

Sermon File # 711

Scripture Text: 1 Peter 2:4-10

Sermon Title: *God's Call to the Church*

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God's Call to the Church

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to 1 Peter 2:4-10 as we continue our sermons in this first letter from Simon Peter, the apostle of hope. Writing to a scattered church facing persecution, Peter emphasizes that the hope we have in the risen Christ is not mere wishful thinking. Rather, our hope is a solid conviction of the reality of our eternal life in Christ, whose promises to us are being fulfilled in our present life in the kingdom and will be completely fulfilled in the consummated new heaven and earth. Last Sunday we noted that, because of the grace and hope we have received, we are under an imperative to live faithfully as obedient children of God, in holiness of conduct and in loving relationships with one another in God's family.

We recall how Peter admonished us to be rid of the "junk food" of ungodliness and alienation from one another and instead crave for the pure spiritual milk (2:2) of Christ and his word. Our first priority is to seek Christ himself and his fullness in our lives, and then are we prepared to consider our responsibility in relationship with one another in the church, the body of Christ and the temple of God, which is the image that Peter uses in our text.

Follow as I read **1 Peter 2:4-10**.

During my tenure as a board member of a missionary sending organization, I recall some correspondence we received from a missionary serving in a particularly difficult region of the world. He and his wife had informed us of their partnership with missionaries from other evangelical churches, which, sadly, was not well received by some members of our board, who thought our denomination should be able to win the world to Christ without the aid of any other denomination. But this cooperating missionary replied to these objections by saying, "We need each other. Down here, any believer looks good."

I imagine that the believers scattered throughout Asia Minor as "strangers in the world" thought other believers looked good to them. They didn't have the luxury of being exclusive, but rather needed the fellowship and encouragement afforded by a close bond with one another. Although we don't face the same kind or degree of opposition or persecution from the world, we here at IBC realize, perhaps more than those in nations where the church is a major part of the culture, that we also need each other. Every follower of Jesus should look good to us.

Peter has introduced his letter by extolling the riches of God's grace given us through the new birth and also the need we have to grow in our new life in Christ through personal holiness. But that's not all of our life in Christ. Just as we are called to a personal relationship with Christ, so are we called just as importantly to a relationship with one another in the body of Christ and to the temple of God, which Peter imagines for us in this text. These words speak against one of the sins of the church, particularly in North America, the sin of individualism and of failure to fulfill our responsibility to one another and with one another. (A professor of church growth and evangelism names individualism as one of the sins of the Western church. Rah, 27-45).

In this passage in his letter, Peter says that God has called his church, including you and me...

To be his people

Peter says these scattered and estranged believers, although rejected by others (4) are nevertheless precious to God, by whom they and we are...

Chosen for relationship

Just as we are to continually crave the Lord himself and feed upon his word (2), so we are to keep coming to him as the living Stone (4). Once again Peter reminds us that we are the Lord's chosen (1:2; 2:4). He had us in mind, Paul says, from before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4) and took the initiative toward us when we were dead in our transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Just as Christ was despised and rejected by the world (Isaiah 53:3), so we too share in his rejection by the world. But also, as Jesus was

delivered and raised again triumphant over the world, so we are risen with him and await our full deliverance and vindication.

Quoting passages from Isaiah (28:16; 8:14) and the Psalms (118:22), Peter emphatically states that the coming of the Messiah created a great divide among mankind. Christ has come to be the Cornerstone, not just of the nation of Israel, but for all of the people of God, all who are willing to come to him and submit to his Lordship. But for those who reject him, Christ becomes “a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall” (8, Isaiah 8:14). If we do not come to Christ in repentance, faith and full acceptance of his Lordship (and I might add, we must keep on coming to him), then we must face his judgment and suffer everlasting punishment. There’s no room in Peter’s theology (or in that of all Scripture) for today’s pluralism and universalism. Rejecting Jesus Christ, who is the only way to salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12, which is Peter’s sermon to the Sanhedrin, in which he quotes Psalm 118:22) is a sin with everlasting consequences.

In the meantime we live in the confidence that we belong to God and we are...

Precious to him

As we noted in the first chapter, God showed us the extent of his love and how precious we are to him when he purchased (ransomed/redeemed) us at the price of the blood of his Son (1:18f).

