

## *Once You Were Not, But Now You Are*

1 Peter 2:4-10

2/29/16

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My name is PD Mayfield, and I'm Associate Pastor here at Columbia Presbyterian Church, and it is good to be with you. It is good to sing praises to God. And it is good to visibly see God's faithfulness in baptism—to see it placed upon a new child and to remember our own. If you have your Bible with you, please turn to 1 Peter 2. This morning we're going to be looking at verses four through ten. It also will be projected on the screens in front of you.

This section of Peter's letter serves as a culmination of where we've come through so far. It really serves as a summary starting back in chapter one verse thirteen. It's bringing to a close what Peter has said so far, and it's been transitioning into what's to come in the middle section of the letter. Now, if you're familiar with the apostle Paul's letters, he's very notorious to be, you know, he starts out with the big picture: what is true about you? What is true about the gospel? And then he transitions into: and what do you do about it? How do you live your life in light of the gospel?

Peter's method is similar, but he likes to weave together what we are to do and who we are. And here in this passage, we see this section of who we are in Christ. And on the bookends of that passage, what we talked about last week and what we're going to talk about next week is him giving us ways to respond in light of that truth. And what does it mean to be a people in a context that doesn't understand you, at best? And at worst, doesn't want anything to do with you? Peter's letter as a whole—but here in these passages, these verses—Peter's providing clarity to who we are, and gives meaning to what we may experience by bringing our lives in greater focus upon Christ, upon Jesus. So before we read God's Word and discuss its implications, will you pray with me?

Our Father in heaven, we give you praise and thanks to be able to be called to worship you by your Word, to be able to sing of your goodness, to be able to be lifted up in remembrance of how you have called us from darkness to light, how you have transitioned us from being outside your kingdom to being inside your kingdom, from being outside of your covenant and inside your covenant. As we remember your grace shown and your mercy given through your Son Jesus, help us to understand by your Spirit your Word. Give this preacher words to speak, clarity. And would you speak through me in ways that are truthful and points your people to water, to bread, to the very person that gives us life? We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Follow along as I read 2:4-10.

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion,  
a chosen and precious cornerstone,  
and the one who trusts in him  
will never be put to shame.”

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

“The stone the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone,”

and,

“A stone that causes people to stumble  
and a rock that makes them fall.”

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of God stands forever. Amen.

If you’re like me, you may like bumper stickers. I kind of get a kick out of them. My favorites tend to be the funny ones. For example: “If you can read this, you’re driving too close.” I’m usually guilty of that. Or: “Watch out for the idiot behind me.” That category of bumper stickers I really smile when I read those. Bumper stickers are really a small window into the person who’s driving a car that’s in front of you. For example, that person that could be in front of you at the red light, you could learn that they’re a Terps fan. You could learn that they enjoy vacationing on the Eastern Shore, or they would rather be hiking. They show us our political opinions, our musical tastes, and our interests. They say something about who we are, what we like, what we want to be associated with.

This morning’s passage highlights three pictures—bumper stickers, if you will—of what we could describe as the church. Peter’s using these three images to describe a building, a rock, and a people, to describe the corporate collection of the followers of Christ. Now, in your bulletin, if you heard me, I said it a little different. In the week when I submitted my outline, since then I’ve decided to switch it. So take the third point, and that’s going to be now your second point. So we’re going to look at how Peter’s using the imagery of a building, a rock, and a people to describe the followers of Christ.

First, a building. A building has form and function. Designers often swing back and forth between highlighting a form or its function. Sometimes they focus on the aesthetics, focusing on the form over function. Other times designers prefer to highlight utility; they want to highlight the function of that item or the function of that building over its form. But the best design takes both into account. So here in these verses four and five, this picture of a building is not uncommon throughout the rest of Scriptures. Just for examples of where God’s people are described as a building—just a few. Isaiah 6:7; Ephesians 2:20-22; 1 Corinthians 3:9; and Hebrews 3:4-6.

What form does this building take that Peter’s talking about? We see in verse five, look, it says, “You are being built up as a spiritual house.” It’s not just a random building. It’s not a tavern. It’s not a grocery store. It’s a house. And he builds on that imagery by talking about the corporate collection of what Peter calls living stones. These living stones are those who profess faith in Christ. And they’re living stones because he’s making a comparison to Jesus himself as a living stone.

