

## **Group Study Guide**

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

*Who are We and Why?*

I Peter 2:4-10

April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018

### **Main Point**

This passage describes who we are because of Jesus and what God desires to accomplish through us.

### **Getting Started**

Jesus is called the living stone and the cornerstone but also the rejected stone and the stone to stumble over. Peter taught his readers that they are God's valuable possession and like Jesus believers will be rejected by men. Believers are living stones built into a spiritual house. They are part of a living temple that is the corporate people of God. His unique possession. The phrase a chosen race seems to refer to the corporate unity of believers. In Christ, believers of all races are unified. They are also a royal priesthood – a collection company of priests who offer up spiritual sacrifices to God. As you study this passage today, consider how much God has richly blessed us with a new identity in Christ!

### **Observation**

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a topic.

Have a volunteer read 1 Peter 2:4-5.

*What does Peter remind us about Jesus' identity by calling Him the "living Stone" in verse 4? Why is it significant that Jesus is the living Stone?*

Jesus is doubtless called the "living Stone" because of His resurrection. Peter probably drew this theme from Psalm 118:22, where the stone rejected by the builders becomes the cornerstone. In Acts 4:11, Peter appealed to this same verse to refer to Christ's death and resurrection/exaltation. The religious leaders despised Jesus by crucifying Him, but God made Him the cornerstone by raising Him. Jesus is the chosen One, and we are chosen because we are in Him. Our entire identity is wrapped up in our coming to Him.

*What parts of the stone imagery stand out to you the most? Why?*

*Why did Peter say that Jesus Christ Himself is the cornerstone of this building? What does this mean about the place of Jesus in the church?*

The cornerstone was the first stone set in a structure, giving the rest of the building shape and definition as the measuring point for everything else. Similarly, this is what

Jesus is to the church. He provides definition and shape to everything we still do today as the spiritual house.

*Why is it important to recognize Jesus as the cornerstone of our church? Other than Jesus Himself, what might we be tempted to make the cornerstone of our faith?*

Have a volunteer read 1 Peter 2:6-8.

*What additional insights into Jesus' identity are revealed in the Old Testament passages Peter quoted—Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; and Isaiah 8:14?*

Peter referred to Isaiah 28:16 in verse 4 and then quoted it in verse 6. Then in verse 7, Peter quoted Psalm 118:22, naming Jesus as the cornerstone. The stone imagery takes off from there; Christ is the cornerstone, the stone on which the entire building is set. Churches, bodies of believers, are the stones that are built up together to form a spiritual house. These stones work together to form the structure as a church; it is not about any individual, but about how individuals can be concerned for one another in the church and for those who will come after them.

In what ways is Christ “a stone that causes men to stumble” (v. 8)?

Peter also quoted Isaiah 8:14. In this verse Isaiah said God should be a rock of sanctuary to His people. Instead, they failed to obey God, and they stumbled over Him as they would a huge rock placed in their paths. In a similar manner, Jesus, the Messiah, is a sanctuary to believers, but the One over whom unbelievers stumble. The idea that they were destined for this expresses God's sovereignty, but it does not mean unbelievers have no responsibility for disobeying the message. They reject Jesus as Savior and suffer the consequences, and this rejection is not a surprise to God.

Have a volunteer read 1 Peter 2:9-10.

*Looking at verses 5 and 9, what terms describe the identity of Christians? Which is most important to you? Why? Which is most difficult? Why?*

*What was the role of a priest for Israel? In what way do believers fill that role for one another?*

Peter described believers as priests who offer spiritual sacrifices. As Israel was God's chosen people, believers are a chosen race. We are also a royal priesthood, belonging both to the family of the King and to the priestly family. We are a holy nation, a people for His possession, as Israel had been. Our purpose as the people of God and as priests is to proclaim the praises of God. We exist to praise God for what He has done for us in Christ, how He has called us out of the darkness and into His marvelous light.

Peter addressed believers as aliens in this world and directs his attention to their behavior in a hostile culture. He summons them to conquer evil desires with which they struggle. Christians must live exemplary lives with the kinds of good deeds that will make unbelievers take notice. Hence, they will fend off any suggestion that they are

practicing evil. Even more important, the goal is to provoke unbelievers to glorify God in the day of visitation. Peter's hope was that unbelievers will be compelled to admit that the lifestyle of believers is morally beautiful, and this admission will bring them to saving faith so that God will be glorified on the day of judgment.

