

## **Aliens and Strangers-Part Seven**

### **“Chosen People!”**

1 Peter 2: 4-12

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**Text: 1 Peter 2:4-12 (NIV)** <sup>4</sup> As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-- <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." <sup>7</sup> Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," <sup>8</sup> and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for. <sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

<sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. <sup>11</sup> Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which **war** against your soul.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

“Live such good lives...!” Peter spoke to the church twenty centuries ago but it is as if he is speaking to us this morning. Peter was guiding a young church that lived in a culture that included wicked religions that sacrificed their children in fires. They lived in a culture where homosexuality was rampant in particular among the Romans where men living with boys was commonplace! They lived in a culture where some religious people worshiped dozens of false gods and whose houses were filled with idols before which they bowed down. And Peter was keenly aware of a great theological and spiritual truth. He knew that he was speaking to a very small group of Christians that had been called out and woken up and designated to be Holy and chosen to serve the one true living God! So...as a summary statement, Peter said:

<sup>12</sup> **“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.”**

What did he mean? I think he was saying “Live such good lives that although the unbelievers around you persecute you and despise you and even bring charges against you...that when they stand before God they will have to admit that your life gave them pause! Or perhaps they will say that your life even prompted them to seek salvation!” But in any case, Peter’s instructions beg the question for us: do *our* lives among the lost give them pause? How are *we* living among the Pagans? Are we living such “beautiful” lives [which is what the word Peter uses: Greek “kalos”]...such lovely and winsome lives that they have to admit that we make them think of the beauty of God? Let us pray.

In the 1998 movie “Saving Private Ryan” actor Tom Hanks plays the part of an Army Captain named John Miller. Captain Miller and a small squad of men are sent into Nazi occupied France to locate and rescue a Private named James Ryan. Ryan’s three brothers have been killed in combat and the Army command has decided to withdraw him from danger lest his parents lose all of their four sons. So off they go this brave and somewhat puzzled squad of fighting men. Not certain their mission makes sense, they nonetheless salute smartly and take it on. Sent to rescue one man, they lose several in the process. When they finally find Ryan, he resists being rescued because he is part of a small platoon fighting for their lives. In fact, he argues with Captain Miller and says “Why me? Why should I get to go home? Why should I be taken to safety”? But it’s not long before they are all engulfed in a German attack and they are fighting for their lives.

At the end of the story, a company of American soldiers comes to their rescue but not before Miller is mortally wounded. As he lays dying, he looks up at young Ryan...for whom he has sacrificed his life and that of the others under his command...and he says something quite profound to him. Ryan leans down to hear his Captain’s dying whispers and with his last breath Miller quietly says “Earn this!” And Miller dies. His point of course was “Men have died to save you...I am dying to save you. Make the most of this...that we have saved you...live accordingly...live as a man redeemed from death!”

I think the Apostle Peter would say to Christians “Exactly! Now that you have been saved by Jesus’ Crucifixion on the Cross, live in such a way as to make Heaven glad of it! Live in such a way that God is glorified! Live in such a way that you make the most of your salvation!” Captain Miller told Ryan to earn it but we cannot earn our salvation. But we can and must live as those chosen for salvation!” Question: are we doing that? Are we living as chosen people...ought to live? Are we making the most of what Jesus did to get us out of combat with the Devil and save us for eternity?

Last week, we said that “God is a God of Expectations!” Allow me to suggest today that Peter might have been the “Apostle of Exhortations!” In these few verses that we’ve studied, he gave his readers at least **TEN DIRECTIVES** before

the middle of chapter two! Let's review these things that Peter said to the young church...things that should be part of our lives as those redeemed in Christ.

