



DESIRE THE
WORD

LIVING STONES

GOD'S OWN
CHOSEN PEOPLE

PILGRIMS

THE DAY OF
VISITATION

1 PETER 2.1-12 THE POWER OF GRACE

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

A ReVision Resource

The Power of Grace: 1 Peter 2.1-12

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1 Peter 2.1-12: Introduction

A Day of Visitation is coming. Will it be soon? Final? Or will it be for some unbelievers the beginning of a new adventure of life?

Whatever that Day may be, we must prepare for and live toward it at all times, in everything we do. We don't have time to moan and complain about unjust treatment from those who despise us. What do we expect, having identified ourselves so closely with the Stone of Rejection Who is Jesus Christ?

God has shown us mercy in Christ, and His grace is sufficient to make us into a new people, a living temple, designed and built to bring Him glory and honor and praise. We need to listen to what God says about who we are and what we should be doing, not those in the unbelieving world who wish we'd either go away or just keep our religion to ourselves.

We are pilgrims and sojourners here, Peter reminds us, so let's not carry around the baggage of our former worldly lives. Look up, look ahead, look around, and then, fortified with the milk of God's Word, live each day for His glory.

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1 and 2 Peter can encourage, embolden, and instruct us, if we're willing to take the Apostle's words to heart. My prayer is that all who take up this study will do just that. Thank you for joining us.

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1 If...

1 Peter 2.1-3

¹ Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, ² as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

The Story: Peter has been insisting that only the Gospel, as revealed in the Word of God, is powerful to sustain believers in troubled times. So, if his readers have indeed come to the Lord, they will know that certain things are expected and required of them in order for them to realize the full benefits of their salvation, come what may. “If” they are true believers – “if”, that is, they have begun to taste the redeeming and transforming grace of the Lord – then they won’t respond to worldly situations the way they used to, before they were the objects of redeeming grace; and they won’t indulge worldly occupations and diversions the way they used to, either (cf. 4.3-5). If we stand in the grace of God we will strip ourselves of everything that keeps us from knowing more of that grace (v. 1), and we will apply ourselves with all diligence to whatever source might nourish us more fully on it (v. 2). Grace impels us to such efforts. Don’t get the order of things wrong here: We don’t deny the flesh and the world and all their evil ways, then dutifully immerse ourselves in Scripture, in order to *gain* the grace of God. Peter says “if” we’ve attained to grace this is what happens *as a result*. “If” indeed we have tasted of grace.

The Structure: That little “if” is so important in this passage. It’s not the “if” that suggests possibility – “if it’s really true” – but the “if” that indicates certainty – “since.” *Since* you’ve tasted of grace, then be done with everything that gets in the way of your attaining to more of it. Drink deeply and feed long on that by which more grace is worked into the muscles of your soul. Conversely, *if* you don’t seem interested in the pure milk of the Word, *since* it’s clear you don’t care to read or study or meditate on it, and *if* your ways haven’t changed much since you professed faith in Christ, then how can it be said that you have ever really tasted of transforming grace at all?

Do you find the grace of God compelling? Does grace compel you to forsake all worldly ways and seek more of God’s grace and power?

2 Living Stones

1 Peter 2.4, 5

⁴ Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The Story: We can't fulfill our callings in Christ if we insist on dragging with us the baggage of the world. And we can't fulfill those callings apart from the spiritual nourishment of the Word of God. Peter says we need to keep our perspective straight. When we came to Christ we came to One Whom the world rejected because He was not like them. The world hated Christ, but God finds Him chosen and precious. How can we continue to want to be like *them* and insist we are one with *Him*? Would we rather be chosen and precious to our worldly neighbors or our sovereign Father? Life in the world is building on sand; no sure and lasting foundation supports the various worldviews of the unbelieving world. Jesus, on the other hand, is a Living Stone, a sure Foundation and Cornerstone. We should expect, since the world rejected Him, that we, being built together on that Stone, will grow into an edifice that the world will likewise reject, at least, to some extent. So why are we surprised when "fiery trials" erupt around and against us (4.12)? But since each believer is a living stone in the new temple the Lord is making of His Church, we should seek to make the fullest possible contribution, so that this new temple, all its varied stones held together in the Spirit (Eph. 2.19-22), can give the sacrifices of thanks, praise, worship, time, and treasure that God can use, through Jesus Christ, to advance His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

The Structure: In short, Peter is saying, if we're spending all our time fretting and fussing about unbelievers not liking us, or seeking to do us ill; and if that situation is causing us to "downplay" our identify in Jesus a bit and to "up-play" our identify with our worldly neighbors; if that's the case, then our lives are out of focus. This is not how grace operates in the redeemed. New focus – the temple of the Lord. New foundation – the living Christ. New objectives in life – contribute to the work of the Lord. New driving force – all things to the glory of God! "If", that is, we've tasted of the grace of the Lord.

