

Do such Good

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Last week as we continued our series in 1 Peter we embraced, with Peter, the call to be holy – to be different and set apart; to love sincerely; to get rid of self; and to grow up in our faith. We can embrace these callings because God has bought us with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and He grants us the faith to believe that in Christ we are made new.

Today we will continue with a look at 1 Peter 2:4-12. Take time now to prayerfully read this passage. I realized this past week that I never gave a title to this sermon series, so here it is: Bold Obedience. I think this title reflects the life of Peter the Apostle, the writer of this book, and the messages that he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to share through it.

I really like how today's passage begins: *As you come to Him*. It's such a simple statement, yet carries so much beauty. The fact that we are invited to come, the fact that we choose to come ... these are glorious blessings worth celebrating each and every day. Why? Because the "Him" that we come to is the Lord (1 Peter 2:3), or more precisely, The Lord who *is good!* The Lord ... God Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, Eternal, All-Powerful, All-Knowing, All-Wise ... invites us to come and we boldly enter His presence. Peter's initial hearers

were people who had been offered that invitation to come to Christ Jesus, the Lord, and they had accepted that invitation. Whether Jew or Gentile, they had chosen to come, and in coming had tasted that He is good! Now Peter encourages them to keep on coming (that's the sense of the Greek verb here ... continual, ongoing action).

We need this reminder, don't we? If we are to live in bold obedience we need to keep on coming to Christ, the Lord. In coming continually, we will know His closeness, feel His love, sense His encouragement, and be inspired by His holiness and goodness. Are you daily coming to Him? If not, it's never too late to start!

The Lord, the one we come to, is captured in 1 Peter 2:4 as "the living Stone"; a phrase that, first, emphasizes that Jesus Christ is alive, resurrected from the dead, and forever present to His Church; and, second, emphasizes that He is a solid, dependable, unshakeable refuge and strength. Are you coming to the living Stone? Do you think of Jesus in that way, as you draw near to Him?

As we've shared in the past two sermons, Peter's initial hearers were facing severe persecution because of their faith. They needed a solid rock to stand on in the midst of the storms they were facing. So Peter wisely reminds them here that Jesus is that solid rock! In the storms of our lives, we also need to be reminded

that Jesus is our refuge; that He is our shelter in the storm; that He is alive and present, supporting and upholding us in every circumstance of life.

As we come to Him, Peter declares that we *“also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house”* (verse 5). This is God’s work in the life of His Church; a work made possible through Christ Jesus. Each believer is being joined together with other believers by God, creating a spiritual house – a fellowship, a community, a family with a spiritual purpose. It’s a powerful and beautiful metaphor. It speaks to the importance of community and fellowship, but also emphasizes the significance of each person, each stone!

This spiritual house is made up of living stones – that’s you and me, and every person who has come to The Living Stone (Jesus Christ). Through Him we become living stones – alive, vibrant, energized, empowered, strong, and rock solid. Are we feeling that? I’m sure Peter’s first hearers struggled to see themselves in this way, given what they were facing. And, no doubt, many of us have periods when we don’t feel like alive, vibrant, energized, empowered, strong and rock solid living stones. But we are ... by God’s grace, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And all we have to do is come to Him ... to keep on coming to Him!

The metaphor used here speaks of a formidable structure being created and sustained by God Himself! We each, joined to all the others, form a spiritual

house with a great spiritual purpose. What we need to take note of here is that every believer is a vital part of that spiritual house. God's house cannot be complete without you. It cannot be complete without me. We each are an integral part of the whole! This is God's design. This is and always was God's plan. Can you fathom the significance of that? The living stone that is you is absolutely necessary for the living stone that is me, as is the living stone that is every other believer. This spiritual house ... this impenetrable fortress that God is building ... the house that He calls the church needs us all!

Why are we being built into this spiritual house? Peter declares that it is so that we can *be a holy priesthood* – people who are holy (different, set apart, distinct from the world around us) AND people who priests – individuals whose life work is to help others draw near to and experience God. Being part of this holy priesthood is an honour that each of us shares. It isn't just reserved for pastors or ministers. The priesthood belongs to all believers. And as God's holy priesthood we all serve His Kingdom by *offering spiritual sacrifices* – the sacrifice of our lives, our passions, our time, and our talents in worship and service to God.

