

A Holy Priesthood

1 Peter 2:4-10

INTRODUCTION

Our passage, that we are about to read, describes a great building and an incredible privilege. The building is the living Temple of God – grander than Solomon’s temple of old. The incredible privilege is for common Gentile Christians to become priests in that Temple – and not just any priests, but royal, kingly priests.

In our days these two concepts can be foreign to our minds. What is a priest anyway? And has anyone really been to a Temple? To help us recover the “wow”-factor that was there for the first readers of Peter’s epistle, consider a great building that was recently dedicated here in Minnesota.

If you’ve been to US Bank Stadium, you’ll appreciate just how immense it is. It is the largest building in our state, and it has the largest freestanding glass doors in the world. Each is 55 feet wide and from 75 to 95 feet high. In all, they use 30,000 square feet of glass and weigh 40,000 tons.

If the stadium is similar to the grandeur of a temple – being able to join the team – or have a close relative on the team, would be similar to being made a royal priest. Talk about access! The lounge for former players is amazing. I’m sure player’s parents and their families can enjoy similar access to the stadium. If your son was drafted by the Vikings – you would go from uninterested in the Vikings to suddenly a member of the inner circle, in a sense.

Now when the Super Bowl comes to Minneapolis this year, the events there may come close to the wonder that we should think of when we read of the Temple in Scripture. The Dedication of the Temple and Solomon’s great prayer – and the slaughter of thousands of animals

as burnt offerings to purify it – that would be much greater than a Super Bowl – and the fact that fire came down from Heaven and burned the offering and God’s presence came down in a cloud and filled the Temple – well that is truly awe-inspiring. Being a priest involved in singing praise to God, or being there and blowing the priestly trumpet, or even being one who helped with all the offerings – that would far outmatch the thought of being in a VIP suite during a Super Bowl, wouldn’t it?

If the God who made the universe was coming down and indwelling a Temple decked out in gold and silver weighed out by the ton (112 tons of gold, 262 tons of silver – cost of materials alone is more than 400 x the cost of US Bank stadium), that would be something truly special! Now with the proper level of awe, let us turn to our passage for this morning.

READ 1 Peter 2:4-10

- I. **The Preparation of Holy Priests** – 2:4-6 (the spiritual house [2:5] enables us being a holy priesthood)
 - A. **Christ is our Cornerstone**
 1. “Living” Stone – life due to his Resurrection, “the Rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:4), life due to the smiting of the Rock and life-giving water flowing from it (Ex. 17).
 2. “Chosen and Precious” Stone – chosen by God the Father, precious in His Sight. (quote is Is. 28:16 – adds “in him” with LXX)
 - B. **We draw near to Christ**
 1. We have “tasted” that The LORD (Jesus) is good – vs. 3.
 2. We believe in Him – vs. 6.
 3. Rather than rejecting Jesus (as others do), we come to Him. We “are coming” to him. We are compelled to come.

4. Coming to Him is similar term for “drawing near” –
 - Draw near to hear God Speak (Dt. 5:27)
 - Draw near to offer sacrifices (Lev. 9:7)
 - Draw near to worship/pray (Heb. 4:16 “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”)

C. This results in our being built up as a Spiritual House

1. We are like living stones – receiving life from Christ, modeling Christ, being the Body of Christ (the Church).
2. This happens together – not individually. The Church is where we experience the indwelling Spirit most fully.
3. 1 Kings 5:17 “At the king’s command they quarried out great, costly stones in order to lay the foundation of the house with dressed stones.”
4. Neh. 4:2 [speaking of the futile attempt to rebuild Jerusalem] “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they **revive** (bring to life) the stones out of the heaps of rubbish...?”
5. The stones get their order/structure from being placed on the Cornerstone.
6. Spiritual House is for the indwelling Spirit. The fact that it grows is part of prophecy that the Temple would grow to expand God’s presence and glory to the ends of the earth (Ezekiel’s grand Temple, and Rev. 21’s Temple city 1500 miles cubed).
7. Christ knits together the individual stones into a Living Habitation for the Spirit. **READ: Eph. 2:19-22** (Gentiles and Jews) / **Eph. 4:15-16** (church life in view).

