and be included in the rebuild that is to follow. That’s what the prophecy said and Peter is saying that Jesus is the fulfilment of that prophecy.

Jesus is the precious cornerstone.

Jesus is that one little piece of Judaism that will survive the judgment of God – upon which the

new structure, the new people, the new program of God will be constructed.

Now where in the world did Peter get an idea like that?

Well of course, he got it from Jesus.

Jesus told a parable once that we know as the Parable of the Wicked Tenants. In the story the people who were originally entrusted with the owner's property tried to steal it. They were corrupt. They were violent and they actually beat up and abused all the messengers that the owner sent in order to try and receive the fruit that he was do – in fact at the climax of the story they even kill the owner's son thinking somehow to take control of all that belonged to the Master. Do you remember how Jesus ended that parable? He ended by asking a question; he said:

When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" 41 They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

43 Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.

44 And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. (Matthew 21:40–45 ESV)

Are you hearing that? Peter heard that! He heard Jesus say that God was DONE with the current leadership of the covenant community. They had had their chance and they squandered it. They abused God's messengers – they will even kill God's Son – so he is going to destroy their and scatter them to the four winds of the earth. He's going to knock the house down and he is going to build a whole new thing upon the precious corner stone of Jesus Christ.

Now hear me well – this is not replacement theology. Replacement theology would be if God said: I am done with Israel – from now on I'm working with the Egyptians. No. That's not what is going on here. God isn't done with Israel. This isn't rejection this is a rebuild. He is tearing the house down to the foundations – to one stone of the foundation – literally to one Jew. Jesus Christ. The Seed of Abraham. The Son of David. The Son of God. He is the precious cornerstone upon which a whole new enterprise will be founded.

That's what Jesus said in the parable. The leaders knew very well what he was saying – and apparently Peter did too. Because right here at the centre of his passage he repeats the climax of Jesus' parable.

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” (1 Peter 2:7 ESV)

The Jews rejected Jesus – like the wicked tenants they murdered him and threw him out of the city thinking to take control of the owner's property for themselves. But Peter knew from first hand experience that this would never work – because Peter saw the Son risen victorious from the dead! In trying to kill the Son they only served to set him on his throne!

I love how Edmund Clowney puts it here, he says:

“Christ is the living Stone however, not just because he is a living person, but because he is alive from the dead as the risen Lord. God set his cornerstone in place by the resurrection.”¹

Isn't that neat?

That's why Peter calls him a Living Stone. He is precious. He is chosen. And he is LIVING – he is RISEN FROM THE DEAD – so this is going to be a very special kind of house because it is being built on a very special kind of stone. This isn't going to be like the old dead stone temple in Jerusalem – this is going to be something alive, something permanent, something eternal.

Jesus is the beginning of a whole new work of God – and having seen that we are ready now to go back to the beginning of the passage. Peter begins to talk about how THAT REALITY changes who we are and what we are called to do.

I mentioned that Hebrew minds tend to think and write holographically – so this content is actually repeated in overlapping ways on either side of the theological centre. You can see this very easily for yourself. Look first at verses 4-5; Peter says:

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices

¹ Edmund Clowney, *The Message Of 1 Peter in The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 84.

acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4–5 ESV)

You see a statement there about identity and purpose. You are THIS to do THAT.

Now look at verse 9 and you will see the same thing. Peter says there on the other side of the theological centre:

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 Peter 2:9 ESV)

Again – you are THIS to do THAT.

So let's look first at what we ARE.

We Are The New Place And People Of God

The first thing we see is that:

1. We are the new temple

That's what Peter says in verses 4-5. He says as we take hold of the foundation stone that is Christ – that living, throbbing, precious heart at the centre of this new building – we too are being built up into a spiritual house. We become part of the structure. Jesus is a living stone – and when we take hold of him WE BECOME LIVING STONES. Peter is saying that Jesus is the new temple – first and foremost – he is the place now where the nations come to meet God – but also in a secondary and derivative sense – WE ARE the new temple. We are the house of God that is a house of prayer for all nations.

Do you remember what Jesus did just before giving that parable of the wicked tenants? He cleansed the temple. He went in and he turned the whole place upside down. And do you remember what he said? Mark gives us the longest version of what he said. He said:

“Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” (Mark 11:17 ESV)

So again – this isn't a total new direction – this isn't a shot out of the blue – this is what the temple of God was always supposed to be! It was never supposed to be JEWISH ONLY. It had become that way because of the wickedness and corruption of the temple leadership. That's why it had to be knocked down. God ground it down to the one precious stone who is Christ and now Peter says – he is building it up with living stones – US – as we come to Christ. God is building a much bigger house because he needs to make room for all the nations.