Peter expresses this amazing love and gracious choice when he alludes to the prophet Hosea (1:9f; 2:23) when he says that at one time we were not a people, but are now the people of God, who have received his mercy (10). Just as the Lord called his people into the First Covenant, so now we are blessed to be part of his New Covenant, made possible by the suffering and death of his Son.

We need this awareness of our worth in the eyes of God and also of the inestimable worth of one another. Each member of the body of Christ is precious and dear to him, which should say something to us about the way we often treat each another.

Belonging to him

We use the term “dear” as an expression of endearment, but it’s also used, as in Scotland, to mean something is expensive. “Dear” must have an etymological relationship with the Dutch word, “duur,” meaning costly/expensive. God has put a price tag on us and it says, “Dear to me. This one is too expensive for anyone to take away from me.” The price I paid to set him free from enslavement to sin and bondage to self and a destiny of death is too dear.

Peter uses the image of rebirth by which we come into the heavenly family of God, but also this image of a redemption/ransom price (1:18) also gives the

image of adoption, that we belong to him as his paid-for, adopted children. And that means we must reflect his likeness, as we noted from 1:13-2:3.

Jesus is the living Stone (4) and we “are like living stones” (2:5). Normally stones are inorganic, but the image Peter gives is stones that are alive and organic, building blocks for the living temple, the church of the Lord Jesus.

No doubt Peter was thinking of his own nickname, “petros,” which Jesus gave to him at his calling (John 1:42) and reiterated at Peter’s confession of Jesus’ messianic identity at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13-20). At first, when a disciple-learner, Peter was anything but a rock, but eventually, following his reinstatement by the risen Lord (John 21:15-19) and infilling of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff), he indeed lived up to his name as a solid rock in the building of the church.

Peter didn’t claim a special place as a living stone, as *the* rock of foundation, such as was assigned to him in Roman Catholicism, but obviously thought of himself as simply one of the millions of the redeemed children of God who are living stones in God’s temple (Jobes, 144).

We have a saying in my homeland, the USA, that a young man who bears a likeness to his father, either in appearance or behavior, is a “chip off the old block,” using the image of a wooden chip cut from a large piece of wood. In this image, Peter says that we are all to think of ourselves as chips off of the everlasting Block, the main Stone of God’s temple, the Cornerstone (ESV “cornerstone,” cf. the NIV “capstone”).

And we are called...

To accept his place

We cannot think of ourselves in isolation from our fellow believers. Our faith is inadequate and possibly even false and pretentious if we separate ourselves from our fellow believers. Peter says we are called to accept the place Christ has assigned of us...

In the temple

We are called to be a part of the temple of the Lord. The temple in the Old Covenant was the place where God met with his people in special assembly and where sacrifices were made in behalf of the people of God. Jesus referred to his own body as the temple that would be destroyed in his crucifixion but then restored in his resurrection (John 2:19-22), and the apostle Paul noted that we are, as the church, the temple where God dwells in a special presence (1 Corinthians 3:16. Moo, 2,124).

We cannot live in isolation from one another any more than a building stone has any purpose apart from being in the building for which it was intended. Although many of us are ex-pats and perhaps still have a connection with a

church in our home country, we are, just like the disciples living in Asia Minor, here as sojourners and strangers. But while here, we are called to be a part of the temple in this place, which for you may well be IBC Brussels. God calls you to seek him and to also seek your place in his temple, even if your place here is only for two years or so. And you'll have to accept us as an imperfect temple, but nevertheless a temple where God dwells and is at work.

I like the story told about a woman who spoke with the great 19th Century London pastor, Charles Spurgeon, explaining that she hadn't become a member of his church because she was looking for the perfect church. He then told her to promise him that if she found it to please not join it. "Why not?" she asked Spurgeon. "Because when you join it," he replied, "It will no longer be perfect" (quoted in Carter, 138).

Although we the living stones are imperfect we are called to accept our place...

With the Cornerstone

Jesus is the Cornerstone (NIV translates the Greek "the head of the corner" as "capstone. Most other translations, including *The Message* paraphrase, use "cornerstone"), the most important and the only perfect Stone in the temple of the church. The cornerstone in ancient buildings was the first one put in place and the one that determined the design and orientation of the building, since all other stones had to conform and be true to its placement (Clowney, 84).

