

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 5/09/2021

Title: "Being the church"

Text: 1 Peter 2 verses 1-12

Scripture references from the ESV

1Peter 2:1-12 So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good 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.

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

What is the church? Is it a physical building or perhaps a list of activities that we do? It is an important question on the day that we give thanks for the building, as we start to regather and to restart some ministries and begin new ones.

The church is a building but it is not the structure at 43 York Road or any other building that we might call church.

- It is a building that is more precious to God than any physical building, however splendid it might be.
- It is a building that is far better than our new building or any other building we might have built.

It is described in vv4 -5 (above). This is the Bible's picture of church. Imagine:

- a huge stone that is perfect with perfectly parallel sides and every face perfectly square with its adjacent face.
- This foundation stone is placed at the corner of the building in exactly the right position.
- Lots of smaller stones are carefully selected and cut to look like the foundation stone.
- They are set into the building to be perfectly aligned and tied into the foundation stone.
- Not all the stones are identical, but they all fit together perfectly to form one building.

Every day new stones are being carefully chosen by the builder, and shaped by him to be like the foundation stone and are fitted in to the building exactly where he wants them.

This is not a physical building. It's a spiritual building where Jesus is the cornerstone and God's people are the smaller stones that are being shaped to look like Jesus.

They are placed in the building just where God wants them to be.

All of them are aligned and tied to Jesus, the foundation stone, the cornerstone.

That is the church.

The building is not the church though it enables us to gather together to worship God. The church is you and me – those of us who are trusting in Jesus to make us right with God. We are a people who

- Are being changed to become like Jesus in character and nature
- Are diverse, but are united together as we are aligned to Jesus and united to him
- Are being brought together as a community to physically gather and speak about God's greatness, not just to one another but to those outside the church

We believe that the building is significant in what God wants to do among us, because of the way he has remarkably provided everything we have needed and guided us through the process, but we must not think it is the church.

The church is the people of God who are precious to God, having been purchased by God to praise and obey him.

We have both the privilege and the responsibility of belonging to the church, as three statements will help us see.

1. We are a rescued people (v9)

Peter is telling us that the message God spoke to his ancient people, Israel, 4000 years ago now applies to all God's people, Jew or Gentile.

- Israel had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years, but through miraculous means, God rescued them. He gathered them as a distinct people and committed himself to them to be their God in words that can be found in **Exodus 19:5-6** (see p4).
- Before he sent Israel into exile in Babylon when they had turned away from him to worship false gods, God gave them a promise through the prophet Isaiah. (**Isaiah 43:21,25** see p4) He described Israel as his chosen people and assured them that he would rescue them from Babylon, deal with their sin and gather them again as his people.

In both cases, God rescues his chosen people from slavery, removes their sin from them and forms them into a nation to praise him and obey him. Peter sees this now being fulfilled through Jesus as he rescues us from our sin and gathers us together as his chosen people.

Being the people of God today is not based on ethnicity or geographical borders, but is solely based on being united through faith to Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of this church that God is building. Peter wants us to see

**how great a privilege it is to belong to this people group. We are a rescued people
but also**

2. We are a blessed people (v9)

- **We belong to God** – we are a chosen race.... A people for his own possession. If you are a Christian, it's because God chose you before you were born, and has purchased you for himself. We were all slaves to Satan and our own sinful passions. We could not stop doing bad things, and though we may fight against it, we still die

not just physically but eternally to suffer the just anger of God forever because of our sin.

- Jesus has come to rescue us from that slavery and set us free from sin and death, so that we can live godly lives and death will not have the final word over our lives. The price he paid was the price of his own blood, shed on the cross 2000 years ago. He died the eternal death we deserve so that we don't have to.

When we come to Jesus, confessing our sin, and believing he died to secure our forgiveness and acceptance with God then we are set free from sin and death and we become God's possession. We no longer belong to Satan but to the living God.

- **We are a people group** – Peter uses plural wordsrace, priesthood, nation, people

We must come to Jesus as individuals for salvation, but we don't remain as individual believers.

- Jesus saves us and builds us into his building, the church, so that not only do we belong to God but we also belong to one another.
- **We now have access to God** – Peter describes us as a royal priesthood.

In the Old Testament, priests were the only ones who had access to God. They offered sacrifices on the altar and spoke to God on behalf of the people. The people couldn't just come and talk with God. Here, Peter describes the church as a royal priesthood.

- Through Jesus, the way has been opened up for us (the church) to come before God.

How great is our privilege as the church:

All the blessings promised by God throughout the Bible are ours if we are trusting in Jesus and belong to his people

- We have been chosen by God when we were at our worst so we have security that he won't abandon us now
- We have been purchased at great cost so God says we are his treasured possession

- We have been united in Christ to all God's people, so we not only belong to God but to one another
- We have access to God. When we gather on Tuesdays for prayer, we are a people united in Christ who talk to the God who created the universe. This public gathering of the church for prayer is exciting and precious.

We are such a blessed people but with that comes responsibilities.

When we know who we are it will change how we live.

3. We are to be a proclaiming people (v9)

God has brought us out of darkness into his marvellous light. We were in the darkness of sin, ignorance (we did not know God) and hostility (we weren't interested in him). Now we are in the light. God and his love are real to us, the message of Jesus makes sense and we hate our sin. We are called to proclaim God's excellencies in these ways:

- **We are to be a praising people.** When we are gathered as a people united together called church, how can we not praise him who has done all this for us? We can and should praise God as individuals but the thrust of the Bible is always on the gathered church praising God.
- **We are to be a holy people (vv11-12).** When we are scattered in our day to day lives, we are to be witnesses of what God has done for us. We need to live as God's holy people amongst those who are not yet God's people, so that they will see Christ in us and have the opportunity to come to trust him.

How can we apply this?

a) Don't despise the church – we can be guilty of damaging the church through disunity. This comes from

- Failure to love the people of God – we may gossip, make unkind comments or criticise one another
- Failure to be willing to serve, but expecting everyone to serve you
- Failure to give priority to gathering with God's people to pray, praise and worship God

We will have a much greater love for the church when we truly understand and believe that the church is:

- A people chosen by God, and therefore deeply loved by God
- A people purchased by God at great cost to himself and therefore his treasured possession
- A people with royal status as priests who have access to the throne of God

Ask God to give you a heart of love for the church, both the local church here and also the universal church.

b) Anticipate the final perfection of the church – at the moment it is imperfect, because it is made up of imperfect people. That's why we don't always get it right. It's why we need to be patient and continually forgiving one another. One day that will change. The Bible ends with another description of the church as it will be when Jesus returns to this earth to make everything new. It describes the church as a bride prepared for her wedding.

- It is a church made perfect that perfectly reflects Christ
- It is a church that praises God in a way she has never been able to do before
- It is a church that is stunningly glorious because her Saviour is stunningly glorious
- It is a church that brings honour to Jesus because of the work he has done in her to make her beautiful

That is what we are a part of if we are truly trusting in Jesus. We are so thankful for this building, but it won't last forever. It is a temporary building that is to be used to build the true dwelling of God – the church.

That building, the true church, will last forever.

Exodus 19:5-6 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

Isaiah 43:21 the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.

Isaiah 43:25 I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.