

God's Privileged People

1 Peter 2:4-10

Pastor John Miller

Peter, the rock, has given us a vivid description of Jesus Christ, our living stone. I want you to look at it with me back in verse 4. Peter says in chapter 2, verse 4, "To Whom coming, as unto a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious."

Now last Sunday as I pointed out, we looked at verses 4 to 8. This Sunday I want to go to verse 5, and then I want to jump ahead to verses 9 and 10. So it's taken us two weeks to get from verse 4 down to verse 10, but they're one unit.

Now we saw last Sunday that Jesus Christ, verse 4, is the living stone. He's also the chief cornerstone. He is the chosen, precious stone. He is the dependable stone. He's the rejected stone. He's the stone of stumbling. But now Peter shifts the focus from Jesus, the rock, to God's people. So in verse 5, and then in verses 9 and 10, Peter gets to what he really wants to talk about. The people of God, described corporately as all true believers, are in union with that living stone, so we become living stones, we become priests in a new temple, and we are a chosen nation, a royal priesthood. We're going to look at these images about the family of God.

So basically what he's saying this morning in our text is that you are a privileged group of people; you belong to God. The church—not just locally but universally, those who have been born again and are part of the family of God—we are a privileged people of God. So as Peter closes this section on salvation, he wants us to know how blessed and privileged we are.

Now there's a little sub-point I want to make before I break down this text. And that is, as you read these verses today, inferred in them is the idea that the Christian life is not lived in isolation. That the Christian life is lived in community and fellowship with other Christians. The Bible knows nothing of the "Lone Ranger" spirituality. It knows nothing of an independent Christian life where "I'm a Christian, but I don't need church. I'm a Christian, but I don't need to go to church. I don't need other Christians." I've even met Christians who've said, "I don't like other Christians. So I don't go to church." I've met people who say, "I'm a Christian, but I don't like the church" or "I don't need the church." Let me tell you something; God likes the church. He gave His Son to die for the church. And the church was purchased at the cost of the blood of Jesus Christ. And the church is all what God is doing today. You'd better love God's church. It is His body. It is His bride. And today we're going to see that it is His building, and Christ is the head of the church. He's the foundation of that church. So the Christian life is to be lived in community with other Christians.

You might say, verse 2 of 2 Peter, this is how we grow. We grow desiring the sincere milk of the Word, but we also grow as we fellowship and participate and interact with other Christians. I don't believe you can grow apart from the Word of God, and I don't believe you can grow apart from the family of God or the people of God. So if you neglect either one of those two things, you are neglecting one of the chief instruments that God uses for the sanctification of your life,

to set you apart and make you holy. So we need God's Word, and we need God's people. We need to be living our Christian life in community.

Now there are three pictures of the church in this text. And I want you to write them down if you're taking notes. The first picture is that we are stones in the same building. Now everything that's said about us Christians is speaking in terms corporately, not individually. Yes, they are true in an individual sense, but the text is all about the church corporately. And when we say "the church," we need to distinguish between a local church, Revival Christian Fellowship, and the church, the body of Christ, the people of God, universal around the world. Found in different local churches, found in different denominations, found in different organizations, but all those who are born again are part of one church. People say, "Why are there so many churches?" Well, technically, there's not. There is only one church. And that's the church that has Jesus Christ as the foundation, Jesus Christ as the head, and is made up of every person who has been born again and is part of that family. So we're talking about the church universal and Christ being that chief cornerstone and we're built upon that foundation.

