

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Believer's Privileges, Part 1: Union

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:4-5a

Code: 60-17

We find ourselves now in an ongoing study of 1 Peter in chapter 2, a wonderful epistle of Peter, we come to verse 4, in fact, verses 4 through 10 which is a rich rich section of Scripture. Now I want to confess to you at the very beginning of our message tonight that as we embark upon verses 4 through 10, it's going to take us a couple of weeks to get through these verses. Peter is not like Paul, if you haven't discovered that yet. Peter is not that logical, precise, sequential kind of mind where everything can be easily outlined and flows in perfect order. Peter seems a bit more emotional, a bit more scattered. He makes a point, goes and makes another point and then comes back to his first point...sometimes a little harder to track.

In this particular section, he does that. He weaves his way in and out of some very wonderful points. He bounces back and forth from new revelation to quoting the Old Testament, eluding to the Old Testament. He seems to be literally filled with the knowledge of the Old Testament and it's as if it's in him so deeply that it comes out almost inadvertently. And so while he's speaking something new and fresh, there is yet something old in the revelation of the Old Testament that is inherent in it. And we're going to see that as we look at this tremendous passage before us.

Now if I were to try to identify a theme in verses 4 through 10, I would identify the theme as spiritual privilegesspiritual privileges. This is one we really ought to enjoy. So very often when we study the Bible we're talking about spiritual duties, aren't we? Very often we're being exhorted. We're being commanded. But in my judgment there aren't really any imperatives here. There aren't really any commands. There aren't any exhortations here. This is all a list of our privileges, what is ours because we are Christ's.

Now I don't know, when I say the word "privilege" what rings in your mind. But when I think of the word "privilege" I think of my childhood. Because one of the threats that my parents held over my head was that, "If you don't do what we ask or if you don't change your attitude, Johnny, we are going to take away your...privileges." My parents used that word a lot. And I also got my privileges taken away a lot, come to think of it.

Now what does it mean to have a privilege? What is privilege? I looked it up in the dictionary and it said this, "Privilege is a right or benefit enjoyed by a person beyond the advantage of most." It is a right or a benefit enjoyed by a person beyond the advantage of most. The privileged then are those who belong to a class that enjoys special favor, special favor. Certainly that's true of believers. We as

Christians belong to a class who enjoy special favor. We have rich spiritual privileges in Christ. And as I said, this ought to be a wonderfully encouraging study as we go through verses 4 to 10. Now remember, we have just come out of a section, chapter 1 verse 13 through chapter 2 verse 3, that dealt with spiritual duties. And it was full of imperatives and full of commands and full of exhortations and it basically told us what we had to do. Now we're going to hear about our privileges in Christ, not what we do for the Lord but what He does for us.

And as I studied this and tried to think through how I could understand it and how I could convey it to you in its beauty, I came across the idea that the best way to understand these verses is to look at it as if you were looking through a kaleidoscope. Have you ever done that? Picked up one of those things, it has rocks in the end of it, colored rocks, hold it up toward the light and you turn the end and as you turn it it takes on all different forms but you're always dealing with the same rocks, same substance, just arranged and magnified and displayed in different ways. And that is really what you have here. And in this wonderful section, Peter keeps turning the kaleidoscope, as it were, of Christian privilege and every time he turns it you see the same truths arranged in a plethora of new beauty. And so we're going to be turning the thing as we go through this wonderful portion of Scripture.

Let me read it to you, follow along, verses 4 to 10: "And coming to Him...that is to Christ...as to a living stone, rejected by men but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also as living stones are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious cornerstone and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed. This precious value then is for you who believe. But for those who disbelieve the stone which the builders rejected, this became the very cornerstone and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, for they stumble because they are disobedient to the Word and to this doom they were also appointed. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people but now you are the people of God, you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy."

This is a very emotional, a very marvelous portion of Scripture. And as I said, one that takes the same basic truths and rearranges them in multiple images so that we see the many cultured multifaceted glories of what it means to belong to Jesus Christ.

