

A Living Structure

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could this evening for a short while, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read in 1 Peter chapter 2.

1 Peter chapter 2, I want us to look at the verses that we read together. But if we just read again at verse 4. 1 Peter chapter 2 at verse 4.

And so on.

As you know, this is now the fifth Lord's Day that we've been unable to gather together as a congregation.

And unable to gather to worship in God's house. In fact, the last time that we met together for public worship was the weekend of our communion season.

[1 : 08] But now since we've had services suspended, we've all become scattered saints. And I don't know about you, but this situation of lockdown, it makes me more appreciative of the sentiments of the psalmist.

Especially in Psalm 84, where the psalmist says, And, you know, of course, we're thankful for technology and the ability to hear the preached word in the safety of our own homes.

And we're also thankful for the ability to meet virtually for the Bible study and Sunday school and youth fellowship. But as you know, it's not the same as gathering together around God's word.

And yet for such a time as this, we're reminded here in 1 Peter that Peter wrote this letter to the church. A church who also had services suspended.

And a church who also were scattered saints. And he wrote to them not because of a pandemic. But he wrote to them because of persecution. And like us, the church of the first century, they needed a word of encouragement.

[2 : 25] Which is why we've been looking and studying this letter over the past few weeks.

Because Peter reminds us that if we've bowed our knee to King Jesus, And if we've confessed Jesus as our Lord, Peter says, well, you're blessed.

And we're blessed because we have a living salvation through a living saviour, Jesus Christ. We've been born again, he says. Born again to a living hope. We're being kept by the power of God.

And we have this promised glorious inheritance of seeing Jesus face to face. Therefore, as we considered last week, therefore, says Peter, we need to live like Jesus.

We need to love like Jesus. And we need to do it with our mind, our body, and our soul. Because as we saw last week, Peter said, conform your mind, control your body, and check your soul.

But you know, as we move into this next section, Peter reminds us that because we have a living salvation through a living saviour, As the church of Jesus Christ, he says, we are being built up into a living structure.

[3 : 36] And with the church as a living structure, Peter describes the church. He describes the Christian as precious stones, praising saints, and passionate sojourners.

Peter describes the church in this passage as precious stones, praising saints, and passionate sojourners. And there are three headings this evening.

So precious stones, precious stones. Peter says in verse 4, Now we mentioned before that as we go through this letter, we'll see that Peter often uses Old Testament language in order to illustrate his point.

We saw that in the opening verse, where Peter describes the Christian church as elect exiles, which was a description that reflected the experience of the Israelites when they were exiles in the wilderness, and also exiles in Babylon.

They were elect exiles. And we also saw another Old Testament illustration last week, as Peter called us to live like Jesus and love like Jesus, using our mind, our body, and our soul.

[5 : 09] Because we said that Peter based his teaching there upon the greatest commandment given in Deuteronomy 6. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and your neighbour as yourself.

And so Peter often uses Old Testament illustrations to make his point. And this evening is no different, because Peter describes the church as a living structure, and he uses the illustration of the temple.

And, you know, it was a great illustration to use, because for the Old Testament Israelites, and indeed these Christians, the temple was the focal point of the nation.

The temple was this grand structure that was built upon the holy mountain of Mount Zion in Jerusalem. And the temple, it always stood for the people of God as this emblem of God's presence, promises, and power.

Because you remember that inside the temple, in the Holy of Holies, stood the Ark of the Covenant, which was a symbol of the Lord's presence. And it carried with it the covenant promise.

[6 : 20] I will be your God, and you will be my people. The temple, it represented everything about who God is, and what God is like.

Which is why the Psalms, they often describe the temple as this emblem of God's presence, promises, and power. We see that in Psalm 102, where the psalmist says, Thy saints take pleasure in her stones.

Her very dust to them is dear. All heathen lands and kingly thrones on earth thy glorious name shall fear. You know, even Psalm 102, it's an interesting psalm, because it was written whilst the Israelites were in exile in Babylon.

