

## **Priest-Building - 1 Peter 2:4-8 – Part 1**

Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis  
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### **INTRODUCTION**

*If you are a Christ-follower you are a priest.* Do you think of yourself as a priest today? Do you see yourself as a priest as you go to work? As you use your giftings at church? As you are out and about in the community?

Martin Luther of the Protestant Reformation is forever connected with unveiling this truth of the priesthood of all believers...a truth that had been covered over for so long by the Roman Catholic Church of his day. Through his own study of Scripture, the Holy Spirit unveiled this profound truth and moved Martin Luther to boldly re-proclaim it to the church. All true Christ-followers are priests, and together form a holy priesthood, ministers of God, loving him, serving him and revealing him to the world. You are a priest today, if you have come to salvation and new life through repentance and faith in Christ. And your role as priest follows you beyond the walls of the church to every place you go in life.

Does that sound like an intimidating calling? I hope so. Because it is. And we can only function effectively in this calling as we allow Jesus to transform us and equip up us by the word of God and the power of his indwelling Holy Spirit. So if you're intimidated, that's a very good thing. Why? Because you're in the perfect place then, to draw on God's grace as you depend on him and learn from him, rather than relying on your own talents and abilities and brain power. I'd be much more concerned if you're not intimidated by this calling to be a priest. If you think, "I've got this, no problem. No training, no transformation needed."

Well, the good news is, God has given us powerful instruction in 1 Peter, chapter 2, about how we can together be transformed into a God-glorifying, effective priesthood...individual priests working together with other priests as God builds us into his house where he is revealed in great glory and power to the world. Let's read 1 Peter 2, verses 4 to 8, which will be our passage for both this week and next. Here we go:

**4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 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." 7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," 8 and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.**

So this week we're going to focus on what we learn in these verses about HOW we can become effective priests of God. Then next week we'll consider the stone house God is building out of us, his living stones, and the sacrifices God intends us to make in that house.

But first, let's just get the big picture, the key idea of this passage. Notice first that it *all revolves around Jesus Christ*. Looking back at verse 3, we notice that Peter has just mentioned Jesus, the Lord, and the assumption that his readers have already tasted of his kindness and therefore would naturally want more of him, would want to draw near to him and spend more time with him. And then in verses 4 to 8, Jesus, who is pictured as a living stone, the cornerstone of God's house, is referred to over and over again. The meaning of this passage is all wrapped around and tied up with and revolving around Jesus Christ, the living cornerstone of God's house. Everything in these verses depends on us coming to him and living in relationship with him.

But secondly, the key idea of this passage, the core message, is this: All Christ-followers are being built together into God's house; the place of his dwelling; the place where he is loved and served and glorified and made known to the world. And in this house, a moveable house like the Tabernacle, we are all called to live as priests. To say it again: *All Christ-followers are being built together to be God's house where they are to live the entirety of their lives together as priests of God.*

Now it's important that we understand first what it means to be a priest in the New Testament era, because there are key differences between Old Testament priests and the priests we're called to be today in Christ. In Old Testament times,

before Christ came, priests acted as *representatives* of the people – “entering the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement and making a sacrificial offering on behalf of the people” (*Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*) and serving as mediators between God and people...go-betweens, might be an easier way to think of it. As priests performed animal sacrifices for sin and followed God’s instructions about how sinful people could interact with a holy God, they communicated with God on behalf of the people and then communicated God’s will back to the people.

But this priestly function of *representation* and *mediation* between God and men is no longer, because Christ, the great High Priest, has come and carried out his work on the cross...his sacrifice of himself for our sins, once for all. Now there is only one mediator, one representative, between God and people, and that is Christ Jesus himself (1 Timothy 2:5). Today any person can come into the very presence of God and communicate with him directly, provided they have accepted Christ’s sacrifice on their behalf and are thereby clothed with Christ and his righteousness. As priests today we’re no longer mediators between God and people. No one needs to go through us to talk to God and hear from him. They only need to go through Jesus Christ.

Even so, there are still some similarities between Old Testament priests and how we’re to function as priests today. First, Old Testament priests had the privilege of living in the place of God’s presence and of having God himself as their inheritance. The same is true for us as priests today, though in an even more powerful way. We actually have God dwelling inside us permanently in the Holy Spirit, and not only that, but as we gather together and work together as the people of God his presence is revealed more and more powerfully. He is also our inheritance, our portion in life, like Old Testament priests. And what could be better than that?!

