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God's Own Holy People

1 Peter 2:1-10

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If we're wise, one of the things we learn in life that's puzzling, fascinating, and at times incredibly frustrating is that people can look at the same thing – the same person, the same event, the same actions – and see vastly different things. How we can look at the same person or the same event and perceive different things is complex and depends, at least in part, on each person's previously held beliefs, our psychological make up, our cultural upbringing, our education, and life experience. We might say we're not even seeing the same person or event. Even though we're often unconscious of the fact that we do it, we tend to view people and events through lenses that confirm what we already believe. This is called **confirmation bias**, and it describes the human tendency to actively seek out, interpret, and remember information that supports our existing beliefs while disregarding or downplaying contradictory evidence. This is true about issues large and small.

It's important to understand this truth as we listen to **1 Peter 2:1-10** which is about Jesus and who we're called to be and how we are called to live as God's holy people. Peter makes the point that people look at Jesus and see vastly different things. Using the imagery of stones and rocks, Peter describes how some people look at Jesus and see a living stone who is precious and trustworthy and upon whom we can build our life. Other people look at Jesus and reject him as nothing special. Some of us see Christ as a cornerstone and others as an obstacle. Listen to **1 Peter 2:1-10**, "Rid yourselves, therefore, of all **malice**, and all **guile, insincerity, envy**, and all **slander**. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it **you may grow into salvation**— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. 4 Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals **yet chosen and precious** in God's sight, and 5 like living stones, let yourselves **be built into a spiritual house**, to **be a holy priesthood**, to **offer spiritual sacrifices** acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion **a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious**; and whoever **believes** in him will not be put to shame."

7 To you then who **believe**, he is precious; but for those who **do not believe**, "**The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner**,"

8 and **“A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.”**

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, God’s own people,** in order that you may **proclaim the mighty acts** of him who called you out of darkness into his **marvelous light**.<sup>10</sup> **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.”**

This passage begins with an invitation to **get rid** of some things and to long for and live into something new. Peter invites us to **get rid of** *“all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander.”* The Greek implies a once for all action, like taking off a garment that you’ll never put on again. How many podcasts, radio, and television programs would cease to exist if Christians took this verse seriously and didn’t listen to or watch programming that largely features *“malice, guile, insincerity, envy, and slander.”* It would be the end of a great deal of talk radio and TV and the end of careers for people who’ve gotten rich peddling in these unholy and ungodly behaviors because too many people indulge in them every day. If we take God’s Word seriously, we should be getting rid of vile, unhealthy, unhelpful, behaviors and not feeding them by what we watch and listen to daily. All of these (*“malice, guile, insincerity, envy, and slander”*) have to do with how we regard, speak to and about, and treat other people. How do we get rid of attitudes and actions like that? We need God’s help because sometimes the way we try to get rid of things isn’t the best.

When Steve Tran of Westminster, California closed the door on 25 activated bug bombs, he thought he had seen the last of the cockroaches that shared his apartment. When the spray reached the pilot light of the stove, it ignited, blasting his screen door across the street, breaking all his windows and setting his furniture on fire. *“I really wanted to kill all of them,”* he said. *“I thought if I used a lot more, it would last longer.”* According to the label, just two canisters of the fumigant would have been sufficient. The blast caused thousands of dollars of damage to his apartment building. And the cockroaches? Tran reported, *“By Sunday, I saw them walking around.”*

Ridding ourselves of malice, guile, insincerity, envy, and slander can be as difficult as trying to get rid of cockroaches. Some of us have probably made resolutions about getting our heart right toward others, not assuming the worst, improving our

thoughts, behavior, and speech which is better than not seeking to change at all. Our efforts to extinguish these unholy behaviors are frequently futile. All of them may re-emerge from the crevices and cracks in our character at the worst possible moments because we haven't filled our soul with something else that takes their place. Rather than filling our mind, heart, and spirit with malice, envy, slander and the rest, Peter encourages us instead *"Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good."* By pure spiritual milk Peter means we're to feed on God's word and fill our mind with God's truth about how we're to live as members of God's family and followers of Christ. As Paul says in **Philippians 4:8**, we're to focus on our thoughts on, *"whatever is **true**, whatever is **honorable**, whatever is **just**, whatever is **pure**, whatever is **pleasing**, whatever is **commendable**, if there is any **excellence** and if there is anything worthy of **praise**, think about these things."* What are you feeding your mind, heart, and soul?

