

Main Idea: According to 1 Peter 2:4-10, there are 2 distinct groups of people in the world. There's something very special about one of these groups. We'll understand what's so special and why.

- I. Group #1: Those Who Follow Christ (4-6, 9-10)
 - A. What is our Identity?
 1. We are Stones (5).
 2. We are Priests (5, 9).
 3. We are Family (9).
 4. We are Citizens of a Kingdom (9-10).
 - B. What is our Purpose?
 1. To Offer Sacrifices (5)
 2. To Advertise (9)
- II. Group #2: Those Who Reject Christ (7-8)

Three days ago we observed Thanksgiving. We have so much for which to express our thanks to the Lord. This morning we looked at Psalm 32 and were reminded of our need to give thanks for God's forgiveness. This evening we're going to consider another amazing blessing for which we should continually be expressing appreciation to the Lord. I want to talk this evening about *giving thanks for the church*.

When was the last time you got excited about something? This evening, we're going to explore a topic that God says ought to bring us great excitement.

Let's turn to 1 Peter 2. One of the greatest blessings in our lives is the undeserved privilege we have to belong to, enjoy the benefits of, and serve in *the church*. I am excited about the church. We all ought to be excited about the church, but the reality is, we can begin to take this blessing, as other blessings, for granted. So we're going to think about the blessing of the church tonight.

When Peter wrote this letter, the church was under attack. At first subtly, then overtly. It was not easy to be a Christian in A.D. 63. It's not easy today either. There's antagonism towards the Lord and His people.

To appreciate the good news about the church we need to do as Peter did, take a careful look at two groups of people in the world. The dividing line between the two groups is a Person, the One Peter describes in v 4.

V 4 "To Whom, coming as unto a living stone..."

Q: Who is the Living Stone?

Peter says He is the One that was disallowed of men, but chosen of God. Who is that? That is none other than the King of kings, the Creator of the Universe, Jesus Christ.

We must ask, "Who is Jesus Christ?" Peter tells us He is a Stone. You say, "I don't get it. Why does He call Jesus a stone?" For a couple of reasons. First, it's a metaphor. The Bible does that a lot. God uses common things to illustrate beautiful spiritual truths. Jesus is called a Shepherd, a Vine, a Lion, a Seed, and even a Lamb. Those are metaphors. In v 3 Peter likens Jesus to food. In v 4, to a stone.

¹ Adapted from message given at WBC on 9/8/03 PM and on 5/9/93

Secondly, "Stone" is pregnant with OT significance. There's a rich "stone theology" in the OT which Peter assumes we know. We read of the Stumbling stone in Isa 8:14, the Foundation stone in Isa 28:16, the parental rock in Isa 51:1, the rejected building stone of Ps 118:22, the Supernatural stone of Dan 2:34. "Stone" was a Messianic title for the Jews. In the following verses Peter will quote several "stone" texts from the OT.

So Jesus is like a Stone. Quickly, notice 4 things Peter tells us about Jesus:

1. He is a Living Stone (because He was raised from the dead).
2. He was a Rejected Stone.

In 1:10 "He came to His own, and His own received Him not. Why not? Jesus was not the kind of Messiah they were expecting. So He was rejected by men.

3. He is a Chosen Stone.

Chosen by Whom? By God! The world rejected Jesus. God exalted Jesus.

4. He is a Precious Stone. We'll see this word again in a moment.

Here's the point. Every human being falls into one of two categories. And it all has to do with what a person has done with Jesus Christ. To help us appreciate the church, let's look at what Peter has to say about these two groups.

I. Group #1: Those Who Follow Christ (4-6, 9-10)

V 4 "As you come to Him"

Here's group #1. Those who have come to Jesus. The verb "come" is present tense, indicating attraction to Jesus is a pattern of life for these people.

How does a person become a Christian. It's very simple. By coming to the Rock, Jesus Christ. How does a person live the Christian life? The same way. By coming to Christ. By living in constant dependence upon the Lord Jesus.