So number one, we are stones in the same building. Notice it with me in verse 5. Peter says, "You also, as living stones." Now my King James Bible says "lively stones," and it is an unfortunate translation. I've had people get all crazy in a church service, get real wild and distract the meeting and actually turn to the King James translation and say, "I'm a lively stone. That's why I'm alive." Well, the problem is the Bible is not talking about lively stones, but living stones; okay? And living stones do have life, but everything needs to be done decently and in order. So he says, "You also, as living stones..."—now he's turning to the church—"...are built..."—or literally "being built up"—"...a spiritual house..."—notice that, verse 5. Then he goes on to say we are—"...a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

Now the first point I want to make is that we're stones. Now notice in the Greek, it's actually "you are." The emphasis is on "you." So in contrast to those who are rejecting Jesus Christ, we have accepted Christ, and now we are united with Him by birth, spiritual birth, and the life of Christ, the living stone, comes into us and we become living stones. So Jesus is the living stone; we are living stones corporately because of our new birth and the life we've received from Him. Now notice what it says in verse 5. We are "being built up, a spiritual house." As living stones united to Jesus, the living stones are being built up into a spiritual house or temple.

Do you know what God is doing in the world today? The primary work of God in the world today is building His church. That's what God is doing in the world today. He's building His church. People are getting saved, they're coming into the church and they are being built up in the church. Jesus Christ, the foundation and the head. The Bible also uses the imagery of the church as the body of Christ. He is the head. We're united to Him, and we get our life from Him. And that we are the bride of Christ. He's our heavenly bridegroom. And that we're engaged to Him. And one day we'll be caught up to Him, and we'll be wed to Him for all eternity. So we are a building—our text—we are a body and we are a bride, all descriptive metaphors used to describe the church. But actually it says, You "are being built." So Jesus is

building His church.

Remember in Matthew 16 when Jesus took His disciples way to the north of Israel, called Caesarea Philippi? And there we see Jesus turns to His men and He asks, "Who do you say that I am?" And they say, "Well, some say that You're Elijah. Some say that You are a prophet, and some say that You're John the Baptist." Now they were telling Him what the popular opinion was. But Jesus said, "Who do you say that I am?" And you remember that Peter, the writer of this epistle, spoke up. What did he say? He said, "You are the Christ." The word "Christ" is the same as "Messiah," and it means "Anointed One." So you are the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Mashiach, "the Son of the living God." What did Jesus say to Peter's statement? He said, "Blessed are thou, Simon Bar-Jonah." He said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." He said you're blessed because "flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father, Who is in heaven, has revealed this to you." And then He says, "Upon this rock, I will build My church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." Notice, "I will build My church."

Now the raging debate between Roman Catholics and Protestants is the rock that the church is built on. Is it Peter or is it Jesus? I happen to believe the Bible is very clear; that the church is not built on Peter and that Peter wasn't the first pope, but the church is built on Jesus Christ. When Jesus said, "Thou art Peter"—thou art "Cephas"—He said, "You are Petros." That means a little stone or a pebble. And then He switched the words. And He said, "Upon this rock..."—Petra. So He used the word first, "Petros," which means a little stone. "Upon this Petra..."—a big, massive stone—"...I will build My church." And then the rest of the New Testament is very clear that the church is built upon the teaching of the Apostles, and Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone. Let me read it to you, Ephesians 2:19-20. Listen to what it says. "Now, therefore, you are no more strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God..."—the building, the family of God—"And you are being built upon the foundation of the Apostles and of the prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in Whom all the building..."—referring to the church—"...fitly framed together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Whom also you are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit."

So this is basically a metaphor, a picture. You and I as Christians are living stones. And the word "stone" there means actually a "cut stone" or a "hewn stone." So we're designed to fit together. This is what we mean by the corporate life of the church. You need me, I need you, we need one another in the church. And we're compacted together. We form a building. So imagine a brick building. Each one of those bricks represents you as a Christian, and then that building becomes a temple or habitation of God through the Spirit. That's the church. The church is not a building. We refer to this building as the church. It's not the church. You are the church; amen? The church is the people of God, the living stones.

