



As we continue in our series, “Exiles,” today we’ll see Peter describe Jesus as the foundation of the church, God’s means of salvation, and those who put their faith in Jesus are the people of God—both in identity and purpose. This is a passage about the church in a way that perhaps you haven’t thought about church.

My dad has been in ministry longer than I’ve been alive. As a result, I grew up going to the church building each Sunday and Wednesday. I have a lot of memories and images of “church” through that experience. One of the fun memories involved a role of masking tape. After the service ended, my brother and I often had to wait for my parents to have the various conversations that adults enjoy and children find mind-numbing. We would go to my dad’s office, take a roll of masking tape, and crawl underneath the last pew in the sanctuary. It was a long room with carpeted aisles. But underneath the pews was tile flooring, perfect for a few minutes of entertainment. We would take the roll of masking tape and see how far we could roll it before it veered to the carpet or hit someone. That was the most fun that I had in church growing up!

We each carry images, experiences, and concepts of what “church” means. Some good, some not so good. In the passage today, Peter is going to step back and show the foundation on which the church rests, and he is going to cast a grand vision for the church as the people of God with purpose in the world.

Living Stone for the Church

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 (1 Peter 2:4–5).

Peter is speaking about Jesus, as we can see from the previous section and as we will see in the next few verses. He describes Jesus as “the Living Stone.” He has used the adjective twice already (“living hope” in 1:3, and “living word” in 1:23). Jesus has life and gives life. He further describes Jesus as “chosen by God and precious to Him,” but rejected by people. The original Greek highlights a strong contrast between the two descriptors.

Peter then describes Christians as “living stones,” drawing a connection in nature to the Living Stone, and joining with that foundational Stone to complete a formation. Specifically, the formation is a “spiritual house” that includes priestly functions

and sacrifices. Peter likely draws on the image of the Temple in Jerusalem, where God dwelt among His people, priests mediated between God and man, and animal sacrifices were made. Peter says that the church is built together, not as a building but joined in community with Jesus, the Living Stone, as the foundation. Interestingly, Jesus had previously said that the foundation of the church would be Peter (Matt. 16:18), but Peter rightly turns that around. And the church has the function of offering “spiritual sacrifices,” which is an obscure phrase but we can best understand by drawing on Paul’s command to the church in Rome to offer their entire lives as a spiritual act of worship (Rom. 12:1–2). The church—all that she is and does in the world—is built on Jesus. As John Calvin put it, “the weight of the building rests on Him.”

Cornerstone of Deliverance

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” (v. 6).**

Then Peter uses the OT to support his claim that Jesus is the foundation of the church. He shows that Jesus is the foundation of the church because He is God’s means of salvation. Peter quotes Isaiah 28:16. Understanding this passage in Isaiah is important to make sense of the remainder of the passage in 1 Peter. In Isaiah 28, destruction is coming to Israel and Judah because of their sin. The leaders of the people, instead of turning to God, put their trust in other gods to deliver them. Their trust is wasted because these gods cannot save them, and drives the nation to greater ignorance of their situation. God, in His grace, says that He will establish a means of deliverance for His people from the destruction, namely, a cornerstone. Like a building’s cornerstone is the foundational strength and security, this cornerstone would be God’s secure foundation on which His people can put their faith. The cornerstone represents God’s means of deliverance and salvation. In Jewish thought, “stone” became associated with the coming Messiah.

Peter links Isaiah’s cornerstone with the Living Stone, and identifies Jesus as God’s means of salvation. Jesus is God’s means of deliverance from destructiveness of sin, both in this world and

eternally. “Never be put to shame” is a double negative in Greek. In other words, putting your faith in Jesus will never be a waste.

Cornerstone as Valued or Rejected and Obstacle

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.”

They stumble because they disobey
the message—which is also what they
were destined for (verses 7-8).

For those who put their faith in Jesus, He is valued—seen for who He is as God’s means of salvation. He is chosen and precious to the Father, and faith opens our eyes to see His value. But for those who do not see Jesus as God’s hope and deliverance, they are jeopardizing God’s salvation. Peter quotes Psalm 118:22, which is a psalm of deliverance sung by the priests during Passover. In fact, Psalm 118:22 is quoted seven times in the NT, including our passage in 1 Peter. The Psalmist has come to see God as his salvation, though others may reject Him.

This is where we see tension between Jesus and the Jewish scholars of His day. Jesus over and over again says that He is God’s means for salvation (Messiah), but many rejected Him and His claims. Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22 when tells the parable of the tenants (Matt 21:42, Mark 12:10, Luke 20:17). In rejecting Jesus, they were in danger of being excluded from God’s kingdom. The Jewish leaders and scholars were infuriated with Jesus’ claims, and, according to Luke’s telling of the parable, they wanted to kill Jesus.