Now let's begin at the beginning with what initiates all of our spiritual privileges. What makes us beyond the advantage of the rest of the world. Verse 4, the first phrase, "And coming to Him," and we'll stop right there. My what a great truth that is. We often say as Christians, "I came to Christ...I came to Him," and that is exactly the expression that Peter has in mind. Certainly it begins at the time of salvation when you come to Christ, when you come in faith. In Matthew 11:28 Jesus said, "Come

unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." The Bible says that Jesus calls men to come to Himself. In John chapter 6 verse 35, "I am the bread of life, he who comes to Me shall not hunger and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." Verse 37, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me." Verse 44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." Verse 65, "For this reason I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father." In chapter 7, I believe it's over in verse 37, Jesus says, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me."

Peter has that in mind. And by the way, he heard Jesus say all of those things, he being one of the disciples there when Jesus taught. And so he says here it all begins with coming to Him. In coming to Christ we enter the realm of spiritual privilege. Not only the realm of spiritual duty but the realm of spiritual privilege. Do you remember, I'm sure you do, that wonderful portion in the letter of Paul to the Ephesians where he says in chapter 1 verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ"? When you came to Christ, you entered the realm of spiritual privilege...yes spiritual duty but also spiritual privilege. In fact, you have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ.

Now the idea here, as I said, is that initially you come to Christ in salvation. But that is not the total meaning that is conveyed in the verb. The verb here with its pronoun means to come with the idea of remaining, or to come with the idea of staying. Or to use the words of the Apostle John both in John chapter 15 and 1 John chapter 3, "Coming and abiding...coming and remaining." So the idea here then is of coming to Him to stay in His presence, coming to Him to remain in intimate personal communion, fellowship and abiding. In fact, this word *proserchomai* is used of drawing near to God for continuing worship. It's used that way in Greek translations of the Old Testament. One form of this verb is the noun *proselyte* which means a person who was afar off who drew near. It's used in the Bible to refer to a Gentile who was outside the covenant, outside the promises, outside God's law who draws near. And as I said, its import is that it refers to someone who comes to God and remains, a conscience...rather a conscious drawing near. It is the normal word used in the book of Hebrews for coming near to God to remain there and worship Him.

So what you have here then is that spiritual privilege begins when you come to the Lord Jesus Christ and it is sustained as you remain there. We could say it this way, coming to Him is a phrase in which Peter implies the whole movement of the inner life toward communion with Jesus Christ. The whole movement of the inner life toward communion with Jesus Christ, that's where spiritual privilege begins. That's what makes us have the advantage over all the rest of the world. We are the privileged, we are the favored and we are the blessed.

Now he identifies the one to whom we come, notice in verse 4, he says, "And coming to Him as to a living stone." And he is using an analogy here. Quite an interesting one, by the way. And with this title he begins to touch an amazing combination of images revealed from different Old Testament texts.

This idea of the living stone sort of launches his thoughts about this matter of spiritual privilege. And also I might add, he will having mentioned the living stone recall three Old Testament texts that refer to Christ as a stone, and he shows what spiritual privileges are related to Christ in the image of a stone. And those will unfold for us as we study through the passage, but here he introduces the idea, he says as you come to Christ you are coming to a living stone. The word stone, lithos, the common word for stone is the usual word, mark this now, for a stone used in a building. It is sometimes also used for a carved precious stone, but it is commonly the word used for a stone used in building a building, a stone that is chiseled, that is hammered and that is sawn in order that it might perfectly fit in the building of an edifice. And of course you know in ancient times they built buildings by stone. The way they did it was not necessarily with mortar but simply stones that were so perfectly fit together and so heavy that they simply stacked upon each other and were immovable.