Now throughout the Bible God dwelt with us in different ways. In the Old Testament, He first dwelt in the tabernacle, or the tent, pitched in the wilderness. And then He moved into Solomon's temple, a permanent building. Solomon dedicated that temple. He said, "Lord, we know You don't dwell in houses made with hands. But the heavens cannot contain You." God's

Shekinah presence was manifested in Solomon's temple. And then in John 1:14, "The Word became flesh..."—and it says—"...pitched His tent among us." It's called the Incarnation. And God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ. Then the Bible tells us that when we were born again—1 Corinthians 6—that our bodies actually became a temple. You're like a walking temple. And guess who lives in you? God does. Isn't that amazing? That God would live in us and that God would dwell in us? Every Christians has God in them.

And then the Bible says we're like little stones. Carved out, we're packed together and we form a house. That house is the church. And God lives in us and dwells in us and inhabits us. That's why when we do come together corporately like this and we pray and we sing and we worship and we listen to His Word, there's just a great sense of God's presence here. You know why? Because you're all living stones, and you're united to the living stone. And God dwells in us, and God lives in us and God is among us right now when we gather here. But when you leave today, God goes with you. I'm glad God doesn't sleep here all the time. God doesn't live here. God lives in us. And when we come together, we form that house, and God inhabits us. What an awesome thought that indeed is.

But here's the second image I want you to see in the text. It's also in verse 5. We are priests in the same temple. That moves logically. Jesus the living stone. We're united to Him, so we're living stones. We're compacted together, so we're the church. So God indwells the church. And then we in this church have a service to do. We are priests. Notice verse 5. "A holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

Now in the Old Testament, God's people, Israel, had a priesthood. And that priesthood was to represent God to the people and the people to God. But today in the New Testament it says all true believers who make up the church are—guess what?—"a holy priesthood." In verse 9, "a royal priesthood."

Now I want to mention by way of a little footnote—and I can avoid this, but I want to say this—nowhere in the New Testament are ministers, pastors or spiritual leaders called priests. Every single Christian in the Bible is called a priest. Now I've been called all kinds of names. Sometimes people get real nervous around me, and they don't know what to call me. How about try my name? John. Call me John. "Father, priest, Bishop," you know. "Your Excellency." Whatever. I officiated at a wedding for a friend one time, and he wanted to get me good. So he gave me a little thank-you honorarium in a check, and he signed my name to the check "The Most Holy Right Reverend J. P. Miller." And I handed it to the teller, and she goes, "Pastor Miller, you need to endorse this the same way it's made out." So I had to write "The Most Holy Right Reverend J.P. Miller," you know. It's like "Thank you a lot." I wanted to choke that guy when I found him. I was so embarrassed. But nowhere in the Bible are ministers called priests. Nor "Father." Jesus said you have one father, and that's the Father Who is in heaven. I've been called "Father John" or "Father Miller," all kinds of stuff. You as believers, we as Christians—we're all a holy priesthood. What an amazing thought that is. We as God's people can come directly to Him through Jesus Christ.

Now like the priests of the Old Testament—write this down—we were chosen and called by God. In Exodus 29, God chose the priests in the family of Aaron and the tribe of Levi. No one outside of the family of Aaron or the tribe of Levi could be priests. So you had to be a Levitical priest or high priest from the family of Aaron.

And then secondly, they were washed. So like the priests, we were chosen, Ephesians 1:4. "...chosen in Him before the foundation of the world." Like the priests, we are washed. The priests were given a bath. And the Bible says as believers in Titus 3:5 that we were "washed in regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit." You know that when you got saved, God gave you a bath? That's why, John 13, now that you've had a bath, all you need is your feet washed when you sin. You've had a bath, and all you need is your feet washed. That's confessing your sin, and "He's faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

So in what sense are we priests? Well, we were chosen by God, we were washed by God and, thirdly, we were clothed, Exodus 29:5-9. God gave the priests garments. He gave them very specific clothes to wear. God has given us garments. You know what they are? The righteousness of Jesus Christ. Isn't that awesome? God has given to us a garment of righteousness. He's clothed us in the righteousness of Christ.

