

**INTRODUCTION: BUILDING PROJECTS**

One thing I've noticed over the past months is how, now that many of us are working from home, many are giving themselves to DIY home renovations and maintenance.

We all want to live in a home we can be proud of, one that we can invite our friends and family to, one that makes us feel safe and secure, a place to rest, be refreshed and re-energised to go back out and do it all again whether work, study, relationships or life in general.

Today's passage tells us about God's grand building project. I'm not sure if you've ever thought of God as a builder. I know this image doesn't enter my thoughts much. But so he is.

And in today's passage Peter tells us that God's building project, far from temporary renovations or even an impressive and formidable monument, is a group of people. Otherwise ordinary people just like you and me.

We are God's grand building project that is destined to stand the test of time even into eternity.

Coming to grips with this dramatically transforms our perspective on life, how we perceive the world. How we perceive others. How we perceive the church, God's people. How we perceive ourselves.

As we embark on a journey over the next 15mins are you ready to gain a snapshot of all that God has done and plans to do through ordinary people like you and me?

Follow me under three headings:

Firstly, the grandest building (v 4-6)

Secondly, the greatest impact (v 7-8)

Thirdly, the most glorious calling (v 9-10)

Today's passage is one rich with biblical metaphors grounded in Old Testament Law and prophecy. And so, key for us, will be to understand the significance of the metaphors Peter uses, particularly as he writes to Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire in the First Century. As we dig into the details we'll begin to see just how much we have in common with Peter's original readers.

**FIRSTLY, THE GRANDEST BUILDING**

At the centre of our Sydney CBD there are a number of grand, old buildings. One that stands out the most to me is the Queen Victoria Building. The ornate architecture. The polished wood and tile floors. Can you tell I know my construction terms? But whenever I walk through the QVB it always feels even just a little special, royal, grand.

In the centuries prior to the return from exile, with the Temple destroyed by foreign invaders, God's people Israel never got back to the glory days like those under the likes of king Solomon.

That's until a man called Jesus of Nazareth walked on the scene in First Century Palestine. Although born from a humble home to humble parents, this Jesus grew up to declare that he himself is the Temple, the place where God has chosen to make himself known, and the way for the world to worship the true and living God.

In verse 4 of today's passage, Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples and friends, describes being a Christian as coming to Jesus, 'the living stone'.

The contradiction in terms is not lost on us. How can a person be a stone, and not just a stone but a living stone at that?

Peter is drawing from Old Testament analogy, and he quotes for us the words of Isaiah chapter 28 v 16, in v 6:

***'See, I lay a stone in Zion [that is, the mountain on which Jerusalem and the Temple was built] a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.'***

Peter is capturing centuries of promise and prophecy in one verse. Ever since the beginning God has been embarking on a grand building project. The grandest building project. And at the heart of God's grand building project is a person, his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 4 Peter says Jesus is 'chosen by God and precious to him'. These words are repeated in verse 6: 'a chosen and precious cornerstone'.

But he is the *living* Stone because he is raised from the dead and alive today.

And while Jesus is the centrepiece of God's building project, we are in fact the brickwork.

As I would approach a grand building I feel a sense of awe and wonder at the architecture. God wants us to have the same feeling, but to an even greater extent, when we approach Jesus in the life of his people.

Do we approach church from this perspective? Or have we been led by the world around us, and our shallow desires, to judge by appearances only?

This has particular implications for how we're travelling through COVID. If I truly embraced this picture of God's people as his grand eternal building project then meeting together would fill me with eager expectation and thankfulness to God. And our approach to meeting together would fill us with a sense of joy, anticipation and awe of God. And don't we need that in this season of disconnect and isolation!

Living stones being brought together and built up on the living Stone who is himself the cornerstone of the universe and the heart of God's eternal plans.

Little wonder then, that our response to this Jesus is the most important matter for our entire existence.

## **SECONDLY, THE GREATEST IMPACT**

No figure in human history has divided opinion as much as Jesus.

Throughout the New Testament Gospels Jesus is revealed as the Christ who divides opinion. But this is no accident. It lies at the heart of Jesus' mission. Matthew 10 v 34 and 37:

***<sup>34</sup> "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.***

***<sup>37</sup> "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.***

Jesus offends. If our friends who don't know Jesus aren't in some way offended by what we tell them about him, than we need to ask, what kind of Jesus are we following?

Peter echoes Jesus' message with a contrast in verses 7-8 between those who believe, and those who don't.

I think the ESV's translation of verse 7 captures more the sense of the original, saying, 'the honour is for you who believe'. This also echoes the end of verse 6, that 'the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.'

This would have blown Peter's original hearers away. In the First Century Roman Empire Christianity was treated like a cult of superstition. Archaeologists have found at least one document from the first or second centuries referring to Christianity as precisely that, a superstition. To the Romans, Christians were, at best, weird and, at worst, a major threat to the Empire.

