**YOU ARE A CHOSEN PEOPLE**

May 3, 2020

1 Peter 2:4-10
Key Verse 2:9 – *“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.”*

In this passage, Peter builds on the new hope we have in Jesus Christ by illustrating how our hope is revealed in our newfound identity in Christ. When we truly know who we are before Christ, He becomes the very rock we build our lives upon and an unshakable foundation in times of trials. Let us explore the view our loving Creator has for us in all its dimensions as He reveals the wonderful purpose He has made us for.

**Part 1: The Living Stone**

Look at the opening phrase of verse 4, **“As you come to him, the living Stone…”** The original Greek word used here for “come” does not mean a one-time moment or action. It describes a regular, continuous and deliberate action. We need to come to God every day whether it is through Bible Study, prayer, songs of praise or whatever form your worship of the Lord takes. Sometimes, we come to Him with “a broken and contrite heart” because of our struggles with sin (Psalm 51:17). Other times, we may be weighed down with heavy burdens in life (Matthew 11:28-29). Or it can simply be a deep desire to know who God is (Psalm 42:2). Whatever the reason, whatever the situation and whatever the mood, God’s great joy is when we simply come to Jesus Christ, the living Stone, with whatever is on our minds and in our hearts. It is why Jesus taught us to pray to God for our daily bread, which represents our physical and spiritual needs that only God Himself can truly satisfy (Matthew 6:11).

Notice how Peter describes Christ as “the living Stone.” Why does he do so? Could it be a little play-on-words given that Jesus gave him the name “Peter” (meaning “rock”) so he wanted to contrast Jesus with himself? It goes much deeper than that. Look at verse 4 in its entirety, **“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him…”** Throughout the Bible, stone (or rock) has multiple symbolic meanings. Most commonly it is used to represent God’s strength, security and faithfulness. The Psalmist in describing God writes, “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” (Psalm 18:2). When God delivered David from King Saul and all his enemies, he burst into a song of praise proclaiming, “The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be my God, the Rock, my Savior!” (2 Samuel 22:47). Time after time, God revealed His everlasting faithfulness to those who placed their trust in Him and the greatest revelation of this truth is Jesus Christ Himself.

Just as He is the living Hope in a world filled with dead hopes, Jesus is the living Stone; the rock of salvation and the hope for all mankind. He is living in that He died for our sins, but was raised from the dead, triumphant over sin, death, and Hell. He is the author and giver of life, able to give spiritual life to all who believe in Him. That He is living means that Christianity is not a religion of going through dead rituals. It is a dynamic relationship with the living Lord of the universe! Yet even though He was “chosen by God and precious to him” (verse 4), mankind still rejected Him in pursuit of our own sinful desires. We rejected God’s way of salvation for our own as we worshipped all other created things instead of the one truly worthy of all our worship, our Loving Creator (Romans 1:25). Thankfully, God’s plans do not rely on mankind’s faithfulness and deeds but entirely rest on what He has done. By His grace, He even invites us to become part of His life-saving work.

Look at 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.”** Such a contrast! In one breath, Peter has gone from proclaiming Jesus as the Living Stone to then call us living stones. When we come to Jesus, He transforms us from the inside out into “mini” versions of Himself (2 Corinthians 3:18). Just as Jesus is the Living Stone, we too are called to be living stones being built into a temple for the Lord. Because we have Christ and His Spirit dwelling within us, we are not simply individuals but are built together by Christ as one holy temple, members of one body in Christ. Though we are stones of different shapes, sizes, colours and origins, Jesus the Master Builder is crafting us together into one great spiritual house to serve the Lord. This message clearly was not lost on the early church who were unwelcomed exiles, scattered all across Europe and Asia on account of their faith. Though separated, they were encouraged to see each other as deeply connected by their shared faith in Jesus Christ. The same could be said of us during our time of isolation due to the COVID-19 epidemic. As Calvin put it beautifully in last week’s message, it is very easy for us to fall backwards and only think of the situation in terms of our own struggles and our fear of illness and death. However, we are called to look beyond the hardships and fears by turning our eyes to the glorious image of Christ and the work that He is doing to bring all people together. In Christ, we are able to see each other as brothers and sisters in faith, caring for the needs of one another as He builds His church within us and among us.

Breaking verse 5 further down, we are called to be a **“holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”** In those days, the priest was the sole intermediary between man and God. It was the priest’s job to pray for the sins of the nation and perform sacrificial offerings to God. Through Jesus’ death on the cross He become both an offering to cover all our sins (John 1:29) and our faithful High Priest who bridged the chasm between us and God (Hebrews 2:17, 7:25). Now Jesus has given us the privilege of being His priests tasked with performing spiritual sacrifices for Him. What are the spiritual sacrifices God wants us to give? Romans 12:1 tells us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God. The Philippian church took up a collection and sent it to Paul to meet his needs. He called their service “an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God” (Philippians 4:18). Hebrews 13:15-16 instructs us, through Christ, to “continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

Through these verses, we see that whenever we put God’s desires first and pleasing God as the most important thing in our lives, anything we do for Him can be a spiritual sacrifice. When we do so, we make Jesus the precious cornerstone of our lives. If we build our lives on anything or anyone else, our lives are doomed to come crumbling down. However, when Christ is our foundation, He strengthens us to stand firm in any trial and storm for those who put their hopes in Christ “will never be put to shame” (verse 6).