And fourthly, the priests in the Old Testament were anointed. They were anointed with oil. They put the oil on the right thumb of the priest. They put the oil on the right ear, and they put the oil on the right foot. So that he would do with his hands the work of the Lord, he would hear the Word of the Lord and he would walk in the ways of the Lord. So God has anointed you as a Christian to hear His Word, to do His work, to walk in His ways. So we are chosen, we are washed, we are clothed and we are anointed. We are priests.

Now here's the question we need to ask in verse 5. Why has God made us a holy priesthood? So that we can just kind of strut our stuff and walk around and say, "Look at me. I'm chosen. I'm anointed. I have garments of righteousness"? No. God has a purpose in our function as priests. It's answered there in verse 5. "To offer up spiritual sacrifices..."—stop right there. God has made us a kingdom of priests, a holy, royal priesthood so that we can offer up spiritual sacrifices. Now what does He mean by "spiritual sacrifices"? He's speaking in contrast to the material sacrifices; bulls, goats, lambs, turtledoves, drink offering. We're offering spiritual offerings, or they're inspired or motivated by the Holy Spirit.

What are the spiritual sacrifices or offerings we offer to God? Let me mention a few. Number one, there's prayer, Psalm 141:2. "Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." So here we are; we're a kingdom of priests. What do we do? We offer to God our prayers. We raise our hands as the incense, and we worship God. It is Biblical when we come to church to not only sing with our lips but to lift our hearts and our hands to God. It's a sign of surrender and adoration and reaching out to God. So as a priest, we are worshipping and we are praying.

And then secondly, we're praising the Lord, Hebrews 13:15. The writer of Hebrews says, "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name." So it starts with prayer and it moves to praise. It's a sacrifice to God. You know, when you come to church sometimes, you don't feel like praising the Lord; right? Sometimes you don't even feel like coming to church, but you come anyway. You're just kind of like, "Aw, I'm all bummed out." So we're to give God a sacrifice. Sacrifice means we do it in spite of how we feel, because God is worthy. So we sing, we pray, we lift our hands. We're priests unto the Lord in this holy temple.

The third thing we give to God is our service. Our service. Hebrews 13:16. "But to do good and to communicate..."—which means giving of your substance to others—"...forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." Hebrews 13:16. Our good works and our acts of service.

And then, fourthly, we give a broken spirit and a contrite heart, Psalm 51:17. David prayed and said, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." You know what God wants from us as priests? He wants our hearts. Sometimes we want to give God our money but not our hearts. We want to give God our service but not our hearts. We want to give God church attendance but not our hearts. You know what God wants? He wants your hearts. He even said to Israel in the Old Testament, "You lift your hands and you sing and you praise, but your hearts are far from Me." It doesn't do any good to lift your hands and sing songs to the Lord or give to the Lord or serve the Lord if your heart is far from God. God looks at your heart. God sees your heart. And the sacrifices of God are a "broken spirit..."—a broken and what?—"...and a contrite heart" God will not despise. So you need to ask yourself today, "Am I humble before God? Am I broken hearted before God? Am I repentant over my sin?"

Fifthly—and this is last but not least—He wants our bodies as living sacrifices, Romans 12:1. Paul says, "I beg you, by the mercies of God, that you..."—do what?—"...present..."—or you offer—"...your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable act of service." Now I want you to know in all this sacrifice that we give as priests—in verse 5 he says—that it might be "acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." "Acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." So these spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God only as we do them and by them, we are empowered by Jesus Christ for His name and for His glory. So that closing statement, "acceptable to God by Jesus Christ," means that as a priest in God's temple and in God's home and in God's house, that when I pray, when I sacrifice, when I break before God my heart and I give God my life and I submit my body to Him, I do it all for His glory. It's all for His glory. It's all by, in and through Jesus Christ.