D. We come to Christ continually in order to Grow Strong

1. We are coming (present continual sense) to Him and we are being built up.
2. Wayne Grudem gives the sense of this passage as follows: “As you (keep on) coming to Christ (in worship, in prayer

and praise), you are (continually) being built up into a spiritual temple, a place in which God more and more fully dwells.” (Tyndale NT Commentary, IVP, 1988, p. 100)

APPLICATION: Drawing life from our worship of Christ – and being strengthened as part of the Body of Christ in the Church, we are prepared for understanding and performing our sacred duties as a Holy Priesthood. But before we look closely at what Priestly duties are, we must beware of the peril of not holding firmly to Christ the Cornerstone.

II. The Peril for Holy Priests – 2:7-8

A. The Rejection of the Cornerstone

1. The Cornerstone was rejected by the builders – Ps. 118:22 – Jesus applied this to the leaders of Israel (Matt. 21:42).
2. But later it was valued and placed as the cornerstone.
3. Jesus is despised by the World but is truly Precious.
4. The Stone when rejected becomes a source of “shame” (Is. 28:16 LXX, v. 6 above). Hebrew has “be in haste” and may indicate facing an army without help.

B. The Stumbling Stone

1. It is also a “stone of offense and rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.” (Is. 8:14-15)
2. Peter explains why they stumble:
 - they do not believe – 2:7
 - they disobey the Word 2:8 (Word in context is the Gospel – 1:25b)

C. The Destiny of the Unbelieving

1. The text says that the unbelievers stumble because they disobey “as they were destined to do.” – 2:8b
2. In contrast, believers are a “chosen race” – 2:9a.

3. Some take this “destined” to refer to the stumbling – God sets stumbling as a consequence for disobeying the Gospel.
4. But the object of the destination is “they” – the people themselves are destined.
5. What to make of this? Wayne Grudem gives some helpful thoughts:
 - Scripture does not place blame on God for the unbelief of these people. God is able to destine this disobedience in such a way as not to be the one who commits evil.
 - This is intended to be a comfort to the Christians in 1 Peter who are in the midst of persecution by hostile unbelievers.
 - The text leaves open the possibility that these unbelievers could repent – it is speaking of their current state of unbelieving being destined (up to this point).
 - [But the text does lead us to expect that for some people, their unbelief and disobedience is destined by God – and will persist to their end.]
 - “God’s election of some to eternal life and the passing over of others is never viewed in the same way in Scripture. Election to salvation... is cause for rejoicing and praise to God” – 1 Pet. 1:1-3, Eph. 1:3-6 [Tit. 1:1-2] “But ‘reprobation’ (the passing over of those who are not chosen, and justly leaving them in their rebellion) is viewed as something which brings God sorrow, not delight” – Exek. 33:1, Rom. 9:1-2. (*Tyndale NT Commentary*, IVP, 1988, from p. 108-110)

APPLICATION: We have dwelt on the peril for a few reasons. First, this peril applies to us. The Bible repeatedly warns us to “continue in the faith” and “endure to the end.” 1 Pet. 1:5, 9 stress that our faith must continue to the end. Another key text on this is Col. 1:21-23a: “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him. If indeed you continue in the faith, stable and

steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard...” A similar text, Heb. 3:12-13, points to our church life together as being something that can help us have faith that endures.

Another reason is that the text points us to the peril. And the third reason is that some of us are frustrated by the unbelief of others. We are threatened by it, feel betrayed by it, or are suffering slander (see 3:16) or insults (see 4:14) for holding to the Cornerstone. This text is there to teach us about unbelief and that it is not outside of the plan of God.

In stark contrast to these warnings, we find incredible promises in vs. 9. They are for us who come to Christ and are prepared to be Priests. Let us turn now to these Privileges.

III. The Privilege of Holy Priests – 2:7, 9-10

- A. Honor** – 2:7 (the preciousness of the Cornerstone is conferred on us – who are joined to him)
- B. For background on these next several privileges it is helpful to understand a few things:**
 1. The recipients of Peter’s letter include Gentile Christians as well as some Jewish Christians – 1:14, 1:18, 4:3-4
 2. The terms used were specifically given to Israel as God’s special people in Ex. 19:5-6 (and other places).
 3. These terms were also prophesied to be reapplied to Israel after the exile when God would restore his people – Isaiah 43:20-21 (and other places).
 4. The terms being applied to the believers in Peter’s day communicates their privilege and inclusion into the “one new man” = the Church, made of both Jew and Gentile (see Eph. 2:15)
- C. Chosen Race** –
 - Is. 40:20b-21 “I give water to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.”