So here you have a stone used for building...a stone that is perfectly shaped, perfectly designed, perfectly hewn out to accomplish its purpose. The curiosity, however, is that he calls it a "living stone." And that is a paradox, isn't it? In fact, we think of a stone we think of something that is not living, we even say that something is as dead as a stone, or something is stone dead. Stones are not living, and that's the paradox. A stone has no life but this stone is a living stone. With all the solidity of the stone it is yet alive. And though this stone is the perfect stone that becomes the cornerstone in the building of the edifice of the church, it is nonetheless not just a stone but a living stone. This stone lives. Why? Because it is Christ and Christ lives because He rose from the dead. He is a living stone. He is alive from the dead. He has living relationships with living people. He gives life which He has in Himself to all who believe. He is called in 1 Corinthians 10:4 that spiritual rock that was there in the wilderness from which the water came to assuage the thirst of God's people.

So here is a stone, a solid rock, a perfect building stone on which God can build His church. And yet it is not a dead stone but a living stone, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is that living stone by virtue, as you know, of His own resurrection from the dead. Having been raised from the dead He is alive forever more. And Romans 6:9 says death is no more master over Him. And 1 Corinthians 15:45 says the last Adam, being Christ, became a life giving spirit. Not only is He alive but He gives life. And because of His life we live. By the way, Peter has already talked about a living hope, chapter 1 verse 3; a living Word, chapter 1 verse 23; and now he talks about a living stone.

Now I might add as a note that you'll notice there's no "the" there, not "the" living stone, but it should read, "And coming to Him as to living stone," not just one among many but when there is not a Greek definite article "the," it is emphasizing the quality, the character. The idea here is the stone is Christ and the emphasis is on the quality of that stone as being alive. Anyone who touches Christ by faith, anyone who receives Christ by faith is made alive with His own life. He is a living stone. God has given to us, says 1 John 5, eternal life and this life is in His Son.

Now you say, "Well if...if we're talking about Christ as living, why use the analogy of a stone?" Because Peter also wants to talk about Christ as the foundation of the building of the church and he wants also to explain Old Testament passages that do that very thing.

But let's note for this time, anyway, that all our spiritual privileges are in that living stone...all of them. Now follow what he says. Strange as it may seem, tragic as it is, the living stone was rejected by men. That is why they are not the privileged. That is why the world does not have spiritual privileges. That is why they do not have the advantage that we have. They are not favored. They are not blessed by God because they have rejected the living stone. Thus they have rejected the foundation of God's church, God's building. Thus they have rejected the only one who can give them life. Certainly when Peter says this he has in mind predominantly the Jewish nation, the Sanhedrin, the leaders, the priests and the people who followed them who rejected Jesus Christ, who crucified Jesus Christ having spit upon Him and beaten Him. And so he says this living stone, this perfect cornerstone in God's building of His eternal house, this living stone who alone can give life was rejected by men. And all who have rejected Him since fit into the same category as those original rejectors.

The idea here is very interesting. Let me give you the picture. When men set out to build a building they would then begin to work on the stones. And they would want stones that fit perfectly. But the most important stone of all was the cornerstone because the cornerstone set the lines for the building. And it was the perfection of the cornerstone that maintained the perfect symmetry of the rest of the building. The cornerstone was like the plumb line in every direction. Obviously it would set the direction for both sides as well as upward. And if any of the angles were off, the building would be off. If the angle was not a perfect right angle, if that was the design, then the building would go on into askewed form. If the vertical angle was not proper, the building would either collapse outward or collapse inward. So every angle had to be absolutely perfect. And all of those angles were set by one massive cornerstone to which all other stones must agree.