This passage from Psalm 118 also appears in Acts 4:11. Peter appears before the Sanhedrin after the ascension. He proclaims that *“you crucified Jesus, but God raised Him from the dead.”* And then quotes Psalm 118:22—the Jewish leaders are those builders who rejected the cornerstone, God’s means of salvation. To be clear on the implication that Jesus is the cornerstone, Peter declares that *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). Jesus is God’s means of salvation. Psalm 118:22 is also quoted by Paul in Romans 9:32-33 and Ephesians 2:20. The main point of Jesus and the NT writers is this: to reject Jesus is to jeopardize participation in God’s kingdom.

This is seen in 1 Peter 2:8, in which Peter quotes Isaiah 8:14. For those who reject Jesus, He is “a rock that makes them fall.” The Greek word is *skandalon*, which refers to an “obstacle of faith.” In rejecting Jesus, He becomes an obstacle to their life with God. Jesus is God’s means of salvation to those who believe, and an

obstacle to those who reject Him. The missionary and martyr Jim Elliot put it this way: “Let me not be a milepost on a single road; make me a fork, that [people] must turn one way or another on facing Christ in me.”

Privileged Identity and Responsibility

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 (verses 9-10).

But you, Peter writes, are different. His audience are followers of Jesus. They are built together with the foundation of the Living Stone, and they have put their faith in Jesus as the Cornerstone—God’s means for salvation. Because of their belief in Jesus, Peter says that they are people of God. Peter describes their “people-of-God-ness” in a stunning way. He employs terms previously only used of Israel. In using these terms, he says the people of God are those who have put their faith in Jesus.

Peter uses Isaiah 43:20-21 to show that those who follow Jesus are God’s chosen people, the object of God’s faithfulness and salvation. The next three terms are from Exodus 19:5-6. The people of God were to be a royal priesthood (“kingdom of priests”). The identity of the nation as a whole was to intercede between God and man. They were to represent to the world the good things that God has done. They were also to be a holy nation. Exodus 19 is the first time in the Bible that “holy” is used in conjunction with people. The divine would transform the ordinariness of their lives to be a unique people in the world. Similarly, there were God’s special possession. The KJV translates this phrase as “peculiar people.” They were to be distinctive in the world because of their unique relationship with one, true God.

These were not simply titles, but these terms included Israel’s purpose in the world. Israel was meant to show God to the world, to mirror the true divine nature to the surrounding nations. In the same way, Peter applies these titles to the church so that we would do something about how the world operates so that we would bring a glimpse of God’s kingdom into the here and now. The church is to speak forth “the praises” of God. Praises does not refer to songs or kind words, but the idea in the original language emphasizes God’s actions. It means that the church is to announce—word and deed—what God has done, how God is at work. It means that we learn to tell the story of God at work in the world. It means that you learn to tell your story of how God is at work in you.

What has God done? God has brought us from darkness to light. He employs the language of creation: by God’s word, light pushed back the darkness. From bondage to freedom, from exile to restoration, from things that are dead to life that is fully alive.

Peter then applies to the church two images from the story of the prophet, Hosea. Hosea is a fascinating story. The prophet is commanded to marry a prostitute, Gomer. They have several children. One of the children is named “not my people;” another child is named “not received mercy” (cf. Hosea 1:6-9). The situation is a picture of the unfaithfulness of the people of God in the face of God’s faithfulness to them.

Gomer continues in adultery, but God calls Hosea to call her back. Despite their spiritual adultery, God will allure His people and bring them back. God speaks of His act of grace and salvation and says in that day, those who were previously “not my people” will be my people, and those who had previously “not received mercy” will receive mercy (Hosea 2:23). By God’s grace, the alienated will be invited into the people of God, and the despairing will be recipients of compassion.

Peter links this act of grace with the Living Stone, the Cornerstone, with Jesus—God’s means of deliverance. Peter says that this is what God has done for you in Jesus. He is the foundation of the church, He is God’s means of salvation, and He has given you a privileged identity and responsibility in the world. The weight of all of this rests on what God has done for you in Jesus. John Calvin put it this way “It is...God’s gratuitous [uncalled for, lacking good reason] goodness, which makes of no people a people to God, and reconciles the alienated.” In His grace and favor He has brought you into light, forgiven you in His mercy, and joined you with the people of God in a grand story that reaches back into history and means something for the here and now.

What does that mean for us? It means that we find ways to announce what God has done. I participated in a leadership training each summer during the last two years of college. We were in Myrtle Beach, SC with several hundred college students working and spending portions of our week in worship and discipleship together. Following our large group teaching and worship on weekday nights, several of us would jump in the back of my friend, Corey’s, Jeep Wrangler and head to the pier. We spent the evening on the pier meeting people, listening to their stories, telling them how God was at work in the world and what that meant for them. We did it because of a genuine excitement that we had a story to tell of the grace of God.

What you do doesn’t have to be like that; I don’t think that I would do it in that way today. But there are ways to listen to people and tell the story of how God is at work. God has put the people around you for a reason. They are people who I may never meet, who may not come to church, but they like you. You have been placed in their path for a reason. Your call is to find out why. Listen to the stories they tell, and notice where God has been at work, even though they may not see it. Then follow the Holy Spirit’s leadership in telling how God is at work in your life.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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