

Week 9 - Joined Together to Christ - 1Peter 2:4-10

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 13:7-16

Introduction

America has long been considered “exceptional” - at least that’s the term that 19th Century French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville used to describe our nation

And nearly 200 years later, our emphasis on individualism still stands out when compared to the rest of the world

Since we are inclined to place a higher value on independence, self-reliance, and autonomy, we are more likely to prioritize ourselves and our personal needs, goals, and rights over those of a group

The ideal in our society has long been the rugged individual who rises and falls according to their own merits and efforts

And because our culture is largely a meritocracy we allow our identity to be all wrapped up with our accomplishments

Sadly, when we stop to analyze things, we can see that those same values have found their way into the church

We have the tendency to focus a great deal on our personal walk, our personal relationship with the Lord, our personal growth, our personal service - and that’s not all bad because we are each saved individually and will be judged individually for what we have done in the body

But we have the tendency to want to live out on the extremes and do all of one thing to the exclusion of the other

However, what we are going to see in our passage this morning is that we aren’t merely individuals in God’s eyes and, when we are saved, we are joined together not only with Christ but also with other Christ-followers

And, as we are going to see, Peter’s usage of Old Testament imagery makes clear that he is saying that New Testament believers, the followers of Jesus Christ (both Jew and Gentile), are in fact a new “people of God”

And he imputes to them the status of a new Israel who has come to possess all the blessings of Old Testament Israel but in even greater measure

Then, just as with Israel, Peter makes clear that he is speaking about the community of Christ-followers collectively just as the Old Testament typically refers to the nation of Israel as the “elect” or the “chosen” of God

And in our passage, all of Peter’s descriptions of the people are plural telling us that Peter assumes joining Christ means joining his community

That to be joined to the Redeemer also means being joined to the people he has redeemed

The apostle Paul used the metaphor of a body when he spoke regarding this joining together of many parts to form the body of Christ in 1Corinthians 12

Peter, though, uses two different metaphors:

Individual stones that make up a spiritual building and individual persons who join together to make up a new people

So, if you are taking notes, our Roman numeral one is **a living house** and Roman numeral two is **a chosen people**

Then, in Roman numeral three, we will see that this is **a divisive message** because being included in God’s people means accepting or, as Peter puts it, coming to Christ and not everyone who examines Christ finds him suitable and many reject him

Peter begins this section of his letter in verse 4 [**1Peter 2:4**] with the words “*As you come to him*” meaning Christ

And the word he uses is used in the Greek Old Testament for drawing near to God to hear him speak or to come into his presence in the tabernacle to offer sacrifices

But rather than the priest coming to the altar or even to the holy place in the Jerusalem temple, the people now come to him in whom the fullness of deity dwells bodily [**Colossians 2:9**]

We also see the author of Hebrews use this same word in several verses to describe how we can approach the Lord

And the verb tense that Peter uses indicates an action that is both completed and repeated

It's completed as a person comes to Christ in saving faith and it's repeated as the Christ-follower continually comes to Christ in worship and in prayer

And as we come to Christ whom Peter describes as a "living stone" he then extends that imagery to his readers and says that they are also precious to God and God is building them into his dwelling place - a "spiritual house" made of living stones

I. A Spiritual House

Apart from Jesus, there are other religious and moral communities - we know that is true

But the church is unique as it is the one community that is centered on Jesus rather than morality or spirituality

Jesus is foundational to the church and he is the only solid foundation on which we can build our lives

And as we build our lives on him, first through belief and then through obedience, we become part of that house of which Jesus is the cornerstone

No one would confuse a host of stones lying scattered in a field for a building so the image before us is one where God takes us as individual believers and builds us up together into his spiritual house

Notice that the verb in verse 5 [**1Peter 2:5**] is passive - we are "being built up" and not building ourselves up into a house

The building is God's work as we yield ourselves to him and are conformed into the image of his Son as Paul says in **2Corinthians 3:18** –

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

The fact that the house God is building is "spiritual" can be taken a couple of ways

The first meaning is the same as we saw last week when we considered the "pure spiritual milk" is that Peter is not talking about a literal building made of literal stones

We don't literally become chunks of granite with arms and legs - Peter is speaking metaphorically

But it also, and far more importantly, means that it is a house that is dominated by the Holy Spirit so that Christ-followers are the new temple of God under the influence and power of the Holy Spirit

The beauty of this new spiritual house is no longer found in the expensive gold and precious jewels of the former temple but in the imperishable beauty of holiness and faith demonstrated in the lives of Christ-followers

Things that reflect the majesty and glory of God much more effectively than lifeless, material objects ever could

Just think of the encouragement it would have been to Peter's original audience as they were undergoing persecution and suffering to know that their continued obedience and coming to Christ in worship, prayer, and praise meant that their lives more fully reflected the glory of God

