

1 Peter 1:22-2:10: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 22 to chapter 2 verse 10 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth, for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God. For all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever. And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

So put away all malice, and all deceit, and hypocrisy, and envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, a living stone, rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 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. 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. So the honour is for you who believe. But for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. 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. 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. There is a strong theme of Christian initiation throughout the passage that begins at the end of 1 Peter chapter 1. A few commentators have gone so far as to claim that this is a baptismal liturgy, and that the baptism occurs between verses 21 and 22 of chapter 1. This is highly speculative, and I think unlikely, but Peter does exhibit a peculiar attention to the beginnings of Christian life. He starts off by speaking about coming to Christ in obedient response to the summons of the gospel. This leads to purification of the soul. It leads into the life of a new family, where brotherly love should be the manner of our behaviour. Our hearts have been purified so that we might love each other. There is likely here an allusion to the process of Christian initiation. We receive the gospel, we confess the faith, we are baptised into Christ's body, where we are united with our brothers and sisters in Christ. And Peter is calling his hearers to live out this new life that they have been brought into, to the full. And the focus on loving our brothers and sisters is really pronounced.

This love must be sincere, it must be unfeigned, it must be true, and it must be earnest. A deep and a fervent love for other people in Christ. The process being described is our being born again, we are rising to a new life, and the word of God is the means by which this happens.

This word is an incorruptible or imperishable seed. It endures, it won't perish or die. It is this word by which we were called. It is this word that gave us new spiritual life.

[3 : 33] It is this word with which we were sealed in baptism. It is this word that we grow in and from. And to underline the point, Peter quotes from Isaiah chapter 40 verses 6 and 8. This is a powerful passage about the good news of God's reign. In verses 1 to 9 we read, A voice cries, A voice says, And I said,

As with the rest of the New Testament authors, when Peter quotes from the Old Testament, he typically wants us to think about the surrounding context of the quote. And here that context is the context of the gospel message itself.

God's salvation coming, God being established as king, his righteousness being worked out in history. And the powerful word by which this prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled is the means by which they have been brought into the body of Christ.

This is the word that is at work in them. Coming to Christ and the truth entails putting away all these other things that are against the truth. There must be a purging, a putting off, a clearing out of all those things that are contrary to Christ.

As we take Christ on, as we clothe ourselves with Christ, all other things that are contrary to him must be removed. And in the place of this deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander, we must cultivate a hunger for the purity of the truth of Christ.

[5 : 57] Peter compares it to newborn infants desiring milk from their mothers. And it seems here that he is addressing this to infants in the faith. These are people who have just been born again, just been baptised.

They've tasted something of the great goodness of God. They've been brought into the body of Christ. And now they are being encouraged to grow up into salvation through constantly feeding on the truth.

Growing up into salvation means that this is an ongoing matter of life. The moment of being born again is not the finish line, it's the starting line. It's the place where our new life in Christ begins. And we grow and we develop and we persevere in this life to enter into the full possession of the salvation that God has prepared for us. He appeals to the fact that they already have some taste of the goodness of God.

And that taste should give them an appetite for more. If you know that God is good, then seek more and more goodness from him. He won't disappoint you. Becoming a Christian involves coming to Christ, the living stone rejected by men, but chosen by God.

[7 : 00] But this is necessarily something that makes us part of a body too. We are being built up into a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. In Ephesians chapter 2 verses 19 to 22, Paul speaks about this.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Peter himself would have known something about this, this coming to Christ as a living stone, as living stones ourselves.

His own name Peter was given to him by Christ, speaking about the fact that he was a stone or a rock. And in that context of Matthew chapter 16 verse 18, Christ spoke about building his church, an image that mixes together a community, an assembly of people and a building.

It seems very appropriate that Peter brings together those two images here. Christ described himself in John chapter 2 as the temple, and we are described in him as temples of the living God, each one of us individually and also all of us corporately.

[8 : 19] The purpose of the church is to be this spiritual body, this living temple. We might think about the events of the day of Pentecost, where like the lampstand of the temple or the tabernacle, the disciples are lit with the living flame of the Spirit.

