

Unlocking Freedom: “1 Peter: Hope in a Foreign Land”

Sermon preached by Chris Lofquist

January 26, 2020

Introduction

As you open your Bibles to **1 Peter chapter 2**, I would like to remind you where Peter has turned his attention at the onset of this chapter. Peter is writing to a Church in exile, a group of Gentile and Jewish believers that are at the beginning of some very harsh persecution, and because of that, they are a Church without a home. And yet, in the midst of all of that, Peter encourages them to keep their focus on Christ and develop a consistent relationship and love for His Word. We were challenged to evaluate our priorities and determine where our relationship with the Word of God stacks up. Our challenges in life are different than this early Church – we in America are not under that intense persecution, that may lead to doubt and anger toward God, however, we face the challenge of comfort and busyness. So, although the lifestyles and circumstances are different we are faced with the same question – **Is God’s Word central in our lives?** Do we make time for a sincere reading of God’s Word, or are we simply rushing through life without turning much attention to it? *“Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.” (v. 2, 3)*

In order to long for the pure milk of the Word, we must make time for it. We do this in life already. **Illustration:** How many of you have stuck to a diet for one reason or another and now your body craves for healthy foods above unhealthy foods. And when you drink soda or eat a donut, it doesn’t have the same taste! Or perhaps you are a jogger, and your body has benefited so much from healthy exercise that when you skip a day your body lets you know. In those instances, we have trained our bodies to long for healthy foods and exercise – we have reprogrammed our minds to look at menu’s differently, and to track the weather because it will impact our morning jog – we can do the same thing when it comes to disciplining our bodies and minds to begin each day or end each night in the careful reading of God’s Word. And when we miss it, our minds our bodies long for it. This is the intense desire that Peter tells us to pursue in relation to God’s Word, for by it you may grow in your faith. Strong faith, strengthened by God’s Word, will become the sail that pulls you through the trials, temptations, failures, and difficulties of life. And it will impact all those around you, to the glory of God.

This is what Peter challenged us with last week. And this morning, although he changes the illustration from *newborn babies and milk* to *living stones and priests*, the lesson is similar. **Big Idea:** **We, as believers, are to build our lives upon the living stone, that is Jesus Christ, by keeping our relationship with Him central in all that we do.** It is the cry of Peter! Will we hear it?

Please open your Bibles to **1 Peter chapter 2 verse 4**.

Read **1 Peter 2:4-5**. *Open in Prayer.*

1. **We keep Christ central in our lives by coming to Him daily.** (v. 4)
“*And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God.*”

Peter begins this verse by using the word “*and*”. This is a ‘connecting’ word. He is connecting verses 2 and 3 with 4. When he speaks about *coming to Jesus*, he is reminding us that the main way in which we are to do so, is by drinking in the Word of God. Let me read the sentences for you, so that you can get the flow of what Peter is saying... “*Like newborn babies.. long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. And coming to Him...*”

This is a word of action, that requires moving somewhere. When I say, ‘*come here*’, I am asking you to get up or begin to move in my direction until you arrive in my presence. Therefore, when Peter says ‘*coming to Him*’, he is telling us that we are to move from where we are to where Jesus is. And we are to do this by going to Christ through reading the Word of God and through prayer - and we will see in verse 5, also through our service. When we do so, our minds will be replaced with the perspectives of Christ. Our attitudes will be exchanged with the attitudes of Christ. Our behaviors and speech will be superseded with the behaviors and speech of Christ. We will become more like Him – *but it is your move*. Peter, through inspiration of the Holy Spirit, reminds us that we are to move, and I would add that Christ already came to you as Savior – belief in Him and growing more like Him is a move that you must make.

This word ‘*coming*’ is also an interesting word – it is the word ‘*proserkomai*’ and it is a combination of two words – *pros* which is a prefix that adds intensity to the verb that follows. And *erkomai* which means to leave one area in order to go to another. So this word that Peter uses to express our *coming to Jesus*, implies an intensity, a purposeful change of direction, and perhaps even sacrifice as we leave one location (perhaps a location that brings comfort or a location that we rather enjoy, leading us to giving up something, leaving something behind) in order to be where Christ is. This requires action, perhaps a change of priorities, and most definitely a change of purpose. And when we come to Christ, there is much benefit. Listen to these verses that speak of those who come to Christ. “**Come to Me**, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matt. 11:28, 29). Coming to Christ brings peace to a troubled and tired soul – for we exchange our doubts and discouragement for His perspective and faith. “**I am the bread** of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.” (John 6:35). There is much benefit to making the choice to come to Christ, instead of bearing the burdens of doubt, worry, and difficulty yourself. And you do this through prayer and reading the Word of God.