So as we come to Christ – we become a house of prayer for all nations.

Thanks be to God!

The second thing Peter says is that:

2. We are the chosen people

He says that in verse 9:

But you are a chosen race (1 Peter 2:9 ESV)

The Greek word there translated as “race” is *genos* – it means “family” or “offspring”. This is Peter saying exactly what Paul says in Galatians 3:28-29 when he says:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:28-29 ESV)

Paul and Peter are saying here that those old distinctions of Jew and Gentile have been broken down in the cross of Jesus Christ. Now if you are in Christ then you are something new – something BEYOND Jew and Gentile. You are CHRISTIAN and that is the most honorific title in the world! That means that you are the precious and chosen people of God now! To you – in Christ – belong all the promises, all the blessings and all the assurances. You are the apple of God's eye! Thomas Schreiner says here:

“The church of Jesus is a people now set apart for the Lord, enjoying his special presence and favor”.²

That’s you, brothers and sisters, if you are in Christ. It doesn’t matter where you come from or what colour you are – if you are in Christ – then you are the precious, chosen and beloved people of God.

Hallelujah!

The third thing Peter says here is that:

3. We are a royal priesthood and a holy nation

Again, Peter is applying to the church language that was originally used of Israel. Back in Exodus 19 – at that first ever church service we spoke about last Sunday – God said to the people through Moses:

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ (Exodus 19:3–6 ESV)

So God told the people of Israel that **IF THEY OBEY HIS VOICE AND KEEP HIS COVENANT** then they will be his special people and a kingdom of priests and a holy nation – but of course, we know from having read the Old Testament that they didn’t do that. They didn’t obey God’s voice – they didn’t keep God’s covenant. That’s why Jesus had to come! Not to replace Israel – but to **BE ISRAEL**. Jesus came to do what Israel could never do on its own. He didn’t do that to sideline Israel – he did that to purchase **FOR ISRAEL** and for the nations what Israel was always meant to distribute. Israel was meant to be a conduit of blessings to the nations.

That’s what God said to Abraham back at the beginning: He said:

I will bless you and make your name great, **so that you will be a blessing**. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you **all the families of the earth shall be blessed**. (Genesis 12:2–3 ESV)

God said that he was going to make the family of Abraham a conduit of blessing to the nations.

² Thomas Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude* The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 115.

So now, if you are in Christ – if you are Abraham’s heir through faith - then you are in the blessing distribution business – you are supposed to go to God now on behalf of people – on behalf of all the families of the earth. That’s what it mean to be a kingdom of priests – the word priest means “bridge” – the church is a conduit now for the movement of blessings from God in heaven down to people here on earth.

That’s who we are.

And there are certain activities associated with that identity – we are who we are in order to do certain things.

With Our New Identity Comes New Responsibilities

You can see that in each of the verses that we read. In verse 5 Peter says:

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. (1 Peter 2:5 ESV)

Look also at verse 9:

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 Peter 2:9 ESV)

Do you see that? We are who we are in order to do certain things – 2 things first and foremost.

Number one, we are who we are in order to:

1. Offer spiritual sacrifices to God

Now obviously the word “spiritual” is meant to provide a contrast with the sort of sacrifices offered under the Old Covenant. Back in the Old House of God we offered PHYSICAL sacrifices – we offered the blood of sheep and goats but we don’t do that anymore in the NEW HOUSE OF GOD – that’s the contrast, so what exactly does the Bible mean when it talks about “spiritual sacrifices”?

Well a couple of verses in particular provide very useful context. Romans 12:1 for example says:

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**. (Romans 12:1 ESV)

So a spiritual sacrifice is an offering of the whole person to God. It is giving to God everything that you have and everything that you are. It is to put your life and your whole substance upon the alter. It is to make everything you are and everything you have available to his purposes.

Another verse that is helpful here would be Hebrews 13:15. It says:

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. (Hebrews 13:15 ESV)

So there is a SERVICE component and a WORSHIP component. I love what Edmund Clowney says here about the worship component; he says:

“Praise is more than thanksgiving. Praise not only offers the sacrifices of thanksgiving for God’s deliverance; praise adores God the deliverer.”³

Yes! I like that very much! Praise is about being more than thankful – it is about being GLAD and SATISFIED and OVERWHELMED with the goodness of God.

That is what we are called to – that’s what we’re saved for - and that leads very naturally into the second thing that we are called to.