Secondly, like Old Testament priests we are ministers, servants, in God’s house...which today is not a physical building, but is instead the worldwide people of God working together and gathering together, wherever they happen to be, As priests today, we each serve God and each other and use God-given giftings as we gather together and work together and learn together and share life together and reach out together to the world around us. And when we do this well, God’s presence, his glory, his character, is revealed profoundly and powerfully to us and to those who don’t know him yet.

Thirdly, like Old Testament priests we are responsible to faithfully teach and proclaim and spread God's word throughout the world. Even in Old Testament Israel, God's intention was always that his chosen people would be a light to the nations...that they would represent him well and spread his truth and grace and hope throughout the world. They were to be the people of his presence who would spread the knowledge of God and how to live in relationship with him throughout the world.

And as priests today, we have this same calling...this same commission from Jesus Christ himself: ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”***(see Matthew 28:19-20). Like Old Testament priests were intended to function, we are ambassadors to the world. We go into the world on God's mission and for his glory and his purposes. We are the hands and feet of Christ, as we often say. Our lives, our character, our work are to be consistent with who God is so we can represent God well to each other and to those who don't know him yet. We spread the knowledge of him throughout the world and we call others to seek him and to know him and to give him the glory and thanks he deserves.

And finally, as priests today we still offer sacrifices, though these sacrifices are of a spiritual nature and are not animal sacrifices made to cover sin. Sin has been paid for forever, once for all, by Jesus. His sacrifice of himself is completely sufficient for all time. Now the sacrifices we offer as priests are spiritual sacrifices made for the glory of God as we follow in the footsteps of our sacrificial Savior. Notice in verse 5, that as priests we are ***“to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...”*** Next week we'll dig into what these sacrifices are all about.

But for now we at least have a good idea of what's involved in being a priest today: *living in God's presence, ministering and serving in his house, spreading the knowledge of him throughout the world, and offering spiritual sacrifices.* So let's turn our focus now to HOW we can become effective, HOW we can be equipped, to be God's priests in our daily lives.

### **DRAWING NEAR WITH FAITH**

Let's begin with the truth contained in the opening phrase of verse 4: ***“As you come to him...”*** In your sermon notes, this section is labeled: *Drawing Near with*

*Faith.* God's building project, where he builds Christ-followers together to be a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, gets underway and progresses as we come to Jesus. The Greek word translated, "come," means *to draw near*. The picture provided is us seeking Jesus out to be right next to him, to listen, to learn, and to follow him around wherever he goes...to be his disciple, in other words. We've tasted of his kindness and we long for more of him, so we draw near to him and we don't let him out of our sight. He's what we want and we can't get enough. We're always looking for ways to know him more.

And as you look at verses 4 and 5, it's clear that the building of the spiritual house for a holy priesthood only happens as we draw near to Jesus. As you come to him, the building gets underway and continues. If we want our stone to be used in the building project, we need to bring it to him and let him do his work as he takes charge and puts us where he wants us and then teaches us how to be his priest in the house he builds. Are you drawing near to Jesus and staying there? Are you bringing yourself to him and letting him decide where to put you in the building? Are you letting him teach you continually and are you willing to follow in his footsteps? Come to him. Let him do his work.

Well, as we draw near to Jesus and stay there, our passage also reveals the heart attitude in which we are to draw near if we want to be changed and used for God's purposes and God's glory as his priests. This life-changing attitude is shared in verses 6 and 7, and it's the attitude of believing: "**...whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.**" **So the honor is for you who believe.** It's a very established life principle, isn't it, that if you think someone isn't telling the truth or you think they don't know what they're talking about, you're not going to take action on what they tell you to do. What they tell you to do will go in one ear and out the other, you'll probably chuckle inside, and then you'll just do what you think is best. *Disbelief and distrust lead to disregard and disobedience.*

And this remains true as we draw near to Jesus. If we mistrust him or we think his teachings are too hard or too unrealistic or too costly, we won't get anything out of our time spent with him. We'll just be going through the motions of reading Scripture and saying a few prayers, and then we'll get on with "real" life unimpacted and unchanged and untransformed. But if instead, we draw near to him with childlike faith, ready to watch and learn and try over and over what he

tells us to do; that's when we'll see radical change in our thinking and actions as we persevere.

Our salvation happens through childlike faith and our transformation to effective priest happens with that same childlike faith as we draw near continually to our Savior and believe and act on what he teaches us. *Drawing near with faith*. This is the first principle we learn in today's passage about how we are transformed and made effective as priests. Jesus does his work as we continually draw near to him with faith.