We need to ask God both for the desire and the ability to turn away from unholy habits in our lives by doing what Peter says next. *"**Come to him, a living stone**, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and **precious** in God's sight,"* Peter invites us to come to Jesus, a living stone, rejected by some people as insignificant, but chosen and precious in God's sight. People look at Jesus and see vastly different things. Wendy Vassalo of Dallas, Texas reported the story of a gem dealer who was walking the aisles at the Tucson Gem & Mineral Show one year when he noticed a blue-violet stone the size and shape of a potato. He looked it over, then, as calmly as possible, asked the vendor, *"You want \$15 for this?"* The seller, realizing the rock wasn't as pretty as others in the bin, lowered the price to \$10.

The stone was later certified as a natural star sapphire, one of the largest known of its kind. It took a lover of stones to recognize the sapphire's worth. Some people look at Christ and they see something of limited value. Others see a living stone chosen and precious in God's sight and in our own. The word "**precious**" is repeated three times in verses 4-7. Do you see something precious when you look at Jesus Christ? This is an important question for each of us to answer. If we believe Christ is who he claims to be and who the New Testament proclaims him to be then that's life altering for us.

Not only does God invite us to come to Jesus Christ, but we're also invited to **let God reshape us**; notice the phrasing, ***"let yourselves be built into a spiritual house,"*** We're invited to let God reshape us so we can be like living stones ourselves and be part of the spiritual house God is building. If we see Christ for who he is and come to him and allow God to work on us and reshape us, then God will do great things with us and through us. The scripture doesn't say, "Come to Jesus and build yourselves up into a spiritual house." It says, ***"Let yourselves be built."*** or ***"you...are being built."*** Either way, it's God who is doing the building just as Jesus says in **Matthew 16:18**, ***"On this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."*** Jesus builds his church; God builds us up to be a spiritual house and holy priesthood dedicated to Jesus Christ. Our part is to humble ourselves and allow God to take the lead in shaping and guiding our life.

Are any of you familiar with the hobby of lapidary? Lapidary involves finding, buying, cutting, polishing, and setting precious and semi-precious stones. At our first church in Prospect Park, Pennsylvania we had friends who did lapidary, and they made some lovely pieces. **In a sense, 1 Peter is saying, God is practicing lapidary on us.** Although some of us or some other people may feel of little value or we may not see value in someone else, God looks at each of us and at every single human being and sees someone precious who can be shaped and polished and made into a jewel. If we'll place ourselves in God's hands and let the Creator form us for God's purposes, God can reveal unseen value that others or we may have not seen or known.

What is God's purpose in shaping us and cutting away the unsightly or rough parts and polishing us up? The Divine Artist's hope is that we will offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. As God's holy people we're called to offer sacrifices, but not the sacrifice of animals or grains or other things, but the sacrifice of faithful obedience and the life of love that goes with that. The sacrifice we're called to offer is a life without malice, guile, insincerity, envy, or slander which 1 Peter says we have put off with our faith. Speaking of the spiritual sacrifices God desires, Psalm 40 states, ***"You have given me an open ear."*** God wants us to listen to the Word and be obedient to it. offering ourselves to God by delighting to do God's will, writing God's law on our heart, and sharing with others God's saving help, faithfulness, and steadfast

love. Offering ourselves to the Lord and being in God's presence moves us because God is as precious and amazing to us as we are to the Lord.

Years ago, a woman entered a Haagen-Dazs store on the Kansas City Plaza to get an ice cream cone. After making her selection, she turned around and found herself face to face with the actor Paul Newman who was in town filming the movie *Mr. and Mrs. Bridge*. He smiled and said hello and his blue eyes caused her knees to shake. She managed to pay for her cone, then walked out of the shop, her heart pounding. When she began to regain her composure, she realized she didn't have her treat. She started back into the store and met Paul Newman again at the door. "*Are you looking for your ice cream?*" he asked. She nodded, unable to speak. Newman said, "*You put it in your purse with your change.*" There is delight and joy in offering ourselves to God that can take our breath away.