Disciples of Jesus have come to him and continue to come to him in repentance and faith, and we are necessarily brought into relationship with his people, God's temple. Our place is first of all to be under the authority of Jesus as Lord and in line with his will for our lives. Unless we are right with him we cannot be in a good fellowship with others. We must fit next to him and then we can be fitted next to one another.

Just this past week I received an e-mail from a friend in the US who ministered with me in a former church as our worship pastor. He's been serving with another church in the same city, and wrote to me about the difficulties in his church caused by what he can only assume to be unconverted church members. They've said the right words in a confession of faith without the possession of faith, and were baptized in water but not by the Spirit. And now they are acting like the unconverted people they are, with no desire to grow spiritually or to serve with and love one another in true spiritual fellowship. They've not been aligned with the Cornerstone.

And Christ's place for us is to be...

Alongside other living stones

Every building stone in God's temple is important, and we are called to be true to one another and in our place. Paul speaks of the necessity of every member of the church when he uses the image of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). Each one of us, whether our gifts are impressive or obscure, must

use them for the building and strengthening of the body of Christ. In the same way Peter implies that as living stones we need each other and the temple needs us.

And we must fit together, and accept the place God has for us and be in fellowship and loving unity with all the other living stones. Our part is not dispensable but is essential, even if we remain in the background.

Houses in the USA, like our former home, often have brick or stone facades for decorative purposes. A stone on the front of our former house could be removed and not affect the integrity or strength of the structure of the house. But the houses we've observed over here in Belgium are built of brick, even the interior walls. These bricks and stones are essential and with many of them, their removal would seriously affect and weaken the integrity and strength of the structure.

I've always been impressed by the work of a good stone mason, who can take different shapes of stones and place them together in such a way that they fit and complement the other stones and make a beautiful and strong wall.

God is the Master Builder, placing us in the wall of his temple, with a distinct place and irreplaceable role in the structure. God sees us each one as essential. Just as Spurgeon reminded the woman looking for the perfect church, we are all imperfect, but God uses us all and has a distinct place for each of us. He has placed us together for a purpose and without you the temple is incomplete because his call is...

To fulfill his purpose

God has called us to our place and into his service, to build his temple in a way that will fulfill his purpose and bring honor to his name. And this is done...

Through what we are

We are to be a holy priesthood (5) and a royal priesthood (9). In the Old Covenant only those born to Aaron in the tribe of Levi could serve as priests. But in the New Covenant all of us are reborn into God's family with the rights and also the responsibilities of the priesthood.

First, priests are called and separated from sinful uncleanness and set apart as God's children and servants. We know that in this life we cannot reach sinless perfection but in Christ we stand in his grace as forgiven sinners who daily are being made holy and are becoming more like Jesus. Our first sacrifice we offer as God's chosen priests is the daily offering of our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to him, which Paul says is to be our response to his saving grace that has made us right with God (Romans 12:1).

These words must have been of great significance to the uprooted, scattered, rejected and suffering church in 1st Century Asia Minor. Although many of them

were Gentile pagans, regarded by Jews as outsiders, Peter says they are now part of his chosen people and his holy nation.

A more accurate translation of “chosen people” (9) is “chosen race” (NRSV, NASV, ESV), which would have given a great sense of identity to these believers, whose host cities and regions in Asia Minor considered them culturally inferior. As one commentator remarked, “Here is the foundational cure for the evils of racism in human society” (Jobes, 159). This is a great word to us here at IBC. Although our fellowship consists of “living stones” from many different lands, cultures and races, Christ has made us new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17) and into a new race, God’s chosen people.

Not only that, but they also are ordained, set apart priests. Maybe their citizenship was in question, at least by the local Roman citizens among whom they lived as strangers and aliens. But Peter says they now were citizens of God’s holy nation, a citizenship they could never lose. Some of them had been rejected by their families and had forfeited their property and inheritance. But now they belonged to God as his distinct, beloved children and heirs with Christ (9f, cf. Romans 8:16f).

Before we concern ourselves with what we are to do for God, we need to ask what God wants us to be in Christ. We are people redeemed by the blood of Christ, living stones becoming more like the Cornerstone and priests becoming more like the great High Priest, Jesus (Hebrews 4:14ff; 7:11ff).