### **BEING BUILT ON THE CORNERSTONE**

And this brings us to the second principle we need to grasp in order to become effective priests. I've called this section in your notes: *Being Built on the Cornerstone*. If you haven't noticed the stone theme in our verses today, you might be asleep! In these verses, we have Jesus, the living stone, the cornerstone, a stone, a rock. And we have Christ-followers as living stones being built together with Jesus to be God's spiritual house. And all the stones in our verses are alive, as opposed to physical stones which are always dead and lifeless.

Now the cornerstone references in these verses both come from Old Testament prophecies, one from Isaiah 28:16 and the other from Psalm 118:22. They speak of God himself laying a cornerstone that is chosen and precious, but which was rejected by the builders. This cornerstone would be hand-picked by God and of infinite value and worth, yet the builders would look at it and toss it aside as worthless. Yet God picked up that stone they had thrown into the worthless rock pile, and he made it the very cornerstone of his house. And, of course, that cornerstone, is none other than Jesus Christ.

So what is a cornerstone and what does it have to do with us becoming priests in God's spiritual house? Well, the cornerstone of a stone house is the "stone laid at the corner to bind two walls together and to strengthen them" (*Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*). All the other stones find their place and their strength and their direction in relation to the cornerstone, or the head of the corner, as some translations put it.

For us, as living stones in God's house, this means that we find our place, our strength and our direction only in relation to Jesus Christ and his headship and leadership. Only in remaining connected to him and following him alone will our stone be built into God's house and contribute to its strength and beauty and stability. And when anything or anyone other than Christ becomes the head of our corner, our rock can come loose from the mortar; can fall out of the building; can leave a gaping hole where cold air and moisture and insects can try to get in and do damage in God's house. But when Christ always remains our cornerstone, the one whom we're following above all, we stay connected with the other stones, with other Christ-followers, and the building grows ever more strong, tall and beautiful, and the priests of God's house become and more and more effective in their calling.

There's only one cornerstone in God's house, and that's Jesus Christ. Let no other person or thing ever take his place. We follow Jesus. Don't ever let any of his servants or any other person take his place or become the one you're following above Jesus Christ. That's when we get into trouble. Let Christ be your only cornerstone. Build your life on him, follow him, keep your eyes on him at all times, and you'll be a strong and stable and beautiful part of God's spiritual house and grow more and more effective as his priest.

### **LIVING ALIVE, CHOSEN AND VALUED**

And this brings us to the third and final principle I see in these verses about how we become effective in our calling as priests in God's house. I've called this section: *Living Alive, Chosen and Valued*. First notice three truths about Jesus given in verse 4. As a stone he is *alive*...a LIVING stone. He is also *chosen*...hand-picked, selected, set aside for a special purpose. And finally, he is *precious*...highly valued, priceless, of great worth like a precious, one-of-a-kind diamond. And this living-ness, this chosen-ness, this precious-ness, is unaffected, unchanged by the fact the people rejected him and tossed him aside as worthless. In the sight of God, Jesus, the cornerstone, is of infinite worth and value no matter what people think of him, do to him, say about him, or do with him.

And the wonderful truth is, the same is true of us when we come to Jesus as dead stones and receive life. We become alive. We find that we are chosen and hand-picked by God himself. And we discover that in Christ we are of priceless worth to

God, no matter what anyone else thinks of us. Even before our verses today, Peter has already shared these realities with us. He's told us that we are *chosen* according to God's foreknowledge...chosen for new life in Christ, forgiveness and obedience to him. He's told us that through faith in Christ we've been *made alive*...born again...our dead stone has been brought to life like Jesus, the living stone. And he's shown us that God *values* us enough to send his only Son for our sake to ransom us, set us free from slavery to sin, by his own precious blood.

And this value God places on us has nothing to do with our deserving it. Though we deserve shame and dishonor for our sin and rebellion against the One who created us and is sustaining us every day, still he loves us and values us and has made the way for every person in the world to live in his unchanging love, through repentance and belief in Christ's work on the cross. And when we come to Jesus this way, instead of the shame we deserve, we receive honor and value that transforms the way we live our lives.