The Israelites were scattered saints, living in a foreign country, under the rule of a foreign king, made to worship foreign gods, which wasn't too dissimilar from the situation the early church was being faced with.

And you know, as Jewish converts to Christianity, these Christians that Peter was writing to, for them, the temple was also very precious to them.

[7 : 36] But you know, what Peter wanted to remind these scattered saints and us tonight, is that our hope, our hope is not in the precious stones of a physical temple in Jerusalem.

Because as Peter says, our hope is in the God who no longer dwells in temples made with hands. Rather, he dwells in temples in our heart.

For the heart of the Christian, my friend, the heart of the Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit. You are the temple of the living God. That's what the New Testament repeatedly affirms and assures us, that the church of Jesus Christ, it's not a building.

We may refer to the building we use to gather for worship as the church. And it may be the focal point of our community. And for some, they may even consider the church building to be like the temple was.

They might think of it as the emblem of God's presence and his promises and his power. But you know what Peter wants to make absolutely clear to us is that our hope, our hope tonight, is not in lifeless stones.

[8 : 54] Our hope is in the living stone, Jesus Christ. Because you know, the church, it's made up of those who confess Jesus as their Lord and their living stone.

Because it's in him. It's in him, as we've learned in this letter. It's in him that we have a living salvation through a living saviour. And tonight, we're being told that we are being built up into a living structure.

And that's why Peter urges the church, us, he urges us in verse 4 to come to him. That's what he says, as you come to him.

As you come, literally he says, as you come to him, keep coming to him. As you come to him, keep coming to him. And don't stop coming to him.

Don't allow persecution or pandemics to prevent you coming to this Jesus. Don't allow doubts or distractions to delay your coming to this living stone.

[9 : 56] Don't allow sin, sickness, suffering, or sorrow to stop you coming to this precious saviour. No, Peter says, as you come to him, keep coming to him.

Keep drawing near to him. Keep reading his word. Keep calling upon him in prayer. Keep pouring out your heart to him. As you come to him, my friend, keep coming to him.

But whatever you do, says Peter, don't stop coming to him. Don't stop coming to this precious stone, Jesus Christ. Because as Peter reminds us, those who come to this precious stone, they are made precious stones through his precious blood.

They are made precious stones through his precious blood. Is that what Peter said in the previous chapter? chapter 1 at verse 19, that we're redeemed, not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but by the precious blood of Christ.

You know, we often say that it's impossible to get blood out of a stone, don't we? We often say that. It's impossible to get blood out of a stone. But Peter, you know, he tells us that there's a fountain of precious blood that flows from this precious stone, Jesus Christ.

[11 : 21] And it's through him that we as sinners, we can be made to be precious stones through his precious blood. My friend, it's in him that we have a living salvation through a living saviour.

And we're being built up into a living structure because through Christ we are made living stones. We're made precious stones. And that's what Peter says in verse 5.

He says, Peter says, that even though the temple was built using lifeless stones to create a physical house for God to dwell in, Peter says, as the church of Jesus Christ, you are living stones.

And you're being built up into a living structure. You're a spiritual house for God to dwell in by the Holy Spirit. But as you know, the thing about stones is that every stone is unique.

No two stones are the same. And it's the same with the church, isn't it? The church isn't like bricks. The church isn't made up of living bricks which look identical to one another and are imitations of one another.

[12 : 52] No, Peter says, the church is being built up into a spiritual house using living stones. Living stones that are unique and each one is precious to the master craftsman.

Because, you know, as precious stones, as precious stones, we all have a unique story to tell, don't we? As precious stones, we're all at unique stages with our Savior, aren't we?

As precious stones, we're all called to a unique service for our master. Isn't that the case? We're not identical imitations of one another. Because as living stones, we all have different aptitudes, different attitudes, different approaches, different abilities.

Therefore, we're to love one another, says Peter, and we're to love our differences. We're to love our differences because each precious stone is what makes up the church of Jesus Christ.

And each precious stone is precious to our master craftsman. And, you know, what Peter emphasizes to us is that as precious stones, as precious stones in the church of Jesus Christ, we are being built.