### **Application**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

*The phrase, 'as you come to Him' indicates a daily personal relationship with Christ. Share with your group how you personally come to Jesus. How and when do you come to Jesus regularly? What you have to share about your own personal relationship with Jesus may encourage others to deepen their walk with Christ.*

*How are believers like living stones? How is God building you and others up into a spiritual house? Consider how God has placed each of the people in your group together, for example. Are you building up one another? If so, how?*

*Consider how Peter describes believers in verses 9 and 10. Re-read the royal titles he gives to those who have placed their faith in Christ. What do these titles imply about a believers identify? How might these titles encourage believers who struggle with a poor self-image? How might a correct understanding of these titles also produce humility and gratefulness? Have we earned these titles?*

*How can we demonstrate our identity before the unbelieving world in a humble and loving manner?*

*What would it look like to proclaim the excellencies of God to those around you? Ask God to help you both demonstrate and declare the Gospel to your five. Pray for one another in your group and encourage them to consider ways to apply this command to life.*

### **Prayer**

Dear God, please show me what it means to proclaim the excellencies of Christ to the lost and dying world around me. Use me to reach those who are far from You and near to me. I want to always see your majesty and excellence and share what I have found with those who need Christ!

### **Commentary**

2:4. Many years earlier, Jesus had given Simon the nickname "Rock" (petros in Greek, from which the name Peter comes). Here the apostle nicknamed "Rock" described Jesus as a living stone. (See Psalm 118:22, which refers to the cornerstone that the builders rejected, and see Peter's use of this psalm in v. 7.) The world at large had rejected Jesus, but God had chosen Him and declared Him valuable. Jesus is the chosen One, and we are chosen because we are in Him. Our entire identity is wrapped up in Him.

2:5. Because of our relation to the resurrected and living Lord, we too can be called living stones (but not in the same sense as Jesus). Just as stones were used to build the temple of God in Jerusalem, so we are being built into a spiritual house, a temple, to God. God now dwells in His people, not in a building (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19). Then Peter changed to another word picture and described believers as priests who offer spiritual sacrifices. Under the old covenant the priests of Israel sacrificed bulls and goats in the temple. As Christians, we are priests of the new covenant who offer spiritual sacrifices to God. These sacrifices are truly acceptable to God, because they are offered through Jesus Christ. Peter specified the nature of these spiritual gifts in verse 9.

2:6. Peter then cited a series of texts from the Hebrew Scriptures on which he based his comments. "It stands" in Scripture is a solemn formula for citing quotations from Scripture as the Word of God. Peter first quoted Isaiah 28:16 as it appears in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Septuagint was the Bible of many in the early church, particularly those who spoke or read Greek. Isaiah had condemned Israel for rejecting the Lord's message and for relying on pagan nations for their support. Through Isaiah, God told Israel He was laying the true foundation stone on which His people were to be built. A cornerstone was the great stone lying at the corner of a building uniting one wall to another. This foundational cornerstone supports everything else and ties it all together. The cornerstone God was laying in Zion was either God Himself or the Messiah. Thus, whoever believes in Him will never be put to shame. Those trusting in Jesus never have to worry about whether He will disappoint them. God made that clear to Isaiah, to Israel, and to us.

2:7. Peter pointed out a great difference between those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and those who do not. God gives honor to those who believe. The unbelieving, on the other hand, will be disconcerted to discover that the stone they rejected . . . has become the cornerstone. Here Peter quoted Psalm 118:22. This verse could describe an event in the construction of the temple or perhaps it was a proverbial saying from that period. "Cornerstone" here may mean either a foundational cornerstone as in Isaiah 28:16 or the topmost capstone. Though rejected by the leaders of Israel and Rome, Jesus was the most important stone of the true temple, the people of God.

2:8. Peter next quoted Isaiah 8:14. In this verse, Isaiah said God should be a rock of sanctuary to His people. Instead, they failed to obey God, and they stumbled over Him as they would a huge rock placed in their paths. In a similar manner, Jesus the Messiah is a sanctuary to believers, but the One over whom unbelievers stumble. The statement "they were destined for this" expresses God's sovereignty, but it does not mean unbelievers have no responsibility for disobeying the message. They reject Jesus as Savior and suffer the consequences.

2:9. Peter then identified implications of the new identity that Christians have and are to understand. As Israel was God's chosen people, believers are a chosen race. We are also a royal priesthood, belonging both to the family of the King and to the priestly family. We are a holy nation, a people for His possession, as Israel had been. Our

purpose as the people of God and as priests is to proclaim the praises of God. Here we learn the nature of the spiritual sacrifices of this new priesthood—praising God. Hebrews 13:15 refers to “a sacrifice of praise.” Romans 12:1 speaks of the spiritual worship of offering our “bodies as a living sacrifice” to God. Although Peter did not name the sacrifice of our bodies here, the entire passage implies it. Such a sacrifice of praise is merited by the nature of what God has done for us in Christ. He has called us out of the darkness of our world into His marvelous light in Christ.

2:10. Peter then applied Hosea 2:23 to these largely Gentile congregations. Once they did not belong to God’s people Israel, but then they became part of God’s people, the church. Formerly they knew nothing of God’s mercy to Israel, but then they received mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ. Many believers have a faulty sense of identity as Christians. They may see themselves only as church members or as possessing a certainty of a home in heaven. Such believers can find their lives transformed by understanding they are part of something far greater than themselves. They belong to the new people of God. God now lives in them. They are priests serving before God, offering up the sacrifice of praise to Him amid a perverted and lost world.