The global church, the church at large, the visible church—CPC as a member of that global church is a collection of people that take on the characteristics of Jesus. Because of his resurrection, focus on him being alive, living. He’s not just some rock that’s inanimate or just at a molecular level mineral. No, it’s a metaphor for him being alive. He’s living. And though we see “rejected by men,” in the sight of God, he is chosen and precious. Likewise, as you are united to Christ in his death and resurrection, you too will be rejected because of your association with Jesus.

This is something he promises to his followers. I don’t know when, I don’t know to what extent. Some Christians experience it in starker, more vivid, more visceral, more tangible circumstances of that

rejection than others. But it is something that is a reality for the church. However, the encouragement is that God use you as he used Jesus. Do you think about that ever? That God used you because of how he views Jesus? In Christ, he chooses you. He chooses you. In Christ, he views you as precious. You are greatly treasured as you profess faith in Christ.

This form of this house, it takes on the imagery of a temple, actually, too. The context of what's going on in the verses around it, but also the original languages, there is this play on a house which takes the form of maybe your home, but also implies the inhabitants of the home. But the flexing of the metaphor that he's using is also making allusions to the temple. This is where it connects the form and the function together.

What's the function of this house? Well, in verse five, again, it says, "The church is to be a holy priesthood." You see, Israel had an entire group of people set aside to be priests. This actually wasn't uncommon to other nations as well. Here, the recipients of this letter in the outskirts of the Roman Empire maybe have never visited Jerusalem, maybe have never read the Old Testament, and yet this language of priesthood would make sense to them. But we see a larger story being told here as well. And knowing from the Old Testament, we see that the priests came from the tribe of Levi. They descended from Aaron, who was Moses' brother.

The priesthood functioned as mediators between God and the people, and they performed the various sacrifices according to the law. They were to embody and exemplify holiness, what it means to have a set-apart and consecrated life, pure in their spiritual, religious, and moral spheres of their lives. They prayed to God on behalf of the people. They performed other duties in the temple associated with the sacrifices—perhaps sacrificing, killing the animals, cleaning, burning incense, talking to people, giving instruction in God's Word—all these things happening around the temple where God dwelled. And they also led the people in the worship of God.

But now in Christ, the priesthood is no longer delegated to a special class within the people of God. Rather, it is the entire corporate body that has been set apart for this task, which moves us to the next idea, which is: what is the task? If the function of the building is to be a holy priesthood, then what we should be doing—the task, verse five, to offer spiritual sacrifices. And not just any sacrifices, but such that is acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Now, Peter does not give specifics of what this looks like, what offering spiritual sacrifices in the details looks like. But we get pictures of this elsewhere. Hebrews 13:15-16 talks about—says this:

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Romans 12:1 says, "I appeal to you, therefore, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. This is your spiritual worship." No longer are we performing animal sacrifices. No longer are we going up to the temple mount to give grain offerings. Those things which were wonderful graces given by the Lord to his people to say something about him, to say something about his holiness, to say something about how we deal with a holy God when we are so unholy—how do we make atonement for our sin? These things God gave as types, shadows, pointers. They were pointing. They were saying, "This is but for a time. There will come a time when these things will be fulfilled, and I will offer up my Son, and he will fill fulfill them. He will accomplish all that the law requires, and he will be a sacrificing atonement. He will be the Lamb for the sins of the world."

So how can we exercise our calling as members of God's spiritual house? How do we be priests to one another and to the watching world? How do we offer up ourselves as spiritual sacrifices? And how are they acceptable? How do we know that they're acceptable? Well, the answers completely and utterly and emphatically depend upon Jesus. They're acceptable through him. We are called to be priests because

of him. We respond with worship because of him. And that little phrase in verse four, “as you come to him,” it flows from last week’s passage.