- Dt. 10:15 “Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.” – reasons given for why God chose them are that it was not due to their righteousness (Dt. 9:4-5), nor was it due to their great number (Dt. 7:7), ultimately it was for God’s glory (Ex. 34:10).
- Just as Israel was specially chosen – the Church is God’s special people now.

D. Royal Priesthood –

- Ex. 19:5-6 “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.
- Rev. 1:6a “and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” (see also 5:10 – applies to the Church in context)

E. Holy Nation (same as above)

F. People for God’s Own Possession

- Ex. 19:5 “my treasured possession”
- Dt. 7:6 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.
- Metaphor refers to the King’s private treasure store.

G. God’s People receiving Mercy

- Hosea 1 and 2 – applied to Israel as judgement – here seen as a restoration from the punishment and also an inclusion of Gentiles (who the words more naturally apply to).

APPLICATION: Now we need to look at the purpose of all of this: these grand privileges, this building into a holy House. All of this is not just to have a Super Bowl. Something else is going on here. We now must turn finally to the Purpose of priesthood.

IV. The Purpose of Holy Priests – 2:5, 9 (with 2:11-12, 16, 21)

A. Worship – “to offer spiritual sacrifices” (2:5)

1. Reminder that all of these sacrifices are only made acceptable **through Jesus Christ** (2:5).
2. **Personal devotion/holiness** – Rom. 12:1 “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship”
3. **Confession of sin** – Ps. 51:17 “sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart”
4. **Personal worship** – Heb. 12:28 “let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.”
5. **Praise** – Heb. 13:15 “let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.”
6. **Prayer** – Ps. 141:2 “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.” (see also Rev. 5:8)
7. **Faith** – Phil. 2:17 “the sacrificial offering of your faith”
8. **Thanksgiving and Song** – Ps. 107:22 “And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!”
9. **Love** [Covenant loyalty] – Hos. 6:6a “I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice.”
10. **Knowing God** – Hos. 6:6b “the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”
11. **Giving to spread the Gospel** – Phil 4/18
12. **Good deeds, sharing possessions** Heb. 13:16 “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” (see also Mic. 6:6-8)
13. **Communion** as the One Feast in the New Temple – Heb. 13:10 “We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.”
14. All of these points are not just for individuals, but are to be done together – corporately. We bring God more glory together as a priesthood, serving in his Temple, the Church.

- B. Witness** – “that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (2:9)
1. Proclamation includes having an answer – 3:15
 2. Proclamation includes living as a testimony – context of Peter (2:12, 2:15, 4:4 and other places)
- C. Withstand** – 2:11-12 and rest of epistle.
1. Holy Priests are priests together and for one another.
 2. The Church stands stronger together, and individually you will fail without the strength designed by God to come through the House where each stone helps the next.
 3. The World will slander and insult, the flesh will war against our soul (2:11), there will be persecution (4:12) – yet it lasts just for a “little while” (1:6, 5:10).
 4. The spiritual life that flows from our coming to Christ and staying in communion with each other can enable us to avoid the peril before us and endure to the end in this evil age.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have covered a lot of ground and yet only scratched the surface of what is here in this text. I hope you can come away from this with something that is good news for you. Jesus is the Living Stone and he knits us together into a living Body of Christ that is a Spiritual House to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He has given us a great and Holy Mission. We are privileged to be God’s chosen people – we are Kings and Priests, we are Holy, we are God’s special possession that is treasured, we were not God’s people but have been mercifully made His people. We were in darkness but have been called into marvelous light!

This should give us something lasting to rejoice about. No matter what role we have in the church, no matter how hard the road seem to be that we are called to follow, we can find meaningful Priestly work to do. We can be informed by the Truth of our privileged status, and the Life-giving Stone. We can purpose to offer our body and perform sacrifices worthy of God. We can witness to His glory. We can withstand the adversary and his fiery trials (see chapter 5).

May God grant us an increased measure of His Holy Spirit, and may we live out this message together as the Church of Christ.

Benediction: Rev. 7:14b-17