The Spirit descends into their midst as the Spirit descended upon the tabernacle in Exodus chapter 40, or upon Solomon's temple in 1 Kings chapter 8. We are a new temple, we are a new building of God that is being established, formed by people, and the chief purpose of the church is to offer spiritual sacrifices.

The temple was there as a means of sacrifice, as was the tabernacle. But now the sacrifices are performed by persons. The true purpose of sacrifice was always spiritual sacrifice, the offering up of the human spirit in prayer and in worship and in self-dedication.

The New Testament speaks about this in a number of different places. We offer the fruit of our lips in worship. We offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God. We are washed as sacrifices in baptism. Our bodies presented to him for his service. Our limbs and organs, like those limbs and organs of the sacrifices of the animals that were separated and placed upon the altar, our limbs and organs are presented to God for his worship and his service.

[9 : 40] Our resources are another form of sacrifice. Our praise and our prayers are also forms of sacrifice. The primary purpose of the church, as we see in these verses, is a Godward one.

Some people have said that the church primarily exists for the sake of outsiders, as if its primary purpose was mission and evangelism. That is not the case. The primary purpose of the church is

the purpose of a temple.

We are to offer spiritual sacrifices to God. Our purpose, primarily, is a Godward one. And these sacrifices are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

He is the one who has provided a living way through his sacrifice. All of our sacrifices are a participation and on the basis of his sacrifice. Without the way and the acceptance that he has won for us with God, we could never approach.

Peter goes on to develop his position from Old Testament quotes, developing and exploring the meaning of the term stone. Jesus did something similar to this in Matthew chapter 21 verses 42 to 44.

[10:44] Jesus said to them, Have you not read in the scriptures, The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and given to a people producing its fruits.

And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him. Here Peter quotes from Isaiah chapter 28 verse 16, Psalm 118 verse 22, and Isaiah chapter 8 verse 14, all of which helped to develop his point about Christ as the cornerstone. God is building a new temple in Zion, the mount of his habitation. He has placed this special dress stone, this particular stone of great beauty and value, and it is the cornerstone of this grand new edifice.

Everything else is going to be built around and according to this stone. And for those who believe, they will not be put to shame. They will not be condemned, but will be vindicated on the day of testing.

However, for those who reject, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Their whole building project has been rejected. The stone, or in the parable of the wicked vinedressers, the sun that they have rejected, will become the one that everything else is built around.

[12:00] What's more, that stone will become a cause of stumbling, a rock of offence. The stone is a cause of division. For some, it leads to their glorification and building up, and for many others, it leads to their destruction.

The dividing factor, once again, is the word. Their disobedience of the word is something that they were destined to do. And God's placing of this stone in Zion is on the one hand a means of judgment upon those who reject, and on the other hand, a means of blessing to those who accept. People's destinies will be determined according to how they respond to this stone. There is a contrast drawn now between those who disbelieve and those who accept Christ.

Here, Peter draws once again upon Old Testament scripture, Exodus chapter 19, verses 5 to 6, in the context of Sinai, where God calls his people to the mountain and tells them what he will do with them.

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, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

[13:04] And then in Isaiah chapter 43, verses 20 to 21, I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I form for myself, that they might declare my praise.

These sorts of statements were used of Israel in the Old Testament. And here the language that was applied to Israel in the Old Testament is applied to the people in the church, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Not only is the church a new temple, the church is a royal priesthood, it's a holy nation, it's a people of God's special possession, God's name is placed upon us. And we have a priestly purpose, but also a heralding purpose.

We proclaim the excellencies of God to the wider world. While our primary purpose is to offer spiritual sacrifices, we are also to be a light on the hill, to be those who bring light to the surrounding world.

We have been called out of darkness into God's marvellous light for this purpose. Once we were not a people, but now we are God's people. Once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy.

[14 : 09] And here he is referring to Hosea chapter 1 to 2. There the prophets spoke about disowned people that God was receiving back. And here Peter speaks not only about Jews who are forgiven, but about Gentiles who were never a people at all, who are brought into the body of Christ and in him become a new people.

The language here might also make us think about creation, called from darkness into light. Once not a people, but now a people, God has created something out of nothing. God has brought light into the darkness.

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. A question to consider. How in our presentations of the gospel could we speak about the church in a way that gives it the same centrality and importance to the message of the faith as Peter gives it here?