Throughout 1 Peter 2 we hear a variety of things that God does for us. God provides the means for us to grow in our salvation by giving us the scriptures and the Spirit. God invites us to come to Christ. God will build us up and shape us into precious followers of Jesus. God is the one who enables us to offer the right kind of sacrifices. God takes nobodies and turns us into somebody's. Once we were no people, now we can say we're God's people. Once we hadn't received mercy, we were stumbling and fumbling heading for a fall. Now God has set our feet upon a rock, making our steps secure. Once we were in darkness not knowing which way to turn or what was what. Now God has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. What does God ask of us in return? That we live as God's holy, transformed, humble, grateful people and tell others what God has done; that we proclaim the mighty acts of God we've just mentioned. Isn't that a good deal?

Can you imagine how awful the seller of the sapphire I mentioned earlier felt after selling it for just \$10? How does one get over giving away an incredibly valuable stone for ten dollars because you were so unaware or ignorant that you didn't see it for what it was worth? How do you sleep after that experience? How much worse is it not to see Jesus Christ for who he is and to recognize his preciousness and value? That has eternal consequences, not just financial ones. What a responsibility and privilege God has given each of us to proclaim the mighty acts of God to people near us who look at

Jesus and at this point in their lives, only see a potato shaped stone, not a precious gem. The Lord also wants us to look at other people and see them as precious and valuable in God's sight.

One of the most important truths expressed in 1 Peter 2 is what it says about our identity. 1 Peter 2:9-10 tell us that **life with God is life in community**, not a life of individualism. All the images in verses 9 and 10 are plural: ***"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people."*** For believers, Christian community is our community, and the church family is our family.

Throughout our series on the church, we've heard many images and descriptions of who we're called to be and what we're to do. Mark emphasized how we're to be disciples of the cross. Matthew stressed the importance of doing the will of Jesus' Father in heaven as part of a household of justice that's greater than our biological family. Luke described how we're to be a sign of the kingdom of God, leading and pointing others to Jesus by being gracious, generous, and merciful. Paul taught us the church is the Body of Christ and each of us has a role to play to help the body be healthy and strong. Paul also described how the church is to be a community of reconciliation in which we dialogue, listen, and extend forgiveness as we serve as ambassadors for Christ in the ministry of reconciliation. Peter described how the church is our home in this world and gave us five clear things to strive for as members of the church - unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Revelation encouraged us to be a community of resistance, embodying the presence of God, living as conquerors in Christ, trusting in God's ultimate victory and the promise of a new creation. Timothy invited us to live as part of the family of God, proclaiming and living the truth of the Gospel. The Apostle Paul also taught us how the church is the Temple of God where God's Spirit dwells in our midst.

What an indescribable blessing it is to be part of the church and it's wonderful we have new members joining today. By God's grace and mercy, we're all invited to be a part of God's own holy people. We're to share the story of God's love, with those who don't know they have an invitation to belong and that there's mercy for every person who seeks it no matter who they are and what they may have done.

## **Closing Prayer**

Holy God, we offer ourselves in obedience to you this morning, through the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, the living, chosen, and precious stone who has the power to save and transform us if we allow him to. We thank you that you have called us to be a royal priesthood, a holy nation, your own holy people; and to you, O God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, be blessing and honor and glory and power forever. Amen.

## **Questions for Discussion or Reflection**

1. 1 Peter 2:1 says, *“Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander.”* What are some things you think God would like you to “get rid of?” What are some things you’d like to get rid of in your life?
2. How are you actively striving to grow spiritually and in your relationship with God – see 1 Peter 2:2.
3. 1 Peter refers to Jesus as *“a living stone.”* Take note of all the times and ways that stones and rocks are mentioned in 1 Peter 2:1-10; what is Peter communicating with these images?
4. How are we as a community of believers “being built into a spiritual house?” What role do we play in making that happen? How do your spiritual gifts, passions, and experiences factor into your place in the “house?”
5. How does it make you feel to know that as part of God’s people we are chosen, royalty, and God’s possession with a mission to fulfill?
6. How does our receiving the mercy of God impact how we treat others?