Look at the end of verse 6 and the first part of verse 7: ***...whoever believes in him will not be put to shame...the honor is for you who believe.*** The Greek word translated, "honor," means "primarily 'a valuing.'" Through belief in Christ we receive Christ, the chosen, precious and living stone; AND we find our identity and our value and our security in him...a valuing by God that doesn't change no matter what other people think about us, say about us, or do to us. This third principle about how become effective priests of God is all tied up with identity and value. We grow in our effectiveness as priests as we embrace and live out of the identity and unchanging value given to us by God in Christ.

As Christ himself knew without a doubt that he was chosen and precious to the Father, and was thereby able to experience rejection and persecution and slandering by men without lashing out, without despairing, without losing hope and getting off track with his mission. So we too can learn to do the same as God's priests, keeping Christ as our cornerstone and his purposes above all, no matter what rejection or persecution or hard times we face in this life. We can put away malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, and just keep pursuing and longing for more of Christ and his ways and his purposes. That's how you can live when you accept the identity and precious value you've been given in Christ.

## CONCLUSION

If you're a Christ-follower today, have you accepted your calling to be a priest wherever you go and whatever you do? A priest who's connected and working together with other priests in God's spiritual house...the house being built out of all Christ followers? Would people you work with and spend time with see any evidence that you are a priest of God...that you're set apart and different and that you love Jesus Christ and want to share the knowledge of him at every opportunity? Being a priest is not just for pastors and ministry leaders. It's the calling of every true Christ follower, and it's only as we all take up this calling that we become effective in carrying out the commission Jesus has given us to make disciples.

My friends, every one of us can become an effective priest of God, and we each have a unique and essential contribution to make in God's house. He's made each of us one-of-a-kind and given us different gifts and roles to fill. And when we each use these gifts and accept the roles he's given us, not comparing ourselves to others, or valuing some more than others, or wishing we were like someone else; then the glory of the house God is building for his presence and his priests shines brighter and brighter and the building grows higher and higher and more and more visible to the world.

Are you engaging in each aspect of the priest development program we've seen in our passage today? Are you drawing near to Jesus and staying near him, following him as his disciple everywhere you go? What are some ways that you're spending time with Jesus? Are you learning to pray continually? Are you regularly studying and meditating and applying God's word to your life? Is fellowshiping, worshiping and working together with God's people a high priority for you? And as you draw near to Jesus, are you doing it with simple, childlike trust that he is good, his word is true, and by the power of the Spirit you can live it in your daily life? We won't be effective priests if we're not continually drawing near to Jesus with faith.

Secondly, is Jesus functioning as your cornerstone? Is everything in your life evaluated in light of him and his worldview? Does he set your direction and provide your stability and serve as your guide in all things? Are you following him

above all, or is your allegiance to other people or to other things in life that have taken priority over him? Don't let anyone get above him.

And thirdly, have you embraced the new life and the new identity Jesus has given you through repentance and faith in him? In him, you are a living stone, a rare jewel, chosen and precious in the sight of God, a unique creation unlike anyone else. He treasures you and delights in you and loves to hear from you. No matter what anyone else says about you or what value anyone else puts on you, you are precious and treasured and loved by the one true God. And this never changes. Embrace this reality and you'll be freed to glorify God and remain faithful to him and represent him well, no matter what anyone else does to you, or says about you, or no matter what disappointments or hard times come your way...you'll be freed to glorify God as his priest in all situations.

And finally, if you're here today and you haven't yet come to Jesus for salvation, acknowledging your need for him and accepting the gift he gave to you on the cross, please do it today. He is the cornerstone of everything. Nothing works or makes sense without him. There's no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. And his invitation to all people is to simply come with childlike faith and accept the great gift he longs to give to you: *peace with God, forgiveness of sin, honor instead of shame, new spiritual life, his Spirit dwelling within you and a glorious future with him that starts now and will unfold one day in glory and majesty that blinds the eye...that day when you enter heaven, the place he's been preparing for his people for nearly 2,000 years now. If the present universe took him only 6 days to create, imagine how glorious heaven is going to be when he's already put almost 2,000 years into preparing it for us!*

The way to accept Christ's gift of salvation is so simple. Acknowledge that you haven't given him the glory and honor and thanks he deserves as your Creator and Sustainer and the one true God of all things. You haven't loved him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. You've loved the cheap substitutes over him. This is the heart of sin. Acknowledge your sin. Then tell Jesus you believe that he died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sin and that he rose from the dead. And finally, invite him to save you and take charge of your life from here. That's it! That's how life at peace with God and filled up with his presence and power begins. Please do it today.