And that by their perpetual coming to Christ, God was persistently building them into a place where he more and more fully dwelt

As Jesus taught in Matthew 7:24-27, a believer can be guilty of building their spiritual house on the sand by not continually coming to Christ and the same is true of a local church

So, if we want to be a church that is indwelt fully by God and the encouragement that brings we must be sure to be continually coming to Christ as individuals and in all we do corporately

Then, when we come to the last half of verse 5 [**1Peter 2:5**] we see Peter switch his imagery from the spiritual house to the activity within the house as he says that believers are:

“...to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”

The distinction between the people and the priests was sharp in the Old Testament system

God chose the priests and set them apart to offer sacrifices and forgiveness, to pray for the people, and to instruct them in his truth

But now all followers of Christ are priests and there is not just a select few whose job it is to do ministry to the exclusion of all others

We all have access to God without human intermediaries through Christ as we read in **Hebrews 4:14-16** which says:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Of course, this truth was dramatically illustrated by God’s tearing of the veil in the temple at the moment of his Son’s death on the cross

And **Hebrews 10:12** tells us that Christ has made the only sacrifice necessary for sins for all time so we don’t need to offer continual sacrifice for our sins - but sacrifices for the atonement of sin are but one type of sacrifice

And Peter says that we are God’s holy priesthood and our purpose is to *“offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”*

Before we get to what those sacrifices entail let’s be sure to recognize that we can only offer acceptable sacrifices through Jesus Christ because it’s only through him that we are qualified to serve as priests or do anything pleasing in God’s sight

And since God only accepts perfect sacrifices, and ours are flawed by their very nature, we offer them through Christ who perfects them

I once asked a group I was leading for examples of what they could possibly do to honor God in their lives and the same thing could be asked here as we consider what might be included under the umbrella of spiritual sacrifice to God

Paul, in **Romans 12:1**, tells Christ-followers to *“present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God”* and refers to doing so as *“your spiritual worship”*

And in **Philippians 4:18** Paul refers to the gift that the church in Philippi had collected and sent him was *“a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God”*

In **Hebrews 13:15** we read of the *“sacrifice of praise to God”* *“the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name”*

Then in **Hebrews 13:16** doing good and sharing what we have are called *“such sacrifices that are pleasing to God”*

And since the purpose of spiritual sacrifices is always to give glory to God we turn to **1Corinthians 10:31** and see that literally everything we do can be a spiritual sacrifice that brings glory to God

As a member of the holy priesthood, whatever you do here at Brick Church or whatever you do beyond the walls of this church in our community can be a spiritual sacrifice that is acceptable to God if you do it in accordance with the will of Christ, in complete reliance on the power of Christ, and for the glory of Christ

And offering spiritual sacrifice in such a way isn’t just a good idea - it’s your job because God has chosen you to be his priest

That brings us to our main point number two which is that we are a chosen people

II. A Chosen People

Look with me at verses 9 and 10 [1Peter 2:9-10]

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Throughout this section of his letter, Peter shows how the identity of Christ establishes the identity of those who believe in him

Christ-followers are a distinct people because we have been chosen by God not by any merit of our own but simply because of God's mercy toward us

Notice the terms Peter uses here to describe the corporate identity we enjoy as the people of God and note that all of the terms are foundational statements found in God's Word concerning Israel applied now to the church:

"A chosen race" comes from **Isaiah 43:20-21** where we read –

The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.

And the remainder come from Exodus 19:5-6 –

*Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be **my treasured possession** among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me **a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."*

Again, what an encouragement this must have been to the sojourning exiles - many of them Gentiles - who first received this letter to know that, though they were rejected by the people around them, God had chosen them and taken them in

The privileges that once belonged only to Israel were now theirs as well

And the contrasts Peter lists are striking:

Once you were in darkness but God has called you into his marvelous light

Once you were strangers but now you are God's people

Once you were facing judgment but now you have received mercy

But privilege comes with responsibility and Peter says that, because God has mercifully redeemed us and we are his, we are to be his heralds who "proclaim [his] excellencies"

God didn't call us out of the world as his people simply for our own sake

The small but important word "that" says he chose to make us a people so that we could advertise him to the world

And that can never be done in isolation so that means returning to or remaining in the world which we were chosen out of to tell others about our most excellent and praiseworthy God

God chose to make us his people so that we would be his lights in the darkness guiding others to him not only with our words but with the example of our lives

There is a solemn truth we need to face - people largely get their impressions about God from those who say they belong to God's family and they read our lives more than they read a Bible and our actions speak far more loudly than our words

So you see how all of what Peter is teaching here ties together and how, as we are all together joined to Christ and recognize our status and strive to make every aspect of our lives a spiritual sacrifice to God we begin to proclaim ever more clearly the excellencies of God by our words and deeds which is the reason that God chose us in the first place

And it would be wonderful if everyone we interacted with came to a saving knowledge of Christ but, as Peter points out in verses 6-8, that isn't going to happen because the message of Christ is a divisive message

III. A Divisive Message

Let's look at those verses together [**1Peter 2:6-8**] - Peter writes:

For it stands in Scripture:

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"

and

"A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense."