[14 : 06] Not that we are built, but we're being built. Which means that the church, it's not complete. It's not the finished article.

It's not perfect. It's not the way it should be. It's not the way it's going to be. But the church tonight, it stands upon the promise which Jesus gave to Peter.

I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. My friend, regardless of how precious these stones which make up the church of Jesus Christ, regardless of how we may look on the outside, whether we look weak or worried or weary or worn out, the wonderful thing is this master craftsman, he's affirming and assuring us tonight that the work is still going on.

The work is still going on and we're still being built up as a spiritual house. And we're being built up, my friend, all because we have a living salvation through a living saviour and we're being built up into a living structure because in Christ we are living stones.

We are living stones. And so Peter describes the church, he describes us as precious stones. We're precious stones.

[15 : 30] But then secondly, he describes the church as praising saints. Praising saints. You look at verse 9. 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 marvellous 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. In his book, Add to Your Faith, St. Clair Ferguson, he recalls seeing a poster on the notice board in that church which read, workshop inside, showroom upstairs.

Workshop inside, showroom upstairs. And of course, it's a picture of the Christian life where our lives in this world and as part of the church of Jesus Christ, our lives resemble the workshop.

Because as Peter said, we're being built. We're not already built, but we're being built. Because tonight, we're in God's workshop.

And we're not complete. We're not the finished article. We're not perfect. We're not the way we should be. We're not the way we want to be. We're not the way we're going to be. But at least we're still not what we once were.

[16:57] And all that's taken place and all that takes place in the workshop of our lives, it's not without purpose. Every providence in our lives, my friend, is a preparation for the showroom upstairs.

And you know, that's how Peter describes the church of Jesus Christ. And that's how Peter wants us to see the church of Jesus Christ. He wants us to see the church as precious stones in God's workshop where we're being built and prepared in the workshop of sight.

And you know, with all these allusions to the temple, I can't help but think that Peter is directing us to what it was like when the temple was being built in Solomon's day.

Because you remember that when the temple was built during Solomon's reign, the temple was built in Jerusalem and all these precious stones that were to be part of the structure of the temple, all the precious stones, they were prepared off-site and away from the temple mount.

The precious stones were all quarried and prepared in the workshop so that not a sound of a hammer or an axe or any tool could be heard in God's house while it was being built.

[18:16] And you know, my friend, you know, it's a wonderful reminder to us tonight that we as precious stones, we're being quarried and prepared off-site in the workshop of this world.

And whatever we may be facing in our lives, we have the assurance that we're still in the hands of our master craftsman who knows everything about us. And this master craftsman, he's carving in our lives and he's cutting in our lives, he's still shaping in our lives and he's smoothing out all these rough edges because everything that takes place in the workshop of our lives, it's not without purpose and it's all preparation for the showroom upstairs.

It's all preparation for the showroom upstairs. But you know, as precious stones, what Peter reminds us in verses 6 to 8 is that Jesus Christ is our chief cornerstone.

He says in verse 6, 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 honour 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 offence.

[19:37] They stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do. In those verses, Peter quotes three Old Testament scriptures about stones.

He quotes from Isaiah 28, Psalm 118, and then again in Isaiah at chapter 8. And with each reference, Peter is emphasising that Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of his church.

But you know, when we hear the word cornerstone, we're often tempted to think that it was the first stone and the foundation stone of the temple. But in the ancient world, the cornerstone, it wasn't the first stone or the foundation stone of the temple, it was actually the final stone of the temple.

literally the word cornerstone is the head of the corner. It's the highest stone. It's the headstone. It's the capstone, the chief stone. It's the final stone that went into the structure.

And as the chief cornerstone, it held a place of prominence, not on the corner of the temple, as it were, but it was in a prominent place over the door of the temple so that everyone would see it and it would be the focal point of the building.