Have you tasted that the Lord is good? It is out of a loving response to him for his salvation, for his new birth given to you by his Spirit. And now we don’t offer bloody sacrifices anymore; we offer up ourselves, our bodies. Being living stones, we offer living sacrifices. And as you now are alive in Christ, you can give your life away to your family. You can pour yourself out into your projects at work. Now, those things also can be false identities when you’re leaning on those things apart from Christ. But when we are coming to Christ and we are depending upon him, then these are then the avenues which we go from experiencing his grace and mercy in our lives to then pouring them out to the areas of life that God has called us.

This is experienced in corporate worship. Even this morning, through God’s Word as it’s read, as we sing praises to him, as we participate in the sacraments, as we join together in prayer—these are means of experiencing God’s grace, and by which we are transformed. It can be experienced with others in community groups, joining together how he is building you up as a priesthood together. And likewise, it is how we can lean into relationships with those who reject us on account of Christ.

You are not meant to do this by yourself, but together as a corporate collection of others who are members of this house. Do not lose sight of that Peter is talking to the whole church in the plural, which then individuals are members of. The imagery of a house made up of living stones is built upon this house that mentions the temple, as I talked about. Such a house refers to its architectural makeup and the activities within it. And Peter is speaking about who makes up the house and how they are to live in it.

Second image we get from verses six through eight is the image of a rock. Peter is not creating something new here. He is not making a baseless assertion that is separate from what God has been communicating throughout time. What Peter is saying about Jesus, he is saying is actually rooted in the Scriptures. It’s anchored in God’s purposes. In verse six, he references Isaiah 28:16. Verse seven, Psalm 118:22. And in verse eight, Isaiah 8:14 is alluded to. Peter is chaining these verses together, because he’s telling us something. He is telling us something about the unique role that Jesus plays in God’s plans. And namely, he calls him the cornerstone—this rock.

These Scriptures are being fulfilled in Jesus. He is the chosen and precious rock which the entire house is being built. Understanding stonework helps us glean from the metaphor. I’m no mason. I don’t know of any masons, actually, anymore really. But there is a beautiful picture embedded in this imagery. The cornerstone was the foundational rock for the building. It contributed to the soundness of the rest of the building—its integrity. It is where, once you place that cornerstone, it lined the walls up square. It made the vertical walls plumb, which the rest of the building began to rest on, which gave it security and soundness.

But there’s something counterintuitive that’s happening here. By quoting these verses, Peter is drawing our attention of Jesus being this cornerstone. How did men respond to Jesus? Here it says that they rejected him. They regarded him as unworthy, as unfit to be a cornerstone, casting him aside. And this is the counterintuitive nature of what God is communicating through the mystery of the gospel—that Jesus, though rejected by man and deemed unacceptable as a building material, was deemed worthy by God. Even more so, God chose him specifically for the preeminent role of the structure. And upon this rock, he will build his church.

And the fact that the church is being built on Jesus also implies that he is the caller. I think that’s in your outline as well. It’s implied here, but then there’s fuller reference to it in the next section, verses nine and ten. We’ll look at that in a moment.

In 2004, I lived in South Africa for the summer. And I was one of about twenty college students that lived and spent time among students at the University of Pretoria. We spent our days on campus. I

spent all days in what we call dormitories, they call res's, short for residents' hall. And res's are—they're not like res's here. They're actually more akin to what we might know on American university and college campuses as fraternities. There is culture. There are colors. There are words and phrases that they talk to each other. There is hazing—they haze the freshman. The freshman kind of give respect to the upper classmen. And there's a tight-knit group of people who live in this res together.

On one occasion, the other guy that I spent time with—we were—we had a little bit of time left before we needed to head home for the night. And as we were walking by, we noticed that there were some tents near the res that we spent time in. And so we kind of just meandered over and very quickly learned that we were out of place. These tents, you know, there was music playing, there were people there—a lot of people which we recognized, and then a lot of people that we did not recognize. And so we just, you know, do what Americans tend to do, I guess. We just walked in, and we felt out of place. People looked at us strangely. People we knew by name and we had spent weeks together with—they just looked at us and did not say hello, did not come to us at all.