How much of this newness is evident in your life today?

3 Precious Rock of Offense

1 Peter 2.6-8

⁶ Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture,

“Behold, I lay in Zion

A chief cornerstone, elect, precious,

And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”

⁷ Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient,

“The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,”

⁸ and

“A stone of stumbling

And a rock of offense.”

They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

The Story: What did you expect? Peter reaches back to the prophets to remind his readers that what they were experiencing in the way of persecution was just part of the Gospel. In chapter 1 he based the Gospel on the Old Testament; here in chapter 2 he does the same. The Gospel brings rejection, opposition, and suffering – like the suffering of Jesus – to those who take their stand on that precious Rock of offense. But standing there, though the world scorn and mock us, we will never be put to shame because we are standing in the grace and favor of God! That makes the rejected Stone of Christ most precious to us, for we know Him to be the true Cornerstone of the new temple the Spirit is constructing of His Church. Those who stumble at Christ are disobedient to His Word; this is precisely as God has ordained. Nothing the unbelieving world can do to us, as living stones being built together on the sure Foundation of the Rock of offense, is outside the will or power of God. We just need to keep focused on the Lord and grounded in His Word in order to now how to make the most of these times of trial for the continuation and expansion of the divine economy.

The Structure: The Gospel is no novelty, Peter is at pains to demonstrate. The Gospel is grounded in the Old Testament. But if we want the Gospel and the eternal life it brings, we have to embrace the *whole* Gospel, as revealed by the prophets and the apostles. And that can include some things which, while not necessarily pleasant, are nonetheless part of our journey in the Lord for now. So we should not try to avoid such trials; rather, let us get more of the grace of the Gospel so that we can bear up and grow through them.

Since Christ is “precious”, we should be sharing Him with others. Since He is a “Rock of offense”, we should expect some people to be put off by our sharing. So how do we reconcile these two facts?

4 But You...

1 Peter 2.9

⁹ But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...

The Story: We will not flourish as the living stones of the Lord as long as we listen to the world's view of who we are and to how or whether we matter. They will make it clear that their view of us is not, well, a high one. Regardless of what the unbelieving world says or thinks, or how unbelievers act toward us, our identity, purpose, and callings in life come from the Lord. And Peter reminds his readers – as we need to be reminded every day – that we are quite a different kind of people than how the world regards us. God has *chosen* us to be His *specialty-favored people*. In Him we are *royalty*, by virtue of His adoption; we are seated with Him and reign in heavenly places (Eph. 2.6). We are a *priesthood*, so our primary orientation is upward, and our primary purpose is to lead others to join us in celebrating the God of our redemption. We are a *holy nation*, a people unlike any others, whose citizenship is defined by righteousness. The Lord's people embraces every nation, tribe, and tongue in a new and holy commonwealth that is coming on earth as it is in heaven, more and more every day. This is how we must regard ourselves, regardless of what others may think or do. Only as we daily embrace and take up this identity, this calling, will we go forth into the world in such a way as to bring the light of Christ and His Kingdom, by our words and deeds, into the dark nooks and crannies of a world without hope.

The Structure: I daresay not 1 in 10 believers today views himself through this lens. Yet if we refuse to see ourselves as the Lord does, and choose instead to be defined by the world or our own fallible preferences, we will not fulfill our reason for being, which is to glorify God in all things. Then how shall it be seen that we have, indeed, tasted of Him?

To whom will you proclaim the excellencies of Jesus today?

5 ...and Here's Why

1 Peter 2.10

¹⁰ ...who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

The Story: Peter paints a lofty vision of how we as believers should think about ourselves and our lives in the world. At the same time, he wants us to remember that none of this is because of anything inherent in or attributable to us. We were “not a people” when God came seeking us. We were as lost as those people who now despise and scorn us. We lived in the same way they do – though now we are learning to lay those old ways aside – and we drank of the same diversions as our unbelieving neighbors – though now we are drinking the pure milk of the Word. Then we obtained mercy. Mercy was granted to us, not earned, and our sins were forgiven for Jesus sake. Grace gathered us up – sinful and foolish though we were – and catapulted us into the household of God. What God has done for us, He continues to do for others. He can do it even for those who mock and scorn us. And if He does, it will be through undeserving, grace-empowered people like you and me, living and proclaiming to the glory of God.