Now watch this. This is exciting. People who come to Jesus, people who follow Christ, have a special identity.

Remember, Peter's readers were undergoing an Identity crisis. As Christians, society called them the scum of the earth, and a menace to enlightened society. They were ridiculed and slandered. Do you know what they needed? To be reminded of their true identity.

A. What is our Identity?

Peter identifies us with 7 metaphorical phrases. We can lump them into 4 groups.

1. We are Stones (5).

V 5 "Ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house"

Did you see the connection? Who is THE Stone in v 4? Jesus Christ. He is the Living Stone. Who are living stones in v 5? We are.

Notice the passive verb. "You ARE BEING BUILT into a spiritual house." Who is building this house? Jesus Christ.

No doubt Peter had in mind a conversation he had had with Jesus years before.

Mt 16:15-16 "And Simon Peter answered, Thou art the Christ..."

Mt 16:18 "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church."

In the next 35 years, Peter says, that's exactly what Jesus did. Jesus is building His church. YOU are living stones. YOU are a spiritual house.

Think about that. I like the way Wiersbe put it, "Each time someone trusts Christ, another stone is quarried out of the pit of sin and cemented by grace into the building." (401)

You say, "It doesn't look like God's building program is going too well. I don't think the church is very attractive." True, the church isn't perfect. But never forget this. Our perspective is limited. To us the church may look like a pile of rubble and ruins. But not to God. It's a spiritual house. The Church is people, not a building. And the Church is the Residence of God. He lives in His people.

Application: Notice something very important. In v 5, "stones" is plural, but "house" is singular. Peter wrote to believers living in 5 provinces, yet he said they belonged to "one spiritual house." Friends, the Church is a community. As an individual Christian, you'll never prosper until you find your place in the spiritual house. We need each other. There's no such thing as a "free-lance" Christian (Cranfield, 195).

There's little value in a pile of bricks. When a brick lies by itself, it's useless. But when you take that brick and insert it into the building...

2. *We are Priests* (5, 9).

V 5 "Ye also...an holy priesthood"

V 9 "But you are a royal priesthood"

One of the great doctrines that the Protestant Reformation clarified is known as the Priesthood of Believers. The Word says we are a "holy priesthood."

What does it mean to be a priest? What does a priest do? A priest is a mediator. A priest is a person who has immediate access to God. A priest is an individual who brings others to God.

Are you a priest? What does v 5 say? If you are a Christian, you are a priest. In the OT, God's people HAD a priesthood. But today, God's people ARE a priesthood.

Do you know what that means? We need no other Mediator than Christ in order to have access to God.

Heb 4:16

Rev 1:5-6

Are you living like a priest? The Latin word for priest is "pontifex." The word means "bridge-builder." A priest is a person who builds bridges for others to come to God.

Illust:

We'll come back to v 5 in a minute. But notice thirdly about our identity.

3. *We are Family* (9).

V 9 "But you are a chosen people [KJV 'generation']"

The church is a body. It's also a family. The word "generation" is a term that means "family" or "offspring." We are a chosen generation.

God said of Israel in Isa 43:21, "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." God chose Israel. But listen. Peter says that God also chose us. He chose us to be part of His family. Jesus said in Jn 15:16, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you." (NIV)

Please understand something. According to v 4, Christians are people who have come to Jesus. But how and why did we come to Jesus? According to 1:15, we came because God called us. According to v 9, we came because God chose us. And why did He choose us? V 10 says it was because of God's mercy.

That's our Identity. We are Stones, Priests, and a Family.

4. We are Citizens of a Kingdom (9-10).

Vv 9-10 "...a holy nation, a people of His own...the people of God"

The word "holy" means "different, distinct." God is holy. As followers of Jesus, we are both declared holy and commanded to be holy. We are a "holy" nation.

We won't go into detail about this, but listen. The Church is LIKE Israel, but she is not Israel. The Church is called to perform many of the same functions as Israel, but the Church did not replace Israel in God's redemptive program. God has a special, future plan for Israel.