Peter goes on in verses 6-8 to cite Old Testament passages that speak of the Messiah as this Living Stone. First, He is identified as the *Cornerstone* (Isaiah 28:16) that is the foundation for the spiritual house that God is building. Jesus is a

precious stone for all who believe. His worth and value cannot be measured. He is pure, trustworthy and true. He is a sure foundation. But for those who reject Jesus as this cornerstone, He becomes the *capstone* (Psalm 118:22). The capstone is the last stone placed; the work is complete when the capstone is set in place. The message here is that those who reject Christ forfeit their place in the spiritual house that God is making. Their failure to recognize Jesus as Messiah (the Cornerstone) becomes a stumbling block for them; *a stone that causes men to stumble; a rock that makes them fall*. As people granted free choice by our Creator, we can either accept or reject Jesus. Those who accept Him become part of God's spiritual house, and they will not stumble or fall. Believers stand on the firm foundation of Christ Jesus, the Cornerstone, who gave His life to ransom and redeem them.

Let's make sure we are staying firm in our trust in Him, and Him alone, for our salvation. It is because of Him that we are being built into this spiritual house and given the privilege of serving as part of God's holy priesthood.

Peter goes on to affirm the believer's position in Christ in verses 9-10. In bullet points he paints a glorious picture of who we are, individually and corporately:

- A chosen people
- A royal priesthood
- A holy nation
- A people belonging to God

- The people of God
- People who have received mercy

Each metaphor is packed with meaning. Each affirms worth and value. Are you able to claim these truthful statements about who you are in God's eyes, as one who has accepted Jesus as Lord? Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Peter declares to believers then and now, "You are ...!" You are Chosen! You are Royal! You are Holy! You belong to God! You are His! You are a Recipient of His Divine Mercy! There was a time when you and I could not claim these titles; but simply by coming to Christ Jesus and believing in His mercy, we now can claim each and every one of them.

What does it mean to you to bear these titles? I encourage you to sit with each title for a moment in the presence of God. Feel His blessing. Feel His pleasure in pronouncing these blood-bought titles over you. He wants you to claim them, with gratitude. These truthful titles are intended to help you understand how precious you are in God's eyes.

Peter goes on to remind his hearers (past and present) that we are all of these things so that we *may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light!* (verse 9b) Yes, indeed, we are a holy priesthood with a magnificent spiritual purpose!

Once we have fully claimed these amazing titles as gifts of God's grace and mercy, how are we to respond? Well Peter speaks to that in verses 11-12. A life of bold obedience is called for here! And that obedience is made possible as we reflect deeply on the new life that God has granted us. It's who we are in Christ that determines what we do!

First, in response to our new life and its glorious titles, we are to *abstain from sinful desires*. Knowing that we are part of God's spiritual house and that we hold glorious, blood-bought titles, we are to recognize that we are *aliens and strangers in this world*. As such, the world's ways are our ways no longer. Our ways are now the ways of God and His Kingdom; loving, joyous, peaceful, kind, gracious and merciful ways. These are to be our aims as we seek to live out our calling as part of God's spiritual house and holy priesthood. In our new life in Christ, continuing to pursue sinful desires will only serve to *war against our souls* because we've been re-made, re-born. So, we need to *abstain* ... to just say "No!" ... to those old ways. They will continue to lie before us, tempting us, as we walk in this world, because we're still in the process of growing up in our faith. But through the Spirit, we can know the power to turn from them. Through the Spirit, we will be empowered to choose to fill our hearts and minds and souls with

the pure desires that reflect God's Kingdom. This is captured in the second response asked of Peter.

He commands his first hearers and us today, *live such good lives among the pagans (non-believers) that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us*". False accusations were rampant when Peter wrote this letter. The Church was under severe attack. Christians were the subjects of malicious lies and slander. The right counter-attack, according to Peter (inspired by the Spirit), is to live good lives ('good' meaning holy – different, distinct, set-apart, pure) that stand in stark contrast to the slanderous words being spoken of them. In the face of malicious lies and slander, the natural tendency is to fight back and defend ourselves. But Peter makes a good point here. The better answer to lies is a life of purity and love and grace and mercy ... a life of goodness and holiness!

What's Peter saying here? This is it: the life of those who are being built up into a spiritual house and holy priesthood; the life of those who are chosen, royal, holy, belonging to God is this:

Say "no" to sin and "yes" to godliness!

In a nutshell, bold obedience flows from the sure knowledge of who we are in Christ. He has purchased us for God's praise and honour. The world may attack,

it may slander, it may stand against all that we believe, but we can trust God's Word which declares who we are and we can rely on God's Spirit as we seek to live as His beloved children. As we do, Peter tells us we can count on the fact that unbelievers will be inspired by our goodness; inspired to glorify God and become part of His spiritual house too! Isn't that good news! God has called us out of darkness into His glorious light, and through us He will call others! Let's be the light. Let's abstain from sin and do good!