His argument was this: we have been born again into a living hope and we have been given the joy of salvation. For Peter, Christian Holiness was, in a sense, a matter of ethics! For Peter, Holy living was and is to be the only ethical response to the salvation that has been sent our way. So he might say "Holy living is the least we can do" to glorify God and honor him who has saved us. We should live in such a way that God is pleased and glorified! He gives us much to do. Consider Peter's exhortations just this far in our study:

- 1. Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled**
- 2. Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed**
- 3. Do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance**
- 4. Be Holy in all you do**
- 5. Live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear**
- 6. Love one another deeply**
- 7. Rid yourselves of all malice...deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander**
- 8. Crave pure spiritual milk**
- 9. Abstain from sinful desires**
- 10. 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.**

In a sense, Peter has listed Ten Ethical Commandments! But let us be clear for the sake of anyone who may be here today but has not yet been saved. He is not saying that if we do these things we will get saved because we will be good enough for Heaven. Embracing his list would be the fruit of salvation not its cause. He is saying we should do these things *because* we are saved. This life that he is describing should be the *normal Christian life*. A life prepared and self-controlled and loving and rid of malice and a life that stands out to the unredeemed.

This is the life that God expects from those who have been rescued by Jesus. A life rooted in Christ. Here is how Peter builds his case. He is like a skilled lawyer making his argument to a jury. In the process of making his points, he

refers to four stones. And since he had told them that God is building them into spiritual houses, the very mention of stones to an ancient audience was powerful. Remember when the disciples of Jesus stopped to admire the great stones of the Temple? We read in Mark's Gospel:

**Mark 13:1-2 (NIV) <sup>1</sup> As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" <sup>2</sup> "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down."**

Jesus was prophesying about the destruction that would come upon Jerusalem in the year 70AD when the Romans brutalized the city. It's as if Jesus was saying "Don't be too impressed by these stones! They will all be scattered!" But because of Jesus' death and Resurrection, Peter now speaks of four stones that hold up the Gospel itself! And the people chosen by God to be saved need to grasp what God has done with these four stones!

### **First: the "Rejected Living Stone" that is Jesus!**

**<sup>4</sup> "As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him"**

Peter refers to Jesus as the "living stone." Ordinarily, a stone is an inanimate object but this stone is Jesus who is alive! The Old Testament shows us the same imagery of stones because ancient people knew that a building designed to be permanent would have to be made of stones! Men built whole careers mining and cleaning stones for use by builders. Sometimes, the stones would be rejected as too angular or discolored or cracked. Interesting! This stone, Jesus, was rejected by men yet considered precious to God! Peter uses the word "distinguished" where we see "precious." Jesus was distinguished in every way and chosen by God because of that and for that purpose. But the stone masons building a structure would have rejected him. In fact, they did!

### **Second: the "Cornerstone" that is Jesus!**

**"See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."**

This needed no explanation. Everyone knew that the cornerstone in any structure was the most important stone. It was set in place first and everything was built upon it and outward from it. Peter is referring to the Prophet Isaiah who had written these words seven centuries earlier:

**Isaiah 28:16 (NIV) <sup>16</sup> So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation..."**

Sometimes it would take a decade or longer to be certain that a Cornerstone had been both strong and properly set in place. If the structure where the two walls came together remained straight and sturdy everyone knew it had been properly built. Thus, God was saying the cornerstone that he would set in place, Jesus the Christ, would prove to be true and trustworthy.

### **Third: the “Capstone” that is Jesus!**

**"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone..."**

Peter might be simply using a synonym here by saying “capstone” instead of “cornerstone.” But they are different words. It is possible that he uses “capstone” as the actual top of the wall. The “capstone” was the highest point on a wall. Thus, Peter seems to be saying that Jesus is both the corner foundation stone and that he sits as the top stone of the complete structure! Perhaps...the Alpha and the Omega?! So...think of this: if Jesus is the *capstone and the cornerstone* then there is more to the building...namely us! That is why Peter said earlier:

**“<sup>5</sup> you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood...”**

So the church is not only built upon the Cornerstone that is Christ but the church becomes a part of the building!