Now the idea here is that here came the leaders of Israel wanting to participate in the building of God's glorious spiritual temple. And in looking for the cornerstone, the Messiah, Jesus came along and they examined Him. And with all of the fine view that they could muster and with all of the angles that they could perceive and with all of the measuring instruments that they had in their religion, they assessed the suitability of Jesus Christ to be the Messiah who would set the cornerstone for the spiritual Kingdom of God. And when they had concluded their assessment, they concluded that Jesus was not adequate and so they rejected Him. As far as the Jewish leaders were concerned, He did not pass their calculations. And so they rejected Him. The word here for rejection embodies all of that because it is the Greek word which means "rejected having been examined," or "rejected having been tested." Their rejection was contemptuous. Their rejection was filled with venomous hate. Nothing was so unthinkable to them then that this Jesus could possibly be the cornerstone of God's Kingdom...this foolish man, this poor man, this man who literally scathed them with His denunciations of their religious system, this weak humble man, this man who ultimately went to a cross and died, it

was unthinkable that He could possibly be God's cornerstone. This man who wouldn't even overthrow the Romans, this man who couldn't even establish Israel's freedom from the bondage of its invading army...and so they rejected Him.

But, though He was rejected by men, look back at verse 4, He was choice and He was precious in the sight of God. This is an interesting phrase in the original, it reads "but He was elect and He was precious by the side of God." God examined Him, too. And God took out the measurements of His own perfection and God measured Jesus Christ and God said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am...what?...well pleased."

This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. He was elect. That's what choice means. He was chosen. Christ, Mine elect...God said. Chosen, ordained by God, precious, entimon means costly, it means highly prized, it means rare. And so God looked at Jesus Christ and said He was perfect for the cornerstone. Every angle is perfect. He is the cornerstone. And because God affirmed His perfection, God raised Him from the dead and made Him the living cornerstone. And all we see here is the stupidity and the ignorance of men. It reminds me of two men who walked in the Louvre Museum in Paris. One of the curators there, a man of great appreciation for art stood as these two men stared at one of the great masterpieces of art. And one turned to the other and said, "I don't think much of that painting." To which the curator replied, "Dear sir, if I may interrupt, that painting is not on trial, you are. The world has already assessed the quality of that painting, you only demonstrate the frailty of your measuring capability."

And that's the truth. Jesus isn't on trial. The stone is perfect but every man who measures it is on trial to see if his system of measuring is adequate. Their's wasn't and men today continue to reject the one whom God said is choice and precious. This, He said, is My beloved Son. In Psalm 2 God says, "Kiss the Son." In 1 Corinthians 16 he says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." One of Peter's themes was God's acceptance of Christ. In Acts 2, Peter loved this subject apparently, he said, "You have nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men Jesus and you put Him to death." But he said, "God raised Him up again." You may have rejected the stone, God hasn't. In chapter 2 again, verse 32 he says, "This Jesus God raised up again and has exalted Him to the right hand of God." In chapter 4 verse 11 Peter says, "He is the stone which was rejected by you the builders, but which became the very cornerstone." Then he says, "And there is salvation in no one else." In chapter 5 he's after that same subject again. "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you had put to death." He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a prince and a Savior.

Even over in chapter 10 verse 39, "We are witnesses of all the things He did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross but God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He should become visible." That's...Peter loves that. That's his theme. You rejected Him and God affirmed Him. He is choice. He is precious.

Men disapproved and men disallowed and they still do today. You know what they said when they were offered Jesus Christ and Barabbas, what did they say? "Crucify Christ and give us Barabbas." And men still think they can adequately measure Jesus Christ by their own corrupted measurements and they come up with the same rejection today. They mocked Him. They spit on Him. They nailed Him after having beaten Him and they killed Him. I don't know about you but that's not the kind of folks I want to be identified with particularly. One writer said, "I do not seek and I do not want the world's esteem after knowing that. It tells me how little it is worth for the world despises what God has chosen and hates what God loves most. So that which is highly esteemed by men is abomination in the sight of God. I don't want any acclaim from the world, it's worthless. They couldn't even recognize the value of the most precious person who ever lived and they chose a wicked thief and robber instead of Him."