Then God will be pleased and honored...

Through what we do

Peter says that what we are results in what we do. Because we are called to be a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people belonging exclusively to God, we may declare his praises. We can’t declare his praises if our lives are not being conformed to his likeness, if they don’t give any evidence of his life and grace in us.

Christ has called us to be his children, and as we live as his children and unite ourselves with other living stones/fellow believers in the temple of God, we are part of a temple that glorifies him. God has called you to find a temple, a local church, where you can join in his purposes. And when God adds someone to the church, we need to ask ourselves and that individual what gifts and ministry that person is bringing to us. God has a purpose in adding that “living stone” to the temple, and that purpose will result in the strengthening and up-building of the temple.

Although Peter is not speaking against the place of an ordained ministry that is given a particular equipping role in the church (Ephesians 4:11-13, and see Jobes, 160), he nevertheless says that each one of us is a priest, a minister in the service of the Lord.

We are not just a missionary church, a concept that shifts responsibility for the ministry to the elected leaders and to the missionaries we support through prayer and finances. Rather, we are a missional people, each one of us called to be on mission with Christ in our daily life and using ordinary contacts to be a witness and a bridge between unbelievers and God. Our calling is not only to glorify God by our worship, but also to join Christ in seeking after worshipers (John 4:23). As John Piper says, mission exists because worship doesn't. Our ultimate objective is to make disciples who will glorify God around his throne.

As William Barclay says, "the Latin word for priest is pontifex, which means a bridge-builder; the priest is the man who builds the bridge for others to come to God; and the Christian has the duty and the privilege of bringing others to that Savior whom he himself has found and loves" (Barclay, 232). And there's a close connection between our being fitted together in love with God's people and our effectiveness as priests who lead the way for others to come to God. Jesus said our love for one another would authenticate to the world that we are his followers (John 13:35).

Conclusion:

Some here today need to cross over the bridge given you by the great High Priest, Jesus, who is your only way to peace with God. Today you will decide to come, for the first time, to Jesus Christ as the Cornerstone, the Foundation and the Rock of your salvation, or you will have decided that he will be a stumbling stone and a rock that will make you fall to everlasting destruction.

For those of us who have come to Christ the Cornerstone, our part is to answer his call and find the place and fulfill the mission he has for us. God has placed us among our neighbors and work and school associates, and has a distinct role for us as his representative and bridge builders. This church has been given a distinct role as well and God wants us to find your place and fulfill his ministry for us.

Soon we will have a Ministry Fair, and will display in our fellowship hall all the ministries of this church and how we can participate and give our support. It may be a less glamorous but a vital one, such as taking a turn caring for small children in order for their parents to be able to sit in the worship service more frequently. One thing is certain, God is at work and we need to intensely seek his fullness of presence through prayer and then carefully follow his guidelines for us.

Warren Wiersbe tells of a contractor in Michigan (USA) who "was building a house and the construction of the first floor went smoothly. But when they started on the second floor, they had nothing but trouble. None of the materials from the lumberyard would fit properly. Then they discovered the reason: they were working with two different sets of blueprints! Once they got rid of the old set, everything went well and they built a lovely house" (Wiersbe, 48).

God is at work, but we need to follow his plans, and here at IBC and in this post-Christian culture we realize how much we need each other and must work off of the same set of plans. And it's vitally important that we look at and listen to what God is doing among us, and whom he has sent to join with us. We must follow his plans for us. And because you are here with us you can assume God sent you here and is calling you to be a part of us and to fit into this temple of imperfect but living stones. As with the missionary serving in a difficult place (in introduction), you look good to us, and we need you to join with us.

May we all listen to God's call to the church!

Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. Would you agree that much of evangelical Christianity is guilty of the sin of individualism? What evidence do you see?
2. What encouragement or comfort do you receive from the truth that you were chosen by Christ before you chose him?
3. Our text tells us we also are precious to God (4). Is it important that we realize God's love for us, and why so?
4. What is the significance of the image of Christ as the Cornerstone of his temple (church)?
5. What does the image of our being living stones being built together into the temple say about our relationships with God and with one another?
6. According to verse 9, what is the objective of the church?
7. Reflect on your role in the church, and to what extent you are contributing to God's building and to his glory?

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