### **Fourth: the “Stumbling” stone that is Jesus!**

**<sup>8</sup> “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”**

If a person was walking by a building site and not watching closely, they could stumble over the cornerstone. Peter is saying that this cornerstone that is Jesus would trip up those who are destined to fall because they love their sins. They will reject the cornerstone that is Jesus because they want a different one and they do not consider him precious. Like an ancient builder looking over the stone his cutter has brought to him ...he says “Take it away!” So, the only ones who see the cornerstone that is Jesus and look up to the capstone and accept it and build their lives upon it...are those who are chosen by God to do so! Thus Peter says:

**<sup>9</sup> “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”**

This is the single hardest theological concept to teach to modern American Christians. For thirty years I have heard Christians respond to the Bible’s teaching on God choosing those whom he will save...and they usually respond as if that cannot be! Only in Russia when we studied the Book of Acts at the Tyumen Bible College did we not get an argument. When I asked if the idea of God electing and predestining some to be saved offended them, one Russian gave

a great answer. He said “Why would we be offended? We have lived under dictators for decades. The sovereign can do whatever he wants to do!” In a sense, a person not living in a democracy will have a much better understanding of the sovereignty of God. God is not a dictator but he is sovereign!

Some will remind me that the Bible says God would be pleased to save everyone. Indeed, we read:

**1 Timothy 2:3-4 (NIV) This is good, and pleases God our Savior,  
4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.**

God offers salvation fully and sincerely but all people naturally say “No!” When Jesus tells the Parable of the Feast in Luke Fourteen, we see that everyone who was invited said they had other things to do. Actually, if God did not choose some to be saved, none would be! Thus, Jesus said to the unbelieving Pharisees in John Chapter Ten:

**John 10:23-28 (NIV) <sup>23</sup> and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. <sup>24</sup> The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." <sup>25</sup> Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.**

His flock are the chosen people. Those who find predestination and election by God of individual sinners to salvation should remember Israel. In the Old Testament we find the entire nation was chosen by God and God even reminds them of how he chose them! We read the words of Moses in Deuteronomy:

**Deuteronomy 10:12-15 (NIV) <sup>12</sup> And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>13</sup> and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? <sup>14</sup> To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. <sup>15</sup> Yet the Lord set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today.**

Here again is the God of Expectations! And God chose Israel above all the other nations! No apology! He chose them! And in this age true Israel is the Church of Jesus Christ...the Jews and Gentiles called by God to salvation! Many Christians today think Israel and the church are separate entities. They think that the Jews are Israel even if they do not know their Messiah. In my view, that is confused thinking. Yes, there is a geopolitical nation we call Israel and yes...God

is doing something in even raising up that nation. But the original Israel broke covenant with God and even rejected the Christ. All part of God's plan! As Paul said:

**Romans 2:28-29 (NIV) <sup>28</sup> A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. <sup>29</sup> No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.**

When Paul speaks of circumcision, he means keeping the law. The true Jew is the person who by faith is a Jew inwardly and who is saved by faith! Thus, we as the church have the very same word from God as to how we should live.

**<sup>12</sup> And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>13</sup> and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today..."**

Translation:

**<sup>12</sup> "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."**

Fifteen hundred years went by between Moses and Peter and yet the Holy Spirit of God spoke the same word to his chosen people! Wonderful! But being chosen and called to Christ was not and is not just so we could be assured of Heaven when we die. It is more than that. It is being chosen to be God's ambassadors while we are on Planet Earth. And our culture is no different than the ancient one in the background of Jesus' ministry. We have politicians accused of sexual impropriety and football coaches turning how to be perverts with others protecting them. We have clergy falling into sin and so-called Christians making the Gospel look irrelevant and ridiculous.

I am not worried about judgment upon the world. There is no doubt that when he is ready, God will reveal all sin and he will put the scores up on the board. And multitudes of people will know all in a moment where they stand with God and where their perversion and wickedness has gotten them. But we...we were chosen for something far greater and far more pleasing to God. We were chosen for this purpose...to:

**<sup>12</sup> 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.**

Let us pray.