Now there's a third and last picture of the church. And it's amazing, in verses 9 and 10. We are citizens of the same nation. So what is the church? Living stones built into a house that is inhabited by God. What is the church? It is a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God. What is the church? We are citizens of the same nation, verses 9 and 10. "But ye..."—again, emphatic in the Greek. It starts with "you"—"...are a chosen generation..."—verse 9—"..."

a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that you should show forth the praises of Him, Who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light, which in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God, which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." As Israel was a privileged nation in the Old Testament, so now the church is a privileged people in the New Testament. Paul calls us "the new humanity."

But the church is not spiritual Israel; we haven't replaced God's plan, God's purpose and God's calendar for the nation of Israel. There is a false teaching that you need to be warned of. It's called "replacement theology." And that's where they like to substitute the promises God made to Israel and now see them fulfilled in the church; that God is through with Israel, that He is no longer going to deal with Israel, that there's no future plan for Israel and all the prophecies for Israel are now being fulfilled in the church. So as we read verse 9 and we read the descriptions of the church being like Israel, don't make the mistake of saying that God is finished with Israel as a nation. You need to study Romans 9, 10 and 11; Israel's election, Israel's rejection and Israel's restoration. Romans 11—we're going to get to that on Wednesday night. God is not finished with the nation of Israel.

But there's kind of a pause or parenthesis in God's plan of redemption where now He's taking out a people, the church, Jews and Gentile, for His name's sake. And in the church it's not a matter of race. Did you know that the church of Jesus Christ is not a matter of race? You don't have to be a special race to get in the church. As a matter of fact, the church is a new race. It's a new humanity. It's not Jew, it's not Gentile, it's not bond, it's not free, it's not Greek, it's not Skizia. Did you know in the church there are no social issues? You don't have to be rich. You don't have to be intelligent. You don't have to be a certain ethnic background. Everyone is welcome by faith in Christ to come into this church. And we become a new nation, a new humanity. The church is amazing. The apple of God's eye. He gave His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for the church. We need to love the church and pray for the church and work for the church and serve the church, because it's what God is doing in the world today. It's all about the church.

And one day God is going to come, and He's going to rapture the church; He's going to take the church to heaven. And there's going to be a wedding in heaven. The bride, the church, is going to be wed together with their heavenly bridegroom. What an awesome day that's going to be; amen? And the minute the church is raptured, the restraining forces pull back, then a man called the Antichrist is going to come on the scene. And he's going to rule the whole world. And the stage is set right now for his revelation. The only thing holding him back is called The Rapture of the church; the bride, the body, the building. And when we get caught up to be with the Lord, the Antichrist will be revealed, and what's one of the first things this guy's going to do? He's going to make a covenant with whom? Israel. For how long? Seven years. God's prophetic time clock for Israel will start to tick once again. Seven years left on the calendar for the nation of Israel.

No accident that in 1948—May 14, 1948—a nation was born out of the past. Israel is reborn. You say, "Yah, the modern state of Israel is there, but it's in unbelief. It's in apostasy. The

majority of Jews in Israel don't believe in God. They're secular." That's true. They're going to believe in God when they see Jesus Christ come back in the Second Coming. They're going to believe in God real quick. They're going to see their Messiah come in power and glory and majesty. And every eye will see Him, and those who have pierced Him will wail and mourn. And they'll say, "What is the meaning of the wounds in Your hands?" And He'll say, "These are the wounds I've received in the house of My friends." "He came to His own, but His own received Him not."

So Israel was set aside, now, for over 2,000 years. The church is being gathered, the Gentiles. Wild olive branches are grafted in to the root Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—I'm giving you a lot of information real quick here. When you come—Romans 8, 9, 10 and 11—you'll get it all. And then the church, when it's complete, will be harpazoed—raptured, caught up—"to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

You go, "You got all that from that verse?" It's in the white spaces. You see how Scripture links together? It's like you get on a roll and you can't stop. When you talk about the church and you talk about God's plan for the church, you've got to distinguish that from Israel. And God's not finished with Israel. And when the church gets raptured and all that happens, it's an amazing, amazing truth taught in the Bible.