But it is to that very living stone that we come to receive spiritual privileges. And coming to Christ, what are these privileges? Well at least I'll mention one tonight. The first look in the kaleidoscope, all the beautiful stones that make up the reality of our salvation are arranged in a magnificent rainbow of beauty. And the first spiritual privilege we have is this, union with our Lord...union with our Lord. Can we at least look at that in verse 5? Listen to this, "You also as living stones," stop right there.

Wait a minute. It is one thing to come to a living stone, it is another to become a living stone. This is such a fresh truth. This is Peter's way of saying that when you come to Christ you become...what?...like Christ. Did you ever think about while you're called a Christian? You know what that means? It means a miniature Christ, a little Christ. How are you doing in living up to your title? That's your privilege. You also as Christ is a living stone, you also as living stones are being built up. And here he says we're living stones also. What does that mean? That we have eternal life. Now listen to this. The very life...the very life that exists in Christ exists in us. We have the life of Christ. Oh what a thought, what an identification, what a spiritual privilege. It isn't that we just worship Him, it isn't that we just obey Him or honor Him, it isn't that we just pray to Him, it is that we are united with Him. He is the cornerstone and we are stones who also are being built up as a spiritual house. We are united. We are a part of the same building. We possess the same life, it flows from Him through us. That's why Peter can say in 2 Peter, "For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature."

Now, beloved, let me say something to you that I don't know if you've thought about. Christianity is the only religion that I know of in the world where the life of the one we worship becomes our life. You never heard of anybody being in Buddha, or in Confucius, or in Mohammed. You never heard any of them teach that the life of that individual is the eternal life which is possessed by those who worship that individual but in Christ we have the life of Christ. We are partakers of the divine nature. Just thinking of Colossians 3:3, "You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." Your life is hidden with Christ in God. Then the next verse, "Christ who is our life." There it is, Colossians 3:4. He

is our life.

You heard Paul say it, didn't you? "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live yet not I but...what?...Christ lives in me." This is spiritual privilege, beloved. It isn't just that we worship Christ as I said. It isn't just that we bow the knee to Christ. It isn't just that Christ is our Savior, our redeemer, our God, it is that we are in Him sharing His life. It's equally eternal. We have the same strength that a stone has, we are built into the same great edifice that Christ is the cornerstone for and we possess the same resurrection life. What a thought.

But follow this union with Christ a little further. He says as living stones are being built up as a spiritual house. God is building a spiritual house. And He built it initially on the cornerstone of Christ to set all the angles. And then all of us are being built up as that spiritual house. God is the builder and He's putting all of us in place, integrating us with each other, integrating us with the life of Christ, we are in a marvelous union with Christ. What a thought.

In Ephesians, do you remember these words, chapter 2 verse 19? "So you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are fellow citizens with the saints and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole building being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." You need to study that deeply. What it says is this. Christ is the cornerstone. The rest of the foundation is the Apostles. What do you mean, their personalities? Not at all. What do you mean, their ministry? Not at all. One thing, their doctrine. They authored the Scriptures. The foundation is the doctrine that came through the Apostles, that's why in Acts 2 the early church studied the Apostles' doctrine. It is not their personality that the church is founded on. It isn't even their ministry in the truest sense the church is founded on. It is their doctrine, their teaching as those who taught the revealed Word of God. Christ is the cornerstone, the rest of the foundation is Apostolic doctrine and we as believers rise up to be built upon that foundation as the very spiritual house in which God dwells. Glorious, glorious truth, we are the spiritual house in which the Spirit of God dwells. It says in 1 Corinthians 3:9, "You are God's building, you are God's building." Tonight we saw people baptized. Some new living stones, right?, placed perfectly into the building as God builds His spiritual house.