And we just quickly learned what was happening. This was actually alumni gathering for people in the res. And it was an awkward moment. We didn't know what to do. My friend and I, we were just laughing but felt nervous and felt awkward. And we actually considered, like, what do we do here? I mean, we're here. We have our backpacks on. Do we just get everybody's attention and talk to them? I don't know. Well, we didn't. We decided not to do that.

But in reflection upon it, I'm so glad we didn't. Because what was there for my friend and I is this sense of how awkward, how nervous we were, how foolish in the eyes of the students and the alumni, but how important it was for us to remember who is the cornerstone—who is the caller. We could have stood up and talked. We could have shared the gospel to this whole crowd. And that would have been wonderful, and that would have been right to do. But in that moment, God was teaching us something about—that it wasn't upon us to build his church. It wasn't upon us to say something. It was to actually be outcasts in that moment, and to realize that God is sovereign over all these people, that he is the cornerstone.

And here in these verses, Peter is talking about eternal destinies hinging on peoples' response to Jesus. And our eternal destinies are rooted in our allegiance and our association with Jesus. That's what this passage is about. I keep ringing and coming back to it. And it comes down to the claims of Jesus himself. These claims must be explored for yourself. Come to the Word. Read the Gospel of John. Truly to understand the gospel is to actually ask the question, "Well, what is Christianity? Who is Jesus? What does he claim to be? What has he done? What has he accomplished?"

These claims, as you explore them, you will come to see and be challenged that Jesus presents himself as fully God and fully man, that he is the Christ—which is a kingly term. It's not his last name. It's saying something—that he is the rightful heir of the throne of David. He is to be king over Israel. But he is more than the anointed king. He is the suffering servant who took on the wrath of God to atone for the sins of the world. He was also raised from the dead, and even now sits at the right hand of God, that through him—through Jesus, through this rock—God is redeeming and restoring all things. The experienced result of honor and shame that Peter is talking about here is talking about the future, in the end. And it hinges on our relationship to this Rock. Who is the Cornerstone of this building? And it is a work of the Spirit to bring you to a place to believe this.

So whether you identify as a Christian already—maybe for some time, maybe for years, maybe for decades—or you consider you're spiritual but not religious; maybe these claims of Christ seem unbelievable, too amazing to be true, or outright false. Perhaps you don't identify as a Christian at all. The same invitation of the gospel is for all, and it is: come to him. Come to Jesus. See him as the Rock. John 10:27, this is what Jesus says: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

So the question for us out of this section is: do we acknowledge his role as the cornerstone? Are we trusting our place in the house based upon Jesus alone, or something else? Do we find him a stumbling block, something to trip over, or maybe even just to be offended by? The gospel says he will be both. To those who believe, he is fresh air. He is breath of life. To those who don't believe, he's a crazy man. He's a holy terror. He's immoral. But my question to you, my encouragement, my exhortation is don't let your questions go unexplored. If you are a Christian, pursue ways to grow. If you are not a Christian, I invite you to consider the claims of Jesus Christ, considering who he is and what he claims to accomplish.

This last image that Peter gives is the image of a people, verses nine through ten. And here he's talking about both, together, a story and a purpose. Verses nine: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession." Where is he getting this from? He's not getting it from anywhere. It's actually more Old Testament. This is from Exodus 19. This is before God gives his Ten Commandments. This is after being delivered out of Egypt, out of the bonds of their slavery. We see God's mercy to his people even before they were a people—they were just a collection of people who were enslaved, abused, exploited. And yet God heard their cries and delivered them and brought them out, and then he constituted them a people.

And that's coming right out of Exodus 19 right here. He's telling them about their story, where they come from. What has God done in their lives? Where are you going? This story that is being shared throughout all time is culminating in Jesus Christ, for the Jew first and for the Gentile, together. God is making his church. And we have a story. We have pasts. We have presents. We have a future.

So what is your story? That's what's beautiful about verse ten. Everybody at some point comes to a place where we experience new birth in Christ. 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. Do you remember what it was like before receiving mercy? Do you remember what it was like before being a part of the people of God? Now, as we even look this morning with the baptism, the beauty of the church is that Sophia prayerfully will never know a time—but she still has to claim it. She has to come to a place where she believes it herself, as do us all.