Peter says that we are who we are in order to:

2. Proclaim the excellencies of Christ

I love the imagery there in verse 9. Peter talks about how God has rescued us. He has called us out of darkness – but he has left us here – within shouting distance of the darkness so that we can proclaim the excellencies of him who called us. So that we can say to the world: COME OUT!

³ Edmund Clowney, *The Message Of 1 Peter* in *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 95.

Come forth! Come unto Jesus and be saved!

Right? That's what a priest DOES! A priest goes back and forth! A priest doesn't just go up the mountain and camp up with God – we talked about this last week! Moses and Aaron were going into the sanctuary and then back out into the lobby to speak with the people. That's being a priest! In and out. Up and then down again.

The only difference is, in the New Covenant – we are all priests. Everyone who is in Christ is a priest. So we go in. We see God. We speak to God. God speaks to us. But we don't camp out – no – we go out. We go out and speak to people. We proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into marvelous light.

That's the rhythm!

Taste and see.

Then go and tell.

That's what you DO because of who you ARE now in Christ.

So, what it would look like for us a church to engage our mission as the Royal Priesthood of God?

Engaging Our New Mission As The Royal Priesthood Of God

I want to leave you with three very practical suggestions. These are for all of us – this is what we need to DO in order to put this teaching into practice. The first thing we need to do is:

1. Come to Christ

Peter says that right off the top:

As you come to him (1 Peter 2:4 ESV)

All this stuff happens AS WE COME TO CHRIST. In Greek it's a present participle – meaning that this isn't something you do just once rather it is something that you do CONTINUALLY. Change, growth and empowerment happen SLOWLY in the Kingdom of God. We grow by one degree of glory to the next so we have to keep on coming. The more we come the more we grow.

Now before you can come continually you have to come initially – so if you haven't done that then obviously you should! You should come right now! Confess your sins, stop trying to earn your own salvation and cling to the cross of Christ. Ask him to give you his righteousness and his Holy Spirit and to begin changing you into the person that you were always meant to be.

Start there – but don't end there! Keep coming! Come every Sunday – come mid-week. Change happens to those who show up. And come privately – come to Jesus in your personal times of prayer and devotion. Come together, come on your own, come as a family – Come. All this happens as we come to Jesus.

2. Get with the program

By that I just mean – understand the plan. Don't be a dumb stone in the house of the Lord. This will be way more fun and you will be way more useful if you understand what you have been caught up in. We've talked about some of this stuff today. You heard Jesus giving his vision for the new temple:

My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations (Mark 11:17 ESV)

Ok – get on that then.

Get some nation people in here to pray. Get your own self in here to pray. If that's the vision – then get on board.

And you heard today that you are now in the blessing distribution business. You go to God on behalf of people. You ask, you receive, you distribute. That's our thing now. So get on board with it! Start asking your friends and neighbours how you can speak to God on their behalf. Ask

God to give you stuff for their blessing and benefit. You need to know what enterprise it is that you are being added into it.

Then lastly:

3. Connect with the nations

If we are going to make this a house of prayer for the nations, if we are going to be a bridge from God to the nations – then obviously we have to maintain a connection to the nations. That's not rocket science – but let's be honest – far too many churches are basically bridges to nowhere. They aren't connected to the nations – they aren't connected to their neighbours. So let's not do that. Let's not be a bridge to nowhere. Let's make connections in the nations so that we can distribute all the blessings we have received through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

That's why we are sending Dr. Craig and Rene to South Africa. They are going to be our BRIDGE HEAD into Africa. That's why we've developed a relationship with Pastor Paul in Chandigar – he's going to be our bridge head into India. That's why we're working with Dr. Miguel in Latin America – these are bridges we are building for the transport of eternal blessings. But the nations aren't just OUT THERE – the nations are right here! We are the nations! I don't imagine Peter could have thought of a single place further away from wherever he wrote this letter than the City of Orillia, Ontario Canada. We are the nations. So how about we invite our neighbours in here? How about we start asking our neighbours what we can say on their behalf when next we come to Jesus?

Try that.

This week ask some citizen of the nations – some resident of Orillia, Ontario Canada – what you can say to God on their behalf when next you come to Jesus.

That's your homework assignment.

And this is your motivation. We'll end where Peter ends. Look at verse 10:

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. (1 Peter 2:10 ESV)

Why are you going to do it? Because Jesus did it for you. He came, he took a risk, he reached out and he spoke to you. He came to you on God's behalf. Now as one who has received mercy – go and extend it to another.

Thanks be to God – let's pray together.