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

Jesus is the cornerstone of God's work on earth, but humans may choose to trust him or reject him

And in verse 4, Peter says that Jesus is the "living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious" a point that he expands on in verses 6-8

Jesus himself claimed to be the foundation stone in Matthew 21 when he had a conflict with the religious leaders and he compared them to tenants who take a well prepared vineyard, but refuse to pay the owner

We know that as the Parable of the Tenants and in the parable Jesus told the unscrupulous tenants wind up attacking the owner's servants and, ultimately, they kill the owner's son

And he explained the parable by saying in verse 42 [**Matthew 21:42**] –

"Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?"

The imagery in Jesus' parable letter suggests the stonemasons sorting the materials to select the stones that are of the right size and shape to become the foundation stones

And Jesus depicts them as discarding them one after the other until they come to the perfect stone which represents the Messiah but upon examining it, they reject it too

Which is exactly what the religious leaders ultimately did as they rejected Jesus as a false prophet and killed him

That parable might very well have been on Peter's mind as he penned his letter because he uses the same imagery

And, whereas Jesus taught that "the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him" Peter says that Jesus as the cornerstone will either be a stepping stone or a stumbling block for people

Of course, there is stumbling and regaining one's balance and there is stumbling that leads to a fall and it's the latter meaning that Peter has in mind here

All believers can stumble momentarily and Peter knew that as well as anyone ever could but we don't stumble so as to fall

But there are those who stumble over Christ so as to fall permanently by permanently rejecting him as their cornerstone

The decision belongs to each person and they alone are responsible for it

Yet, Peter says in verse 8 [**1Peter 2:8**] that God's sovereign hand stands behind their stumbling

And the fact that "they were destined" to stumble so as to fall has led many to declare that God is unjust

Paul addresses that charge in depth in Romans 9 where he draws on passages from Genesis and Exodus and relates God telling Moses [**Romans 9:14-15**] –

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

Mercy by definition is a charitable act, a gift and God does extend favor to one while withholding it from another

But God is always just in that he always gives everyone what he or she deserves

He never punishes the innocent and the fact that he may, at his pleasure, show mercy to the guilty is not unjust

To believe that everyone must be treated exactly the same or it isn't "fair" is a false idea and to demand "justice" based on that definition of "fairness" is to demand condemnation for yourself because we cannot obligate God to act however we wish he would

I'll admit, this is a hard truth to accept and it's a difficult concept to wrap one's mind around but let's see if an example might help

In Romans 9 Paul mentioned the case of Esau and Jacob and the fact that God showed favor, mercy, to Jacob over Esau

But try to look at those two brothers from God's perspective

When God looked at Esau and Jacob he saw two sinners neither of whom deserved his favor and neither was truly seeking God

So, if God let Esau go his way and pursued Jacob for salvation, he has simply shown mercy to Jacob but he hasn't done injustice to Esau

I don't know if that helps or not but we also know that Scripture makes clear that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved [Romans 10:13]

And anyone who knows enough to question and dispute God's justice in salvation has heard the gospel promise and should call on Christ so as to receive his mercy

After all, God only appoints those who stumble to stumble because of their rejection of Christ

And the word that is translated as "disobey" means to not allow oneself to be persuaded and therefore to refuse to believe the truth and its present tense shows that this disobedience is the ongoing pattern of those who stumble

And since the Bible always places the responsibility for rejecting his precious cornerstone on those who choose not to believe, we can't say that God has ordained their disobedience but the penalty for their disobedience

Conclusion

Throughout this section of his letter Peter assumes that to come to Christ is to come into his community

If we come to Christ, the living stone, we become living stones

Jesus is the cornerstone and God builds us up into a spiritual house that rests on him

And because Jesus is God's Chosen One we are God's chosen ones

The freelance Christ-follower who isn't a living, functioning member of a local church is a walking contradiction

The Bible knows nothing of "Lone Ranger" Christians who claim, "It's just me and Jesus"

Therefore, personal devotion to Christ through the Word should also increase corporate integration into the church because, as we continually draw near to him first through by joining with him in saving faith and then through our ongoing obedience, we should not be able to keep from being closer to one another

And as we grow into our identity as God's chosen people might we fulfill our function and endeavor to proclaim him faithfully so that others might say that they learned who God is by watching the people of Brick Church

Let's pray

Hebrews 13:7-16 (page 1009)

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.

Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp.

So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.

For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.