[20:57] Now, to explain what I mean, it's very interesting that some of the church buildings that were built even in our own island during the 19th century, some of these church buildings, it seems that they've adopted this idea from the temple of the chief cornerstone where, like the temple, there would be above the door this prominent stone feature and it would be above the door into God's house.

And for many churches, it would also be used to hang the bell and call the whole community to come together for public worship. And that prominent stone feature you see on church buildings, you see it in all, in many of the churches throughout our island and beyond, you see it, there's this chief cornerstone and it's the head of the corner.

It's the highest stone. It's the headstone. It's the capstone, the chief stone, the final stone of the structure. And the purpose of the chief cornerstone was to be the focal point of the building.

The purpose of the chief cornerstone was to be the focal point of the building. And that's what Peter's saying to us as the church of Jesus Christ. He's saying the purpose of the church is to ensure that Jesus Christ, our chief cornerstone, our purpose, he says, is to make sure that Jesus is the focal point of his church.

Because we have a living salvation. We have a living salvation through a living saviour and we're being built up to be a living structure because we're all living stones and precious stones.

[22 : 35] And because of all that, our focal point is to be Jesus Christ as our chief cornerstone. And you know, this is important because you know, these three scriptures about stones that Peter quotes here, they draw attention to a time when God's people were more focused upon self than upon their saviour.

For instance, the stone about scriptures in verse 7 where it says, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. That's a well-known verse from Psalm 118.

And it was written after the exiles had returned from exile in Babylon and they were rebuilding the temple. But during those years of rebuilding, you can read about it in the book of Haggai.

During those years of rebuilding, the work stopped because God's people were more focused upon self rather than upon their saviour. They got sidetracked.

They were more concerned with all their own things and their own gains and their own wants and they were more interested in themselves than they were about the Lord being their saviour.

[23 : 51] And for many years, the capstone or the cornerstone was rejected because the temple still lay in ruins, incomplete. And so, as it says there, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

But you know, Jesus, he also quoted this scripture about stones. He quoted it in Matthew 21. And he did so in order to tell the Pharisees that they too, they were more focused upon themselves than upon their saviour.

Paul, he also alludes to this scripture about stones in Ephesians 2 when he explained to the church in Ephesus, he said to them that the message of the gospel, it has been built upon the apostles and the prophets who were the foundation.

But Jesus Christ, he says, is the chief cornerstone in whom the whole building fits together. And like Peter, Paul was emphasising that Jesus Christ is to be our focal point.

He is to be the focal point of the church because we're not to focus upon ourselves, and upon our own ones. We're not to focus upon self, but upon the saviour.

[25 : 04] As living stones, part of this living structure, every precious stone is to point away from themselves and point to the precious stone that is Jesus Christ.

He's to be our focal point. My friend, Jesus, he is to capture our attention. He's to captivate our minds. He's to command our hearts and even characterise our lives.

Jesus is to be our chief cornerstone. And my friend, as the church of Jesus Christ, we are to be praising saints because we're not perishing sinners.

We are to be praising saints because we're no longer perishing sinners. You know, that's why Peter goes on to say in verse 9, but you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous 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. You know, there's a whole sermon on those two verses because Peter's beautiful description of the church of Jesus Christ, it's a description, again, from the Old Testament.

[26 : 24] It was the description that was first given to the Israelites when they were at Mount Sinai. And you can see it there in Exodus 19, where God called his people.

He called them out of the darkness of bondage and slavery in Egypt and he brought them in to the marvellous light of heading towards the promised land.

And that's how Peter describes the church of Jesus Christ. He says, we're to be praising saints because we're no longer perishing sinners. We've been called out.

He says, we've been called out of the darkness and slavery of bondage to sin and we've been called into the marvellous light of Jesus Christ. We've been called out and called in.

In fact, that's what the word church means. It means called out. The churches, the called out ones, the ecclesia, those who have been called out, called out of darkness into the marvellous light of the

gospel.

[27 : 24] And as a result, as those who are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a peculiar people, as those who were once not a people in darkness, but are now the people of God in this marvellous light, as those who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy, Peter says, we are to proclaim his excellencies.

