1 Peter Lesson 3 (2023)

The Living Stone and A Chosen People

1 Peter 2:4-12

Key Verses 2: 4-5

“ As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

I want to ask a question for you. What is the most precious thing to you? How do you keep in your heart and how do you treat it? This process is important to everyone in order to have life in full and live happily ever after. About forty years ago when I was in college, I was asked to answer this question. At that time, with many situations I confronted, I thought about how I should live my life better. I was fatalistic; had no dream nor plan for future. I was not sure who I am and what to do. I studied about Joseph in Genesis and thought of God who is good and shows a great plan for Joseph’s future. Since then, I have been launched into a different direction of life. First of all, it was the time of renewing, having a more exciting journey through and through. I can say it is by God’s mercy. I mean it is by God’s invitation. Meeting Jesus as my Shepherd has been very precious in my life.

In the beginning of his letter, Apostle Peter portrayed that in his great mercy, God has given us new birth into a living hope, which is done through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Because of this hope, Christians are guaranteed to have eternal inheritance. This morning, let us think about who we are and how we should live based on the testimony of the Apostle of Jesus Christ.

1. The Precious Living Stone (4-8)

Verse 4 reads, “As you come to him, the living Stone, rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him.” Apostle Peter invites his fellow Christians to come to Jesus, saying he was rejected by humans, but chosen by God. How did people reject Jesus?

Let us briefly review Jesus’ life on earth. When he was born in Bethlehem, there was no room to put him, so he was born in a manger, the animal’s feeding box. He was almost pushed into the edge of the water by hometown people and constantly challenged by the religious leaders. His disciples abandoned him when he was arrested. He was ridiculed by the soldiers and the crown of thorns was on his head. The crowd screamed to crucify him and he was nailed to the tree as a criminal. He cried out to God when he suffered on the cross because of pain he had to endure, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34) Though he didn’t do anything wrong, rather he lived for the people, people treated him badly until he was alone on the cross. However, to God, Jesus is precious. God made Jesus the living Stone. What does it mean: “rejected by humans, but chosen by God”?

**First, Jesus is the foundation for salvation.** Verse 6 reads, “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trust in him will never be put to shame.” It is the quotation from Isaiah 28:16. The Apostle Peter says that Jesus is the chosen and precious cornerstone. The cornerstone is the foundational stone when a house is being built. Where the cornerstone is placed determines the rest of the stones are. Without the cornerstone a house cannot be built nor stand. God set Jesus as the foundation of salvation. It means Jesus is the determinant of one’s destiny.

It continues in verses 7 and 8. Let’s read together. “Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,’ and, ‘A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’ They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.” What is the message that man should obey? It is about God’s love story. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” God gave his Son Jesus to the people not being perished, but give everlasting life. Though Jesus was rejected by the people, God saves the world through Jesus. The rejected Stone is the cornerstone.

In many cases, we are struggling to believe in Jesus because it doesn’t come naturally. Maybe some may say that I do not need salvation. It is not my story. I am okay. Some try to find something else intentionally, thinking that Jesus is outdated and not real sense to them. Their own preference and choice appear better. In addition, there are many good things people can enjoy in the world. Advanced technology makes people living in fantasy with all kinds of information instantly; the accessible social connections with smartphone support people to have comfort and sense of belongings even in long distance. People work hard to secure their living and make master plan for their promising future. In the course of life, they habitually say that living is not easy; I am tired and just want to live easy-going as possible. However, people usually don’t want to talk about the consequence of all things they largely depend on and pursue. The Bible clearly says that eventually everyone must answer for their lives whether it is good or bad. What would be the standard of the answers? It is by God, which is written in the Bible. I believe many try to find an answer for their lives seriously.

We have the reliable resource to answer for our lives indeed. Peter was so excited to talk about it today. It is about the living Stone; the rejected cornerstone. The cornerstone is the mark, which the builder starts to build a house. It provides the direction and shape of the house and maintains the building. Peter directs us that we can build our lives on the cornerstone Jesus. As the builder builds a house, looking at the cornerstone again and again until it is complete, a believer always looks at Jesus to be built sound and healthy. It is a good news for us. The cornerstone also provides comfort and healing. When you are ignored and distress, suffering from the world, look at the cornerstone. When you feel alone and lost, look at the cornerstone. The love of God in Jesus helps us dearly and guides us, renewing of our soul.

A few days ago, I got a shocking and urgent notice from our neighbor to look for a person who was missing. The man is 26 years old and lived with his mother. They were always walking together through the neighborhood. I would see him and mother, but never paid much attention to them. When I heard he left a suicidal note before he disappeared, my heart was broken. He might have been suffering with some level of mental distress, which he couldn’t bear at the time. I hope he may come back safe and sound. I earnestly pray that he may come back to the living Stone, the author of salvation in God’s mercy. People may inwardly suffer from own mistakes and weaknesses, committed sin with sense of guilt and shame in the course of life. People live in fear under the power of darkness in some degree without exception. Some of us may experience challenges whether it is big or small. It is the time to come to Jesus who was rejected by humans but chosen by God.