And he uses this metaphor of this transition from death to life, from darkness to light. I was at the eye doctor this past week. And while my eyes were being dilated and I was going from clear vision to blurry vision, and I need to close my eyes, I was looking up on the wall. And in the certificates of all the ophthalmologists was this Latin phrase: "Ex obscuris lux." From dark, light.

What a beautiful picture of what ophthalmology is—going from darkness to light, from blindness to sight. That is what new birth in Christ is. It's going from death to life. It's going from darkness to light. And this is God's work in your life, that you can say, "How marvelous is it that I can see? I could not see with my own eyes. I had to be given sight." That is the mercy of God. It is recognizing that apart from him, you would remain in the darkness. And yet he comes to you. He draws near, and he shows himself to be true, and to be good, and to be beautiful, to be kind, to be merciful.

Peter is writing to a people who are marginalized. They're experiencing hostility merely for their belief in Jesus. And being in that context, those experiences can be demoralizing. They can be frustrating. They can be fatiguing and worrisome. People do crazy things when we're afraid, when we're worried, when our sense of security is being rocked and challenged and threatened. But Peter is reminding them of their salvation, reminding them that they profess Jesus. And as he's calling them to a life of love, as he's calling us to a life of love, it's on that basis that when we taste that the Lord is good, it begins to change how we see things, how we order our lives, how we see our purpose in the world. It orients ourselves away from self and directs us to God and directs us to the things that God sees and pays attention to.

I opened with bumper stickers, and I might close with one as well. You may have seen it. Maybe you've seen it on a highway. What do you do internally when you see the bumper sticker "Jesus saves"? Novelist Frederick Buechner wrote years ago about the effect of seeing those words, "Jesus saves." Those

words cause many of us, he said, to wince with embarrassment at the old-time religion of sawdust trails and alter calls. Just as a side note, for many people, they don't even recognize those phrases, either. But there's more: "There is something in the name 'Jesus' itself that embarrasses us when it stands naked and alone like that, just Jesus with no title to soften the blow." The author of this book says:

When I first read those words, I silently argued with the author in my mind. After all, the titles "Lord" and "Christ" hardly soften any blow. The word Christ means kingly anointing, a title so scandalous that it took courage and revelation from Simon Peter to confess it in one of the defining moments of the Bible.

He's speaking of Matthew 16 when Jesus says, "Peter, who do you say that I am?" And Peter confesses that, "You are the Christ."

Buechner convinced me when he wrote: "It seems to me the words 'Christ Saves' would not bother us half so much, because they have a kind of objective, theological ring to them, whereas 'Jesus Saves' seems cringingly, painfully personal—somebody named Jesus of all names, saving somebody named whatever your name happens to be.

[*Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel* by Russell D. Moore]

Peter is reminding them that Jesus saves. He's reminding us that Jesus saves. There is a response to that—it's our worship. It is giving our lives to God and to others. It is loving others. Now, Randy's going to be speaking about his more next week with the next set of passages. There's things to do in response. What do we believe? How do we live in response? These things are being woven together in Jesus Christ. His church bears the marks and shares in the identity of Jesus himself. We share in how God views Jesus—chosen and precious. Those who believe in Jesus are likewise chosen and precious.

We are a house with form and function, with purpose to be priests. Our very lives are not sacrifices to earn God's favor but to be a sacrifice to God as our worship, accepted and acceptable through Jesus. And Jesus is this rock. The people of God are all who confess his name and believe, experiencing his salvation and united to him. On the basis of this rock, we become a people identified, a people with culture, a people with a history, with practices, a way of living—all the while proclaiming his excellencies, proclaiming with our words praises to him for what he has done, his actions, his deeds, his goodness—to each other and to the watching world. May we reflect all that Christ is by coming to him. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we give you praise and thanks from our lips. May it be true upon our hearts. May we proclaim your excellencies, that we would share our stories and retell time and time again of your salvation in our lives, that we would remind ourselves what you have accomplished, what you have done for us, that that would also be the basis of how we share to others, to our neighbor, to the next generation, of those excellencies. May we as your people be marked by your love. May we be joined to you. May you be our rock and our cornerstone. In Jesus' name. Amen.