**Part 2: You Are A Chosen People**

Let us read 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.”** Famously, this is the UBF Key Verse. I have heard it so many times that I should be able to recite it in my sleep. Sadly, this is not the case. I mostly thought of this verse in a similar way to the Great Commission; Jesus’ command to go out into the world and preach the Gospel… usually to disinterested university students. However, through writing this message, I have a greater appreciation for why this verse was chosen. More than a call to preach the Gospel, this verse vividly illustrates our newfound identity in Christ.

Figuring out your identity or “finding yourself” is the main philosophy of our time. People look to all kinds of things to carve out their own individuality, meaning and purpose. I thought that graduating with high marks, landing my dream job and marrying the girl I had long set my heart on would give those very things. I believed that they would the things that would free me from all my worries about life and insecurities about myself. However, one by one these hopes were smashed to pieces. My life was a ship without a rudder, with no clear idea where I was going for I had no sense of who I truly am. I was looking everywhere apart from God but could find no answers. Who am I? What am I doing with my life? Why am I trying to achieve? But all these questions fell to the side as I struggled with God’s Word and confronted the more important question; **Who does God say you are?** God created us. God gives us life and purpose. So it is only natural that only He can tell us what our identity truly is. We can only be our real selves when we live in accordance to our true identity. To those who call on Him as Lord and on Jesus Christ as their Saviour, He has given us a magnificent four-fold identity that can also be described as the four privileges of God’s people. Each of them, remarkable in their own right, paints the picture of how God sees us, building on Peter’s message from Chapter 1.

First: **You are a chosen people**. There is a profound reason why this is the first aspect mentioned. It reminds us that this is something that God initiated. When God first chose Israel, He called them to be His chosen people on the earth and to be witnesses for Him. Through Jesus Christ, the church is now God’s chosen people. This choosing is not because we are better than others or because we have some special inner quality. This choosing is entirely God’s one-sided grace available to everyone. Due to our sinfulness and brokenness, we did not choose God. Truth be told, by our own effort we would never choose God yet God did something wonderful in choosing us first. Why did He do so? Ephesians 1:4-6 put it best; “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” Such an incredible honour and privilege yet this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Second: **A royal priesthood**. In verse 5, we looked at what Peter meant in calling us a holy priesthood yet here we are also called a royal priesthood. This combines kings and priests into one role. In Exodus 19:5, the nation Israel was called to be a kingdom of priests to mediate God’s blessing to the world. While the offices of king and priest were kept strictly separate, they both anointed and represented God’s gracious rule. When both the kings and the priests worked together to honour God, the nation was even more blessed. But Jesus, who is our high priest and eternal king, has fulfilled both roles and combined them together for us. And because we have been made coheirs with Christ, we get to share in being both royalty and a priesthood. Now we too have been tasked with exercising authority while at the same time being intercessors for others in different aspects of our lives such as family, school, work and of course, church. We are to watch over and lead with authority while at the same time humbly serving others in their practical needs and teaching them God’s Word.

Third: **A holy nation**. To be holy is to be sacred and set apart for a special purpose. In calling us a holy nation, we are reminded that we have been set apart for God’s purpose. No longer do we live in pursuit of our own ambitions and glory for our joy comes from taking part in God’s mission work. In the way we live and all that we do, holiness should be the root of it i.e. does this honour God and is it in accordance with His will? Soon, our eyes become open to the many who share in that same desire, the ones whose allegiance is not to an ethnicity or country but to Jesus our King. In the end, the many divisions there are in this world will simply fade away for we see ourselves united as one people, one nation and kingdom under Christ.

Fourth: **God’s special possession**. Do you believe that you are special to God? You are called “God’s special possession.” It is the God of all creation who calls you special. A lot of our heartache in life stems from our innate desire of wanting someone to see us and think of us as special. We all want to be special. God thinks exactly that of me and you, so much so He willingly died for that fact. Once, we were slaves to sin. But now we belong to God because we have been purchased with a price; we are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. In doing so, we have become His special possession for all eternity and church is the gathering of God’s treasured people.

By God’s grace, we have been gifted this four-fold identity for the purpose of declaring **“the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”** Each and every one of us has a testimony, a story of the work God has done in our lives to bring us out of darkness and give us new life in Him. There are so many who need to hear this message and God is choosing to do this through you and me. This is God’s amazing gift to us. This is our mission, our desire and ultimately our new identity in Christ. So how can we grow in our new identity and be confident it? We can by choosing Jesus in every matter in our lives. Just as Jesus chose us, we need to choose Him in return. As we constantly choose Him and come to Jesus the Living Stone, we will grow in assurance of our identity as it reveals itself in the holy lives that we live before Him. May God strengthen us to be a chosen people and royal priesthood for this generation.

**Big Idea:** Jesus gives us our true identity. By His mercy, we are chosen for His great purpose.