Having said that, know this. As members of Christ's spiritual house, we are citizens of a kingdom. We are a holy nation. We are a peculiar people.

You say, "Why? What difference does this identity make?"

Key: Our Identity is linked to our purpose.

B. What is our Purpose?

We are stones, priests, a family, and citizens of a kingdom. But what are we to do? Peter lays out 2 privileged tasks, one tucked away in v 5, the other in v 9.

1. To Offer Sacrifices (5)

V 5 "TO offer up spiritual sacrifices to God by Jesus Christ"

In the OT, the priests of Israel offered animal sacrifices to God. We have the privilege of offering spiritual sacrifices, that is, sacrifices "pertaining to the Spirit." We live in the age of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit resides in His spiritual edifice.

What kind of sacrifices does God want us to offer? Here are a few...

-He wants us to offer our bodies (Rom 12:1-2).

-He wants us to offer our worship (Heb 13:15).

-He wants us to offer our money and do kind deeds (Heb 13:16).

-Even people we win to Christ are spiritual sacrifices (Rom 15:16).

Illust:

2. To Advertise (9)

V 9 "THAT you may declare the praises of Him [KJV 'should show forth praises']..."

The verb "show forth" = "to tell out; to advertise" We are called to be living advertisements.

What are we to advertise? V 9 "the praises of Him who called you out of darkness..."

How well are you "advertising" God in your life?

Illust: Story of Aaron Johnson in Colson, The Body (368)

Do you see why we have reason to be excited about the Church?! The Church has a great identity: We are living stones who are linked to Christ and to one another. We are priests who have direct access to God. We are members of the Family, the Family of God. And we are citizens of a great Kingdom, Jesus Christ Himself being our Master and Lord. That's our Identity. What's more, we've been given a marvelous purpose: To offer sacrifices to God, and to advertise the praises of our God.

Do you know what makes a church attractive? A church is attractive when its people get a handle on their Identity and Purpose. That kind of church will impact a community for Christ. That kind of church will please the Master Builder.

Illust:

I said earlier that there are 2 groups of people in the world. The first group are those people who are followers of Jesus Christ. But not everyone follows Christ. As we look at the second group, we're being reminded of what we were and still would be apart from God's grace.

II. Group #2: Those Who Reject Christ (7-8)

Peter quotes from the OT (Is 28:16; Ps 118:22; Is 8:14)...

Vv 6-7 "Wherefore...I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone..."

Peter applies this quote to Christ.

I read about one ancient stone in a quarry that was 69' by 12' by 13'. That huge rock was positioned as the foundation stone. Once that cornerstone was in place, the rest of the building took shape.

Christ is the Cornerstone, the Chief Cornerstone, the elect and precious stone.

Remember we said there are 2 groups in the world? Notice the 2 responses to Christ:

1. Unto you who believe He is precious (7), but...
2. Unto them who are disobedient (7)

To some people in the world, Christ is precious. He is highly valued. They trust Him as Savior and Lord. They live for Him. But to others, Christ is 2 things:

--"a stone of stumbling"

--"a rock of offense" (= "scandal")

What's the problem of those who reject Christ? V 8 "stumble at the word"

I Cor 2:18 "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness..."

II Cor 4:3-4 "But if our gospel be hidden, it is hidden to them that are lost. In whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of them who believe not..."

II Cor 3:14 "But their minds were blinded..."

Why did people reject Jesus 2000 years ago? The same reason people reject Him today. They are blinded by their pride and self-sufficiency. We are all born that way. Until what happens? V 10 "Who in time past were not a people...but now have obtained mercy"

Notice those powerful words of contrast: "WERE...NOW..."

Do you know what's tragic? It's this. As followers of Christ, we so soon forget what we WERE. As time passes, we become ungrateful, complacent, and even a little proud. We may even start to look down our noses at "sinners," forgetting that but for the grace of God, there go I. God help us.

Illust:

Conclusion: Friends, we are a blessed people. Let's give thanks this evening for Christ. And let's give thanks to Christ for His church and the great privilege to belong to it.

Communion