**Second, Jesus is the standard in our living.** Let us read verse 5. “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” It says that believers are like living stones that are being built into a spiritual house. It is the new identity Peter was speaking about. The key element of a spiritual house is the living stones. It means each one of you is an essential part of the house. In his letter, Peter describes two important aspects of Christian living: here as “a holy priesthood” and “a royal priesthood” in verse 9. What does the holy priesthood do? They offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God (5b). Romans 12:1 says, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” Our natural body is limited and unable to offer that God accepts. It would be done through Jesus Christ. In other words, by our struggle to imitate Jesus based on his words and by his intervention in us, we may live as a holy priesthood. Offering spiritual sacrifices represents living in Jesus. He is the living Stone and we are living stones who are attached to him.

St. Francis of Assisi is a well-known person who strictly set Jesus as the standard of living. One day, he was hungry and killed a chicken and ate it. After being satisfied, he experienced uneasy feeling. He thought about Jesus and read the Bible. There was no word that Jesus killed and ate a chicken when he was hungry. He repented of his ignorant action based on Jesus’ life. He asked his follower to walk around the street, dragging him with a rope around his neck. He shouted, “Here is a man who ate the chicken that Jesus didn’t.” We can think it is too much that he should endure such a struggle! However, we can learn a lesson that Francis strived to imitate Jesus to the maximum. He received the word from Luke 18:22, which Jesus said to the rich ruler, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

He listened to Jesus’ word. He sold all of his property and gave them to the poor and became familiar with poverty. Francis became a friend of the needy and dedicated to preach the good news to everyone. It is amazing that he preached the word of God to the animals, such as wolves and birds. He was called, “the apostle of nature”. He went to Egypt to preach the gospel to the Sultan, Islamic leader when the Crusade was ending. Though outwardly he was shabby, inwardly he was rich. People saw the beauty of Jesus in him and listened to the gospel and Jesus’ teaching through him.

We may experience many hardships and difficulties while we live in this world. Our hearts may be broken while we serve the broken-hearted. We are often pressured by society and become anxious and emotional. But let us study the word of God and find answers from Jesus’ words. Jesus Christ is the most precious gift given to us from God. He is our standard of living and future. He was and he is and he will be with us. The Apostle assures that the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.

1. A Royal Priesthood (9-12)

The Apostle Peter urged Christians who were scattered, living as foreigners and exiles to come to Jesus. Now he says what kind of people they are in the world. Look at verse 9, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

**First, Christians are a chosen people, a holy nation and God’s special possession.** As this verse defines, Christians are called by God out of the world. They are chosen people. It means God has a special purpose for them. They are a holy nation. To be holy means to be separated. Thus, Christian life is different from the worldly standard. They belong to God as God’s special possession. As an owner dearly takes care of his belongings, God carefully takes care of each person.

**Secondly, Christians are a royal priesthood.** According to Deuteronomy 33:10, the priests are people who teach the word of God and mediators who carry the sin of the people to God for the forgiveness. Peter says that Christians are important people like kings and queens. As Jesus Christ is from the royal line, Christians are a royal family.

What qualifications do a king require? To be a king, he develops a high standard of character with deep study and training. He would have a good heart to embrace all kind of people. A king would have wide concerns for all people beyond his own family. A king requires wisdom to understand people and courage as well. A king has the authority to govern the nation. When Apostle Peter called Christians a royal priesthood, each believer has a high calling with spiritual authority.

Then what is the role of a royal priesthood? Look at verse 9b. “That you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” The royal priesthood declares the work of God in them to the people as a testimony: out of darkness into the wonderful light. In the past, we easily despaired because we were gripped with the power of darkness. When sadness comes into our lives, we became powerless to do anything. Many times, when darkness comes into our mind and thought, we were prone to lie down and sleep all day long. Useless! Apostle Peter testifies that but Christ Jesus called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. We remain in darkness no more. Even if the powerful darkness comes, we can live above the situation. When difficulty comes, we even joyfully deal with it. Jesus calls his followers, “You are the light of the world.” (Mt 5:14) The prophet Isaiah exclaims, “Arise, shine, for your light has come” ( Isa 60:1). We are ambassadors of the Light. In this dark world, we announce the light of Jesus to the hearts of people. All these things happen because God calls us to live in the wonderful light. Once we were not a people, but now we are the people of God. Once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy.

Today Apostle Peter assured that we are a holy priesthood who build the spiritual house by offering ourselves acceptable to God in daily living. We are a royal priesthood who declare the wonderful light of Jesus to the hearts of the people. Christian life is different from the worldly lifestyles, but it is not exclusive, rather actively inclusive. See, how God loves the world? He loves the world until he gave begotten Son as the ransom sacrifice to save them from eternal condemnation.

Verses 11 and 12 instruct us how to live in a pagan society. It says, “Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” The people may accuse you because of your faith, but let us have confidence in our identity as a royal priesthood, holding on to the living Stone firm and secure. We pray the light of Jesus may shine brightly upon the darkened when we declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into a wonderful light. In this year of 2023, Let us have a special testimony about our new life in the living Stone Jesus and how the wonderful light of Jesus shines on the lives of people around us.

One word: In the living Stone Jesus , we are light of the world.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, thank you for calling us as a holy priesthood and a royal priesthood out of the world to live in hope. We may renew this wonderful identity personally and collectively. We may shine the light of Jesus to the people who need your healing. May God work in us to live good lives so that people may see our good deeds and glorify God when Jesus comes again. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

* Sing together from Sing to the Lord Hymnal # 425, “I Love Him Better Every Day”

(1-3 verses)