So Peter uses four phrases—I should have gotten here quicker, but look at it in verse 9—four phrases to describe us, the church: "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people" or God's own possession. "A chosen generation" means a chosen race. "A chosen generation." It's taken from Isaiah 43:20. So we as believers are chosen by God, and we are dedicated to God. Secondly, we are a "royal priesthood," verse 9. First we're a holy priesthood, verse 5; now we're a "royal priesthood." Why? Because we belong to and are in the service of Christ, our king. And we serve in the king's house, the church. Thirdly, look at verse 9. We're a "holy nation." This is my favorite. Holy nation. This is taken from Exodus 19:6. It means that we are a nation dedicated or set apart to God and His service. Now this is another truth that we could spend some time on. God chose Abraham. And from Abraham came the nation of Israel. And God chose them and revealed Himself to them, gave His laws to them, separated them and they were a special, chosen people.

Now when it says a "holy nation," it means that we are set apart and dedicated to God. It's not talking about moral issues, that we necessarily live holy lives, which is part of it. But it's talking about a bigger concept that we're set apart. Some of you women have china at home. You don't use it every day. You don't let the kids go make mud pies in the back yard with your china. As a matter of fact, I don't know why we have china; we never use the stupid stuff. My wife says, "Be careful. That's the china." "So what! We don't ever use it. We might as well use it for target practice." Freak out! China. So if you come to the Miller house and you get china, you know you're special. Because if my wife weren't there, you'd get Tupperware.

So Israel, and now us, we're like china, set apart. So that's what it means to be holy. Now Israel was supposed to be, in their chosen state—they were supposed to be a light to the other

nations. They have God's law, they have God's Word, they have God's prophets. They were to be a light to them. This is the problem; they became like them. They wanted to be like them. Remember when Israel said, "We want a king"? "They got a king. We want a king! You know, we can't see God. We can't touch God. We can't feel God. Who wants God? We want someone we can see. Give us a king!" And God, through the prophet Samuel, "You want a king? I'll give you a king, and you're gonna rue the day that you asked for a king." So He gave them Saul. Bad news. They got a king. So be careful what you ask for from God. The Bible even says for Israel, God "gave them their request but sent leanness to their souls." You never, ever want God to give you what is not His will. "I don't care if it's not God's will. I want it. I want it now!" I don't want to watch. It's a dangerous thing.

So they wanted to be like the other nations. "They have Gods that can see. They have a golden calf. That's cool! That's really hip. That's cool. We want to be like them. So we want to make a golden calf that we can get naked and dance around. They get naked and dance around a calf. We want to do that too." So they turned to idolatry. They turned to sexual immorality. And they became like the other nations. And becoming like the other nations, they were no longer a light to the other nations.

The same thing is true of the church. If we lose our distinction, as set apart and holy to God, and we become like the world, we will never be a light to the world. And there is such a move in the church today—in the local church today, to make the church cool and hip and relevant and palatable and popular, so that when sinners come in, they're not uncomfortable, they think we're cool. This is okay to go to church. And it's fine to use modern methods, but the message should never change. We're built on the bedrock of Jesus Christ and His Word. And when we become like the world, then the world doesn't need the church. You know, a lot of churches are like a social club. "Why do I need church? I'll join a social club." "We have dancing at our church." Well, that's okay. The Bible says to "dance before the Lord." People ask me, "Can Christians dance?" "Some can. Some can't." We don't have any plans to have Revival dancing. "Come and get revived and 'cut the rug.'" You want to dance? Go somewhere else and dance.

When you come to this church, I want you to get what no where else you can get. That's the Word of God. That's what you need. You can have potlucks and dance and have hayrides and taffy pulls and all kinds of stuff that other places have, but when you come to church, you're a holy priesthood. You're a royal priesthood. You're a chosen nation. And when we offer up praises and sacrifices to God, which are acceptable to Jesus Christ, and we preach His Word, uncompromising Word—we don't soften it or water it down or try to make it politically correct or palatable so that people won't be offended. We "speak the truth in love." Amen? It's so important. And today there's a move and a trend in the church to become like the world. And when we become like the world, we're no longer a light to the world.

