

From Cold, Dark Stone to Living

1 Peter 1:23-2:10 • 2022-06-26 • 1 Peter Series "From Cross to Crown"



Some of the stones in our area are just naturally beautiful. You can see some at our library under a display. But what about the ordinary stones? You don't often see ordinary rocks that are covered in dust put into display cases. But then again, sometimes you might. The children in our summer music program have a new module this year. Along with their music module they have an art module. One art project involved taking an ordinary looking stone and making it into something to put on display. In order to do the project, we gathered several different types of rocks. They were all sorts of sizes and shapes, mostly flat, but some round. They actually looked plain and ordinary. Most were the types of stones that everyone ignores. Who would have guessed the children would have that much fun with a rock? They used glue, paints, and craft supplies to turn them into something completely different. Each rock ended up with a unique painted face and color scheme. What was once just a half-buried rock in the dust became a prized possession. Today we continue our series in 1 Peter and see how God has completely transformed our lives. He has taken us from cold, dead stone to become living stones and his prized possession.

At the end of chapter 1 Peter describes how that change happened. He says we have been born again. The Scriptures make clear that we were born blind, dead, and enemies of God. We were born as the rocks that get tossed into the rubble and shut out from God's house. But we were born again. Just as we were powerless to give ourselves new life at our birth, we were powerless to give ourselves new spiritual life. Our heavenly Father had to give us a new life. He did that by sending his Spirit to give us a new birth.

That new birth took place through the living Word of God, which Peter calls an imperishable seed. Our first natural birth was through a seed that will perish. The best that our natural birth can give us is like the fading grass and flowers. Like the flowers and grass these bodies will decay and die because of sin's curse. But our new birth means that we will endure forever. It is a birth into an everlasting life. That's because the Word of God lasts forever. The gospel gave us new life by God's working through the Word. Peter will mention later in chapter 3 how the water and the Word in baptism comes to us in baptism for new birth. But today we're going to focus first on what our new birth through the Word of God brings us. With our new birth comes several new transformations!

Since we have a new birth Peter says, "*rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.*" Peter is using a word sometimes used for casting aside a garment. It's fair to say that he is basically saying we have new clothes. Christ has cleansed us from our sins. Once clothed in malice we sought to harm others. Our deceit and hypocrisy meant we were content to put on an outward show of goodness. But inwardly we were hiding our malice. In sinful envy we strove after sinful desires. Our mouths were used against others to slander instead of building them up. That was our old birth, the way all of us were by natural birth. But we have been born again. We were cleansed of our old sins. We live a new life to God with repentance and faith in him.

But we have more than new clothes. We also have new food! "*Like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk.*" Since we were given new birth by the Word, we continue to be fed and nourished by the same gospel. Recently mothers who were unable to nurse had a crisis due to the lack of baby formula. It was clear that even though some tried, it is unhealthy to water-down baby formula. How much more dangerous it would be to have formula with some containment in it. In the same way, watch out what spiritual food you take in. Just as a newborn baby craves milk we are urged to crave the gospel. Peter is basically saying don't just have new clothes with a new life, be fed or that new life! Listen to the gospel. Receive the gospel in Word and sacrament often. Drink up the water of life as you daily meditate and study the Word. It not only gives you a new birth but strengthens you and causes you to mature in faith. We can't grow in our salvation in that we earn anything. But we can become more mature as our confidence grows. We can put down strong foundations and roots into the Word. You know that the Lord is good. Continue in that goodness in the gospel with his new and good spiritual food for you!

So far Peter says that we have a new birth, new clothes, and new nourishment. We also have a new house! "*As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house...*" The picture has changed from a neonatal unit to a home building project. We "come to Christ," as his own people. We approach him whenever we gather to worship with the gospel. We come to him to praise him, to be fed by him in Word and Sacrament, and to live for him in thanksgiving. In faith we now can approach Christ. He is the foundation and builder of our new house. Peter calls him the living Stone. God the Father chose Christ, that lowly one who so many despised like a dusty ordinary stone. He made him the precious chosen stone. In Christ a whole new house is built, the Church. It is our new home!

And God also chose us to be living stones with Christ. God is building us, "*into a spiritual house.*" This building, a house of prayer and worship, only gives a small glimpse of what is really taking place in the spiritual realm. With every baptism a person is born again of water and the living Word. As the Word is preached and taught, we daily remember

our baptism, repent and cast aside our sinful garments. We hear the gospel, and we partake of the Lord's Supper. We take in pure spiritual food to grow up in our salvation, to mature in faith. And as the body gathers in this house God says we form a spiritual house. Every believer is part of the holy invisible Church. We are God's temple!