Well, Peter spoke more than four words in **verse 4**, so let’s continue on with how Peter describes Christ, the One whom we are to come to. “*And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men but is choice and precious in the sight of God.*”

Peter describes Christ in a way that Jesus described Himself in an earlier parable. As a living stone rejected by men but precious in the sight of God. **Matthew 21:33-42** – Jesus tells a parable about a landowner of a vineyard who while away on a journey rented out his vineyard to vine-growers. When the harvest approached he sent one representative after another to receive his produce. One after another, the employees were beaten by these rogue vine-growers. Then the landowner said, *“They will respect my son.”* So he sent his very own son to gather the fruits of his land, for it was his to collect – and the rogue vine-growers took his son and killed him saying, *“This is the heir, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.”* Jesus in this parable was implying that He was the Son of God sent to gather the fruits of their labor, whom would be killed by the very ones He was sent too. Peter is remembering these words of Jesus, and the events of the crucifixion when he writes that this *“Living stone has been rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of the Lord.”* What a wonderful reminder of God’s enduring love, grace and mercy toward us, sinful man. But after reading this, I wonder what is Peter’s point? Why would he say this? I think it has to do with Peter knowing his audience intimately. He understood that they were experiencing and would continue to experience persecution based upon the rejection of Christ and hatred for His Word within the world. And I believe he wanted to encourage them by reminding them that Jesus too was hated, to the point of being murdered, and yet even in the midst of the hatred that humanity flung His way, in the sight of God, He was chosen for this very reason and was precious. Peter is telling them to remember that they too are chosen by God and precious in His sight, even when they are hated and rejected by man – for you too are living stones.

Therefore, do not lose your focus on Christ, when you are feeling the rejection of man. Do not lose faith in God’s purposes and plans for your life - but trust even more in God, and know that you are precious in His sight. And continue to ‘come to Him’ for strength, wisdom, grace, and hope each and every day of your life.

Let’s continue on to our next observation found in verse 5, concerning keeping Christ central in our lives.

2. We keep Christ central in our lives by building our lives upon service to God. (v. 5)

“You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

There is great purpose to your life. You have been saved for a reason, and that is to share in the eternal life of Christ acting as a holy priesthood, offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus.

Peter tells us that we too are living stones, being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood. What does this mean? Well, let’s break it down phrase by phrase.

“You also, as living stones...” As a result to coming to Christ, the living stone, in salvation, we now share in both the eternal life Christ offers and also the life He desires us to live alongside of Him in this world. So, we too are living stones built upon Christ

the chief cornerstone. This metaphor also points to the fact that we are to be ‘alive or lively’ (*zoe*) followers of Christ, bearing fruit and seeking to impact the world to the Glory of God and the salvation of the lost. We are living stones pointing all others to Christ, the Chief Cornerstone.

And with Christ as our Chief cornerstone, we together, are ‘*being built up as a spiritual house*’. This thought that Peter expresses points to the fact that God is building His Church. And it is by the Church that true worship is expressed. God no longer dwells in a Temple found in the heart of Jerusalem. For He dwells within each believer. Those who have come to Christ in salvation, are now the spiritual house. What a thought? God is the builder, and He is putting all of us in place, exactly where He desires, integrating us with each other and with Christ. **Ephesians 2:19-22** says, “*So you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are fellow citizens with the saints and are of God’s household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a temple in the Lord in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.*” Look around, God has brought you here – perfectly fitting you together (each with your unique gifts, abilities, experiences, and personalities), standing upon the foundation of the Word of God and the life of Christ. That is why it is so important that we love one another and walk in unity. What an absolutely beautiful image!

For what Purpose? “*For a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*” (v. 5b). So, not only are you the living stones of the spiritual house, but you are also the priests functioning in the spiritual house. In the Old Testament, the priests were the only ones who had access to God on behalf of the people. Unless you were a priest, you could not come before God in the Temple, and unless you were the High Priest you were not allowed in to the place where the presence of God dwelt (the Holy of Holies). But when Christ died and rose again, the veil in the Holy of Holies which separated regular man from direct access to God was torn from top to bottom. Therefore, believers now, like priests of old, have full access to the mighty presence of God and all that He offers.

It was also the job of the priest to offer the appropriate sacrifices in order to atone for the sins of the people. However, Christ offered up the perfect sacrifice in order to pay for our sins, He offered Himself. So, our function as priests, no longer is to offer up sacrifices in order to atone for the sinfulness of humanity – but we are *to offer up spiritual sacrifices* – which must be different than the blood sacrifices of the Old Testament. So, what are these *spiritual sacrifices*? Let’s look at a few other passages that use this idea of offering sacrifices to God as the Church.

Romans 12:1 tells us to *offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God*. This means that everything we do can be done to God’s glory (1 Cor. 10:31 – “*...whatever you do, do all for the glory of God.*”).

Romans 15:16, Paul says that he was “*ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that [his] offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable.*” Thus, sharing the good news of Christ is a sacrifice we can offer to God.

Philippians 4:18, We see that the Philippian church took up a collection and sent it to Paul to meet his needs. Paul calls their service in these gifts “*an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God*”.

Hebrews 13:15-16 instructs us, through Christ, to “*continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*”

These are just a few of the ways in which we, as representatives of Christ, can offer up spiritual sacrifices to God, and this relates to just about every aspect of our lives. Therefore, we should be in the habit of weighing our actions by asking the question, “Lord, does this please You?” For our desire should be to worship God with every thought, every word, and every action. This is what it looks like to lead Christ-centered lives. And apart from Christ, none of these sacrifices are acceptable to God. “*Offer up sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.*”

Conclusion

This is the purpose of the Church – for our very lives to sing out praises to the Lord, pointing people to the only One who is worthy of our Praise - the One who has died for the sins of humanity. What a privilege and purpose!

And in a world full of distractions let us remember this is what we have been called to do, let us not lose our focus, and let us live with purpose – with Christ as the center of our lives.

Let's pray