Christians didn't bow before or present offerings to any visible gods or statues. They professed an unseen God. They talked about consuming the body and blood of a man thought to be dead but declared to be living. They chose not to bow the knee to Caesar but only to their unseen Lord Jesus Christ. They were publically shamed, persecuted, prosecuted and executed for believing in Jesus.

On the surface, Christianity was worthless, meaningless, useless. And everyone treated professing Christians in kind.

But what the world considered worthless and shameful, the God of the Bible considers precious and worthy of highest honour.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: do you feel ashamed of your faith in Jesus? Do you experience being misunderstood, mistreated by others on account of your faith? Do you feel downtrodden and shamed by those who don't know Jesus? Well God, your heavenly Father, sees you as precious, his chosen, worthy of the highest honour because of Jesus, the living Stone, the One who is himself chosen and precious to God.

For those who don't believe, they stumble over Jesus. They will be brought low at the last Day. Peter assures us that rejecting Jesus is not without its consequences, both in this life but also in the life to come.

Whether he is treasured or rejected, make no mistake, the Lord Jesus has the greatest impact on the lives not just of us here in the Twenty-first Century West, or the First Century Roman Empire, but all human history and into eternity.

Regardless of either response we can know that God is sovereign and in control over his grand building project. That's how much God cares about it. And that's just how powerful the God of the universe is.

The grandest building, the greatest impact.

#### **FINALLY, THE MOST GLORIOUS CALLING**

Clarifying our goals brings a greater sense of purpose to our lives. Here are some examples of life goals that people over the internet have communicated, thanks to [lifehack.org](http://lifehack.org):

- Long-term happiness
- Deep relationships
- Tapping into my full potential
- Discovering and living a purpose-driven life

As Christians we might readily embrace maybe 2 or 3 of the 4 here, because we know the deeper and everlasting roots to the good desires behind these goals.

In verses 4-5 Peter has given us a glimpse of his grand, eternal building project. And we as his people are each living stones being brought together into a most glorious building with Jesus Christ as the foundation and cornerstone.

So, what do living stones do, we might ask? Well, they live! But for what purpose?

In two places Peter describes the unique calling, the unique purpose for which God has brought together this motley crew of outcasts, fringe dwellers and sanctified sinners, known as his Church.

Look with me at verse 5:

***<sup>5</sup> you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.***

What are the 'spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God'? Well, firstly, to state the obvious they're 'spiritual'; that is, they're empowered by the Spirit, and they aren't material or physical. Secondly, they are sacrifices offered to God. They are given over to God to do with them as he desires. To use older language, they are surrendered completely to God.

Drawing in other Bible passages will help us at this point. Romans 12 verse 1 says:

***Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.***

Or Hebrews 13 verse 15:

***<sup>15</sup> Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.***

This certainly accords with the other place in tonight's passage where Peter describes the unique calling of God's people.

Look with me at 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 9:

***<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.***

So the spiritual sacrifices are not less than our words of praise, confessing God's love, goodness and holiness to each other and the world. In this sense we would disagree with the so-called quote of St Francis of Assisi, 'Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words.' No, preaching the gospel *necessarily* uses words, whether to one another as God's people building each other up, or bringing Jesus into the conversation with people who don't know him. In either case we must use words. It is our unique calling to declare God's praises and tell the world what Christ has done.

But the spiritual sacrifices of verse 5 also incorporate the entirety of our lives lived in surrender and submission to God.

For most of us, we find the idea of talking about Jesus to others terrifying. We do well to recall that people won't repent and turn to Jesus through our witness unless we actually tell them about him. Evangelism is tough! It's scary! But we look for ways to tell people about Jesus knowing God is ultimately in control. He

knows those who belong to him. He appoints for eternal life. He gives the gift of faith to believe. Ours is simply to play our part in bearing that out in our lives, to the people whom God has brought us in contact with.

Some of the most formative experiences I've had have come from conversations I've had with people about life, God, the Bible and the gospel of Jesus. Or books I've read explaining the depth of my sin and the greatness of God's love.

Tim Keller's words, 'you are more sinful than you could ever imagine, but you are more loved than you ever dared hope.'

Or John Piper's parable of the retirees who spend their days collecting shells by the sea from the comfort of their tropical resort, instead of giving of themselves sacrificially for what is of eternal and everlasting value. And their words to God on the Day of Judgment: 'But, Lord, look at my shells!' A call for us not to waste out lives on temporary pleasures when the everlasting reality of eternal life with Jesus beckons – for us and our neighbours!

#### **CONCLUSION: A UNIQUE IDENTITY AND CALLING**

God has given us a unique identity as his people:

***you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession,***

And God has given us a unique calling as his people:

***that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.***

Like Jesus, Christians are strangers in the world, ignored and rejected. But chosen and precious to God.

So when you walk past a great, big, impressive house or building, remember that you, along with all our church family here at St James Turrumurra, are being built into an even greater building that will never be destroyed or put to shame. God's grand eternal building project. Living stones built on the living stone, our precious Lord Jesus.

Let's declare his praises this week.