The Structure: Privilege before God is not the result of works, but of grace. Power to represent God in the world is not the result of natural endowments, but of grace. Strength to bear up with patient rejoicing in the midst of trials is not achieved by mere resolve, but through grace. The grace that saves nobodies and rebels like us can also sustain and shape and transform us into the holy people and royal priests Christ has saved us to be. Amazing grace!

How do you expect to see the grace of God working in your life today?

6 Sojourners and Pilgrims

1 Peter 2.11

“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul...”

The Story: Peter comes back to this idea again: We’re different; live differently! This world is no place to settle down and make ourselves at home. We’re passing through, our eyes fixed on that glow beyond the horizon of time where the City to Come awaits and Christ is even now preparing a place for us. *Where* we’re headed will affect *how* we travel there – or, at least, it should. If we explain to our unsaved neighbors that we’re on a journey toward eternal glory and righteousness with God, then won’t they find it curious that, as we make that journey, we live pretty much like them? We might as well be going nowhere special as long as our lives do not reflect the character of our true homeland. The lusts of this world war against our soul. They drag us down, depress us, rob us of our joy, fill us with shame and regret, and discourage us from bearing witness to the Lord. Be done with them, brethren! Set your eyes on the City to Come, and travel there so that you do not arrive – whenever, at any moment, that may be – still dragging the baggage of this world.

The Structure: Peter is really mixing and matching metaphors here: living stones, temple, priesthood, nation, sojourners. How many different ways can he lead us to think about the life we have in Jesus Christ? So rich and full and glorious is this life, that there aren’t enough metaphors or images in the world to describe it. But Peter offers some especially helpful ones which, as we meditate on them, can shape the way we think, the things we desire, the priorities of our souls, and the everyday works and words of our lives.

Is worldly baggage slowing your progress toward the City to Come?

7 The Day of Visitation

1 Peter 2.12

¹² ...having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

The Story: That phrase, “day of visitation”, is, I believe, deliberately oblique. It can refer to the day of Christ’s return, when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2.5-11). It can refer to a situation in which someone, not a believer, observing our conduct, acknowledges God as being at work in us (cf. Dan. 2.46, 47). Only when God “visits” people with such insight will they, who otherwise neither know nor regard Him, give Him glory. Or it can refer to the kind of visitation Saul of Tarsus experienced on the Damascus road, when Christ revealed Himself and claimed that worldly rebel as His own. We should be living for the glory of God with a view to all three such “visitations.” Such a life begins in “honorable” conduct – honorable to God, that is, but also honorable in the sight of men, since it will be strong enough to silence those who vilify us as “evildoers.” God is determined to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory (Hab. 2.14). We are the people He has saved and sent for that lofty purpose. Let us live honorably and journey well.

The Structure: In short, Peter suggests, there is no excuse for *not* living to the glory of God. Remember who you are. Get in line with what the Word declares. Shed the vain trappings of this world. Stand firm in the midst of adversity. Grow in the grace of the Lord together. Live honorably. Journey well. This is the way God gets glory in the world.

What will it mean for you to “live honorably and journey well” in the week to come?

For reflection or discussion

1. What are some of the ways the unbelieving world looks at Christians? What do they consider to be our “role” and “place” in the scheme of things?
2. How does the world’s view of the Church compare with what Peter outlines in 1 Peter 2.1-12? Why is it important that we take our cues about our identity and mission from God, and not from the world?
3. Peter says we should “desire the pure milk” of God’s Word.? What does that mean? What should that look like in a believer’s daily experience? How can we know when we are growing as a result of this?
4. Peter describes us as pilgrims and sojourners in this life. Why is this an apt way of thinking about the life of faith? How should this aspect of our identity guide our daily experience in the world?
5. Each of us is a living stone in the temple Christ is building for God’s glory. What are the implications of this for our lives together in the local church?
6. We are called to be God’s people so that we might proclaim His praises to the world. What does that mean? How should a church member expect to fulfill that aspect of our identity and calling? Is God’s grace sufficient to make us bold witnesses for Christ? Explain.

Prayer:

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