Fourthly, he says—my King James Bible, I chuckle when I read it. It says in verse 9, "You are... a peculiar people." How many think Christians are peculiar? A better translation is "a people for God's own possession." A people belonging to God. Remember before your salvation, you

were a child of the Devil, but now that you're saved, you're a child of God? And that we were redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and we belong to God. We're not our own; we're His. So this phrase "peculiar people" literally means you're God's own possession. You've been bought by God. I love this concept.

And as a pastor, I'm constantly reminding myself, "You are God's people." You're not my people—praise God for that! So I don't have to worry about you or fret over you or be concerned with you. I can give you to God. "God, these are your people, and some of them have big problems and You need to fix them, Lord. There's nothing I can do about it." And we need to remember when we come to church—when you're sitting here in the pews right now—these are God's people. They all belong to God. They've been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. Be nice to them. God's nice to them. You should be nice to them. Love them. You should love them. God loves them. Serve them. Jesus died for them. Why shouldn't we want to roll up our sleeves and say, "I will give my life and service to Christ for the church"? You know that in our church history, people died for the church serving God? They bled for this church. They gave their lives to serve the church, to advance the church. They prayed, they sacrificed, they gave so that you could have God's Word. They evangelized to build up the church. They serve and give to build up the church. If God loves the church, I should love the church. If Jesus died for the church, I should die to myself and serve the church.

We should have a whole new perspective. One of the things lacking in the modern church today is we have a low view of the church. We have a low view of God, we have a low view of Scripture and we have a low view of the church. It's not a Biblical view. We need to elevate that view. We need to see its value and its importance. So we are a chosen generation, a royal nation and we are a peculiar people, chosen by God.

Now all these privileges—and let's wrap this up—all these privileges bring great responsibility, verse 9. Notice what it says in verse 9. "...that..."—so here's the purpose of God for the church—"...you should show forth the praises of Him, Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." God's purpose for His people, the church, is that we "show forth." Literally that means to declare or to proclaim. What do we proclaim? His "praise." Or some translations have "His excellencies." Do you tell others of His excellencies? His excellencies or His perfections; about His love, about His grace and about His mercy. When you leave the service today, the church, you go out into the world, and you are to tell others about God's love, about God's grace and about God's mercy. You are to "show forth His excellencies." Remembering that He "called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." That's what happened when you got saved. Again, Peter reminding these suffering saints, God "called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

And then he reminds them in verse 10. Look at it with me. "In times past you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now you have mercy." So he really wraps up everything he said about the church by putting it in these negatives-positives. Once you were not God's people; now you are God's people. Once you were without mercy; now you have His mercy. Isn't that awesome? Just reading those verses

gets me all excited. That's amazing. God would call me out of darkness. God would translate me into light. God, Who had shown me mercy. I was living without hope, without God. And God came and showed me His mercy.

We are stones in the same building, we are priests in the same temple, we are citizens of the same nation. But here's my closing question. Are you a stone, a priest, a citizen? The only way you can become that is by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus died on the cross for your sins. Jesus was buried and rose again. And only through faith in Jesus Christ can you be saved and become a part of the church. If you just go to church, if you become a member of a local church and you sing and you pray and you give and you can even believe in God, you can die and spend eternity in hell. You know why? Because you were never born again. You can go to church but not be a part of His church, not be His body, not be saved.

I can't finish this section on salvation in 1 Peter without offering to you today—and I know I've gone long, so bear with me for just a moment—but if you're here today and you don't know for sure that you've been born again, that your sins have been forgiven and you don't know for sure that if you died you'd go to heaven, I want to give you an opportunity right now to repent and turn from your sin and to invite Jesus Christ to come into your heart and to forgive you, to make you His child and to place you in the church.

Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer.