

## Sermon – 1 PETER 2:4-10, Leroy Coote 14<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Well, here we are in a hopefully brief stage 4 lockdown of 5 days here in Victoria, Australia due to a COVID outbreak in one of the hotel quarantine centres. Prior to this, we were developing some momentum in being able to meet together physically which was becoming a good and positive experience to those who were present. However, hopefully for this week only, we are meeting online. We give thanks to God that he has enabled us to meet online.

Why? Because we are told in our passage for today that we are precious to him. We are precious to him not just as individuals but together as God's people. Why are we precious to him? Let me give you some reasons from the first two sections of 1 Peter that we have looked at.

**Reason 1:** We have been chosen by God to experience a new birth into a living hope that provides an inheritance that will never perish, spoil or fade.

**Reason 2:** In response to being chosen by God, we are called to live holy lives that are pleasing to God.

Living holy lives is not just about doing good works. It is also about deepening our relationship with God. As Peter is writing this letter to a group of Christians who have been displaced, he assures them that they are precious in the sight of God – much like Christians in Victoria. This will become clear as we go through this passage. I'm going to look at this passage under three headings:

- The precious person to God's people from verses 4 to the first line of verse 7 and how we are to respond to him.
- What happens when you don't go his way? The rest of verse 7 and 8.
- The specialness of God's people in verses 9 and 10.

By the end of today, what will be very clear from this passage is how special the church is to God and to Peter. But not only that, how we show that we are God's church is also clearly spelt out and I pray that when we leave our time together each Sunday that we will continue to be God's church from Monday to Saturday.

### **1. So, let us start by looking at this precious person to God's people.**

This precious person is revealed to us in verse 4 of our reading and we are told that we are to draw near to him or come to him. But who is the "him" of verse 4? The passage tells us that this person is a living stone who was rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to Him. Who was rejected by Humans? The answer was Jesus. Jesus is the living stone according to what Peter says in this passage. But then we are told by Peter that we, as God's people, are like living stones. This leads me to the question of: why are we like living stones?

The reason I believe is found back in verse 4 because we are also chosen by God and precious to Him. This is awesome and comforting to know from. Why? Because in the wider context of the earlier sections of 1 Peter, we have these wonderful phrases.

In Verse 1, we have this, *“To God’s elect, <sup>2</sup> who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit,”*

Because of God’s work in our lives, we worship Him 24/7. God has brought us to him through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and that work of the Spirit does not stop in our lives until we leave this earth. Isn’t it a precious gift that God’s spirit is at work in our lives so that we can grow to be the people of God in the image of Jesus? And because of the work of the Spirit in our lives --- this happened.

Listen to these words 1 Peter Chapter 1 verse 21, *“Through Jesus you believe in God, who raised Jesus from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.”*

God’s spirit working in us points us in the direction of believing in Jesus. But not only that, he points us towards living holy lives. All of this because we have been chosen by God and as this passage says, because we are chosen, we are precious to Him. Isn’t that wonderful to hear? Because we are living stones chosen by God and shaped by his Spirit, we are told that we are being built into a spiritual house as mentioned in verse 5. The best description of a spiritual house in the Bible is the church, not a building but the people of God. The biblical definition of the content of the church is the people of God who live holy lives.

The people of God come together to celebrate what God has done in their lives and that’s why we partake in the Lord’s Supper because it is a celebration of what God has done for us through Jesus. But we are built into a spiritual house so that we are a holy priesthood. When I mention the word priesthood, there would be some thinking of people who wear white collars and in some parishes – robes. However, the concept of priesthood comes from the Old Testament. Let me explain the role of the priest briefly.

In the Old Testament, the primary function of a priest is to assist people in being in *union* with Him. The priest does this through being a mediator between God and people and through being a teacher of a way of life that improves upon the reconciliation established at the beginning of the relationship. His main act of mediation is to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people and also absolves sins on behalf of the people as well.

However, in the New Testament this changes because Jesus is the mediator between us and God in terms of our relationship with him. The passage tells us that we are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. And what do we do as a holy priesthood who is set apart for God? We offer acceptable sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. This means that Christ is our priest, our mediator and teacher. It also means that believers in Christ are mediators between non-Christians and God.

But what then do these spiritual sacrifices look like? These are expressions of obedience to Christ as spelt out in the gospels that Jesus taught because these sacrifices are to be done through Jesus Christ. When offering a spiritual sacrifice, we need to ask the question – would Jesus do this and would this be acceptable to Jesus? And if the spiritual sacrifice is acceptable to Jesus, then there is great reward. Look at verse 6 and the first part of verse 7.

*"<sup>6</sup> 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."<sup>7</sup> Now to you who believe, this stone is precious"*

This Old Testament reading, especially the phrase "a chosen and precious cornerstone", is fulfilled in the arrival of Jesus onto earth. By definition, the cornerstone is the first stone laid as the corner of a building's foundation and everything else is built around it. This stone arrived in Zion, the special place of Old Testament believers.

But by believing in this precious cornerstone we will never be put to shame which means that there will be no ultimate disappointment or embarrassment for those who trust in the sure cornerstone of Christ himself. And that is why those who believe, believe that this stone is precious in their lives. Therefore, to those who believe in or, place their trust in, Christ believe that Jesus is precious to them. I hope and pray that he is precious to all of you listening online, because if you do, there is great reward only if you believe in Jesus.

But what if you don't believe?

## **2. The results of this behaviour and its content is found in the rest of verse 7 and in verse 8.**

*But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"<sup>8</sup> and, "A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for."*

There is shame in stumbling. In the culture that this was written in, if you stumbled, there would be shame and embarrassment because the society of the time expected you to walk along the road proudly displaying who you are. But the passage suggests that the reason the stumble occurred, was because they did not follow God. There are a number of reasons in this passage for people not to stumble. In the middle of verse 7, we are told that there are those who do not believe. This is not acceptable to God.

God calls his believers to live acceptable lives for him in order to represent him in the world today. What do those who do not believe do? They reject Jesus. This is behind the line of "the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." Jesus was rejected by the physical builders of the temple because they thought the cornerstone of the building was to be made of stone or a man-made object. However, what Peter is talking about here as the cornerstone is Jesus.

This is consistent with what was mentioned in verse 6 as Peter talks about God laying down his chosen and precious cornerstone in Zion who was Jesus, which he did for believers in Christ. But this stone called Jesus caused people to stumble. How so? They didn't believe in Jesus and when they went their own way, they stumbled because they did not do what God desired for them. But fundamentally, they stumble because they reject the stone Jesus. Therefore, by rejecting Jesus they end up stumbling around because there is no clear direction in their lives. Not only do they stumble but they end up falling as well because of their continued rejection of Jesus.

The rock is God who will make them fall because a rock is bigger than a stone and the rock will make the unbeliever fall as opposed to the stone who will make them stumble. The reason they stumble is that they disobeyed Jesus' message and that according to verse 8 is the inevitable result of disobedience to God. When there is obedience to God, there is blessing for God's people. When

people do their own thing or acts that are not obedient to God, they stumble and fall. Which church do you want to be a part of? An obedient church that is seen as precious to God which contains people who place their trust in Christ or...

A disobedient church that stumbles and falls? I know which church I would like to pastor.

**3. I believe Peter has a similar answer, and that is the one that believes in Jesus because they are considered special by God. This is found in verses 9 and 10.**

*<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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."*

We are special because as God's church; we are his chosen people, we are a royal priesthood which means that we offer spiritual sacrifices as we serve a King – Jesus, we are a holy nation which is characterised by living out what the Bible teaches as that is central to the life of the church and we are God's special possession. But we are all these things for a purpose.

That purpose is to declare the praises of God. Why? Because he calls us out of the darkness of sin into his wonderful light. We are special because we have been transformed by God from out of darkness into his marvellous light. But not only that, we were not a people of God but are now a people of God. And at one point, we had not received God's mercy but now have received his mercy.

Therefore, it is safe to say that the church is to be shaped by God, made by God and transformed by God to offer spiritual sacrifices to God, which is our lives. If we are genuine believers in Christ, then we are part of the church which is special to God because the church is the people of God - not a building. If there are people who don't believe watching, then I would love to talk to you about becoming a believer in Christ. As a result of this, let us place our trust in Christ, the living stone, not just to avoid stumbling but to offer spiritual sacrifices to God because that way – we display how special God is to his church – that is as people who believe in him.