These are all amazing spiritual truths. Peter has led us to see that we have a new birth, new clothes, new food, and a new house. He mentions briefly here that while living as part of that new house we offer spiritual sacrifices. We'll look at that more in a bit. But for now, we can just marvel at this new life God has given us!

Someone might ask at this point, "How does all this transformation become mine?" Peter makes it clear that you have been brought from cold, dead, stone to become living stones. He does it by the power of his Word. You do nothing. It is all yours as you put your trust in him. Trust his Word! You might not have noticed it, but Peter has quoted several times and alluded to the Old Testament Psalms and prophets several times already today. He does it again as he describes the one on whom we build. Jesus is called a precious and chosen cornerstone. The Christian Church is built upon him. And we don't build with our own works. We build as we trust in his own work. *"See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."*

We see Jesus as precious. The builders of Israel, that is their spiritual leaders, rejected Jesus as suitable for building God's temple. They saw a man who lived in such lowliness that they rejected him. They saw how Jesus looked just like so many other dusty people around him. He didn't sparkle like a gold gem or a diamond. So, they rejected his gospel and they rejected him. They had him arrested and crucified for claiming to be the precious Son of God.

But through Jesus God brought about the greatest transformation in history. The most despised and rejected man became the head of God's house. Jesus went from cross to crown and has become the cornerstone! Though his body was left in the rocky tomb, he did not remain in the dust. He rose back to life. He sent his gospel, the living Word of God, to bring new birth to a dead world. He preached forgiveness won by his death. This is the gospel that was preached to you. You were born again by the good news of Jesus who lived and died for you. You have a new birth through the gospel that proclaims Jesus as living. He is the stone on which all of God's temple, his house, is now built. Trust in Jesus and you will never be put to shame. You will live forever in his house as chosen and precious to God.

All this is yours as you trust in him. However, not all believe. Jesus is a stone over which people stumble. Don't misunderstand. Some translations drop the ball here. It doesn't say Jesus makes them stumble. But people will stumble over him because of unbelief. And it doesn't say that God predestined anyone to unbelief. Rather it says that God has appointed all who do not believe to stumble over Jesus. The sad truth is that although we cannot give ourselves a new birth, we can reject God's gifts. We can reject our new birth. We can cling to our old garments in unrepentant sinning. We can despise his pure spiritual milk. And in unbelief a person remains a dead, cold stone. Instead of being built into God's house they will be crushed as they stumble over the cornerstone. They see the cross of Christ but fail to see the crown. They don't follow Christ in faith, but stumble over him in unbelief.

But not so with you, brothers and sisters born again. To you Christ is precious. You have come to believe the gospel. You believe that the same lowly man who was rejected by so many was accepted by the Father. He rose in victory.

That brings us to the next part of the transformation Peter describes for all believers. Along with our new birth, new garments, new food, and new house, we have a new status. *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession."* In grace God has chosen you to be his own people. Just as he chose ancient Israel to serve him and be his own, he has chosen you. He has given you the title *"royal priesthood."* That means you have access to the throne of God. He hears your prayers. He answers your call for mercy. He accepts your sacrifices of praise. He considers you royalty in his household. Yes, he still calls men to serve as spiritual leaders in his Church to teach and preach, but all believers have the same access as priests before God. Israel was once called a "holy nation." But in faith all believers are invited to be part of that holy nation. We have been made holy by Christ. All of us are one under God, no matter what our background or first birth. We were together born again into God's house as his people. We are "God's special possession." This should never have happened. But God took us, dead, cold, dusty stones and made us new. Like that project in which the children in our summer program adopted and made new stones, God has made us a prized possession. Washed in our baptism, painted new with Christ's blood, and set to be his prized possession we are now his treasured people. Our status is new!

Finally, we are not his treasured possession so we can just sit there and look nice. We're not paperweights. We have a new purpose. We are priests. We are called out of cold darkness into God's wonderful light so that we can declare his praises. We're that living stone on display for God's glory! These are part of the spiritual sacrifices we now offer as priests. We bring praises to our God who brought us from cold, dark stone, to living stone. We have a new purpose.

This is all because of God's mercy. We have a new birth, new cloths, new food, a new home, a new status, and finally a new purpose as God's prized possession. Once again, we see how our merciful God takes us with Jesus who was rejected and lowly to his glorious throne. We go from cross to crown, from cold dead stone, to alive with Christ.