Now you see for Peter this is very vivid language because he grew up, of course, in all the Jewish culture, the temple and all that the temple meant, all of its significance. It was the earthly house, it was the material house, it was the temporal house. Now Peter says in the new covenant there is a spiritual house, not an earthly one, not a physical one, not a temporal one, for God genuinely and truly does not dwell in temples made with hands. He does not. God cannot be contained in a temple made with hands. Acts 7:48, the Most High doesn't dwell in that kind of place. Then again in Acts 17 you might remember verse 24 where we read again the Apostle Paul says that God, the one who made the world and all things in it, is Lord of heaven and earth and does not dwell in temples made

with hands. He dwells in a spiritual house and we are the stones that make up the spiritual house that contains the living God. Paul writes to Timothy and says the church is the house of God, 1 Timothy 3:15, it's the house of God, it's where He dwells. He dwells in the hearts of His redeemed people. He dwells in the hearts of those who love Him.

Hebrews 3:6't says...3:6, "But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house...listen to this...whose house we are." What a great thought. Christ the living stone, the foundation finished off by the doctrine of the Apostles. In perfect symmetry God builds the house laying one stone upon another. Jesus said I'll build My church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. And so we have that union with Christ, glorious thing. Not the dead stones of the old temple, but living people united with Christ.

One of the commentators I read this week had an insight that I think is helpful as we think about what Peter was going through in his own mind. He writes, "These scattered sojourners to whom Peter writes far from the city of the great king may well have felt that they were missing the sacred precincts and the special privileges of the temple there. That was characteristically the place of the presence of God. Now they are introduced to this wonderful truth of a spiritual house built upon Christ. More than that, they themselves were living stones in that sacred edifice." And so it is, we are that spiritual house...we are that spiritual house. What, know you not that your body is the temple of God? The temple of God's Holy Spirit dwells in you individually and also collectively, of course. If He dwells in us individually, He dwells in us collectively. I read it a moment ago, let me read it again, Ephesians 2:22, "In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."

So when you became a Christian, the first great spiritual privilege...union with Christ. How? You share His life. What does that mean? He lives in you. He lives in you as an individual. He lives in His church collectively. What a privilege. What is the result of that? What does that mean to us? Well, for one thing it means that we can do exceeding abundantly beyond all we can ask or think according to the power that works in us. It means spiritual power, that's what it means. It means spiritual resource for every need. That's why Paul says in Romans 15:18, "I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles." In other words, the salvation of the Gentiles is God working through me. You have the power in you to do beyond what you can think. You have the power in you to see others come to Christ. That's what it means, union with Christ. Beloved, Christ takes up residence in the life of those who belong to Him. Paul says in Colossians 1:29, "All my spiritual service, all my Christian service is really striving according to His power." So on the one hand I can do what I can't even dream, on the other hand I can be used to win people to Christ, on the other hand all my spiritual service is worked in me through the resident power that is there. Christ lives through you. He loves through you. He speaks through you. He serves through You. He even worships God through you. His life in you is eternal so you'll never lose it. His life in you controls you. His life in you conforms you. His life in you provides availability for every need in every situation. What a privilege...what a privilege.

The first look in Peter's kaleidoscope is a magnificent picture. The manycolored magnificence of union with Jesus Christ so that we can say, "Nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me." And we are, would you agree, unworthy vessels? But that is what Jesus Christ gives to those who come to Him as a living stone. His life becomes our life and we are built upon Him into that spiritual house which is the dwelling place of God the Spirit. What privilege, what exalted privilege and how mundane any other kind of life. That's one. There are at least eleven. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, our hearts rejoice tonight. Rejoice over the day that we came to the living stone, rejoice that having come we remain abiding in Him, staying for the rich communion and fellowship so that we can know all the fullness of blessing. Lord, thank You for these privileges. Thank You for arranging the manycolored magnificence of Christ so that we can see the beauty of union with Him. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit, says Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:17, what a thought...one with Christ, our life hid with Christ in God. His life in us, His power in us, His service through us, His voice coming out of us, His love reflecting from us...union with Him. Oh what a thought that unworthy sinners could be one with the living God, what a privilege. We are so unworthy but we kiss the Son in thanksgiving for such a privilege. In His dear name we pray. Amen.

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