We're to proclaim his praises. We're to be praising saints tonight because we're no longer perishing sinners. My friend, we're to be praising saints because we're no longer perishing sinners. And you know, Peter's saying to us that just like the temple was built as a place of worship where sacrifices were offered to God, Peter says, as the church of Jesus Christ, we're living stones. We're part of a living structure and we've been called out to offer up living sacrifices of worship to our Saviour. That's what we've been called to do.

It's not what Paul taught us in Romans 12, present your body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God because that is your spiritual worship.

[28 : 46] My friend, as the church of Jesus Christ, we are living stones. We're part of a living structure. We've been called out to offer living sacrifices of worship to our Saviour.

Our life is to be a life of praise. We're to proclaim His praise. We're to be praising saints all because through Jesus Christ we are no longer perishing sinners.

We're to be praising saints because through Jesus we are no longer perishing sinners. And so Peter, he describes the church, he describes the church as precious stones, as praising saints.

And then lastly, and just in a final word, he describes the church as passionate sojourners.

Passionate sojourners. Look at verse 11.

He says, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable.

[29 : 55] so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Peter says here that if we as a church, as the church, if we see ourselves as precious stones, then the result will be that we will be praising saints and passionate sojourners.

And our passion, he says, it will not be for the lusts, the likes and the looks of this world because we're sojourners. We're only passing through.

But out of love, he says, out of love for Jesus and love for the church, we will be passionate sojourners. And we'll be passionate, passionate about our Christian character, conduct and conversation.

But more than that, he says, we'll be passionate about the cause of Christ in our community. We'll be passionate sojourners. My friend, if we live as passionate sojourners, then we'll live like C.T. Studd lived.

What did C.T. Studd say? Only one life. It'll soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Only one life.

[31 : 12] It'll soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. And that's what Peter's reminding us. We are sojourners. We're pilgrims. We're just passing through this world.

We're in the workshop here in this world just now, but we're going to the showroom upstairs. But in the time being, Peter says, we're to be passionate sojourners.

We're to be passionate sojourners. Passionate about our Christian character, conduct and conversation. And passionate about the cause of Christ in our community. We're to be passionate sojourners.

All for the glory of God. We're to be passionate for the glory of God. And you know, it's a good question for us to think about as we begin a new week, isn't it?

How am I going to be a passionate sojourner this week? How am I going to be a passionate sojourner this week?

[32 : 15] How am I going to live for the glory of God this week? How am I going to be passionate about my Christian character, conduct and conversation? How am I going to be passionate about the cause of Christ in my community?

How am I going to be a passionate sojourner this coming week? Because as Peter has reminded us, we have a living salvation through a living saviour.

And we're being built together into this living structure. And it's all because as the Church of Jesus Christ, we're precious stones.

We're praising saints. And we're passionate sojourners. So let's make sure, my friend, this coming week that we are a passionate sojourner.

Because the truth of Scripture is, as the Church of Jesus Christ, we're precious stones. We're praising saints.

[33 : 15] And we're passionate sojourners. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for Thy Word.

Thy Word that reminds us that Jesus is still working in our lives. He is still shaping us as stones in His hand, as the great master craftsman.

And He is moulding us and forming us and fashioning us. Until one day we will appear and when we appear we will be like Him in that great showroom.

O Lord, we thank Thee and we marvel, Lord, tonight that we are able to praise Thee, that we are praising saints because we are no longer perishing sinners.

And Lord, help us, we pray, to be a people who are passionate, passionate sojourners, passionate about our Christian walk, passionate about the cause of Christ, passionate about the glory of God.

[34 : 17] O Lord, we pray that even in this coming week we would be passionate sojourners, knowing that we've only got one life and soon it will be past and only what's done for Christ will last.

Bless us, Lord, in the week that lies ahead. Keep us in the hollow of Thine own hand. For Lord, we know that without Thee we can do nothing, but that with Thee all things are possible.

Take away our iniquity, receive us graciously, for Jesus' sake. Amen.