

The House of God - the Home of Worship

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[0 : 00] Oh, man. Well, I don't know if you are into house programs, interior design. Perhaps for you it's grand designs, people with a big budget and their hearts set on the dream home.

I don't know about you. I find that name of that show a bit tongue-in-cheek, because what often happens is people burn through the budget and end up living in a caravan on a building site and with no home, let alone the dream home.

Last year, Susie and I got into Scotland's Home of the Year, which, if you've seen it, is the opposite end of the spectrum. People who have made their dream home kind of uber-fashionable interior design, cutting-edge architecture in beautiful places.

Or perhaps your crack is DIY SOS, the do-gooders who transform homes. They hope from DIY disasters into what they hope will be the owner's dream home.

Some of you have been part of that process from the inside. Some of you have built homes or are building homes. I imagine it's all the more intense when you're in it, rather than just watching it happen.

[1 : 24] Well, this morning we meet in the Bible, perhaps a surprising architect and builder, because I wonder if you noticed, as we read in verses 4 and 5, that God himself is in the business of building a 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.

God has designed and is building a house, says Peter. And if you've come to Jesus, if you've rested your life upon him, then you are part of that house.

Now, last week we saw Peter describe the Christian life as a long walk home to glory, and he gave us truths to help us keep going, keep walking the walk to glory by God's grace.

But today, Peter reminds us that walk isn't only long and tiring, because as we walk with Jesus, we have a home away from home, so to speak, heaven is our home.

[2 : 37] But here and now on earth, God is building a house for his glory, gathering people to Christ, building us together into the home of worship.

And this is our home away from home, because it is a picture of the church. What we have here is a wonderful description, then, of who we are in Christ today.

Yet another reminder in this letter of how chosen, how precious to God we are. And as Peter shows us around at this house that God is building, he wants us to see how safe and secure we are in God's plans, in his designs.

And he wants to remind us why God has brought us home to himself. What place, what part we have in this spiritual house.

Firstly, then, Peter tells us God is building a living house, a living house. And the first thing that Peter wants us to see is the shape of its foundation.

[3 : 46] We see that again in verses 4 and 5, as you come to him, the living stone, rejected by humans, but chosen by God and precious to him.

So, the very foundation of this house is a stone that human beings threw to one side, but that God chose and picked up and put in the place of most importance, at the heart of the foundation, a chosen and precious cornerstone.

Now, the cornerstone on a building site would have been the first stone to go down. It's set that the whole direction and the shape and size of the house that was to come, so that the whole weight and design of the house rested on this one stone.

And that's how Peter describes the church's relationship to Jesus. Notice Peter describes it as a living stone, like we saw in chapter 1, the living hope, living because our Lord lives.

This cornerstone is the Lord Jesus Christ. The hymn there in verse 4, notice it's picking up on Lord in verse 3. So, the Lord himself is this all-important foundation stone for the church.

[5 : 12] And as Peter doesn't let us forget, he is a Lord who went through suffering before he entered glory. He was rejected by humanity.

The religious leaders decided, didn't they, early on in Jesus' ministry, that they needed to get rid of this guy. They plotted to kill him. And given the choice the crowd chose between hardened criminal and the Lord of glory, well, they chose to put the Lord of glory on the cross and set the criminal free. And as Jesus went to his death, his own followers, his disciples, turned the other way and fled. You know, I wonder if Peter wrote those words, rejected by humans, that he himself might have shed a tear at the memory of how he himself had denied knowing Jesus three times as he went to his death.

Jesus is the stone the builders rejected, thrown aside by humanity. But he would not stay in the dust of death because, as Peter says, he was chosen and precious to God.

Humanity turned against him, but God was for him. Death could not hold him. And as Peter himself preached in Acts 3, after denying Jesus, after seeing him crucified, having seen him raised from the dead, he says, you killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead.

[6 : 53] We are witnesses of this. And so the stone thrown into the rubble heap of death had been lifted up to life by God, given the place of highest honor and importance in the house that he is building.

And so it is Jesus Christ, this once dead, now living Lord, who is the foundation on which all God's people rest today.

And so it is through his suffering and glory, he has laid the foundation that we stand on as his people. As we come to this Christ, we also, says Peter, are like living stones being built on him into the spiritual house.

So God brings us to Jesus to build up his church. The church, not a building, but the people of God. So if our lives today are grounded, founded on the death and resurrection, the suffering and glory of Christ, Peter says, we are part of the church.

[8 : 05] That is to say, God has made you, bon accord, his new address where he lives. If your hope is in Jesus, God has made you part of the fabric of his own house, part of the furniture, we might say, of his family.

And how did he do that? Well, none of us needed to prove our worth, did we? None of us are worthy. None of us deserve the honor. Do we have being the place where God lives?

How could we? But brothers and sisters, do you see the grace that God has shown us, the love that he has showered on us in bringing us to Christ to be his house?

The one who heaven and highest heaven cannot contain has chosen a bunch of normal, ragtag, sinful people, me and you, to be his dream home, his forever home.

And perhaps this morning, you don't know where you fit in that. You don't know where you fit in God's purposes. Perhaps you don't feel at home in the church.

[9 : 24] You're not sure you belong. Perhaps you feel left over or left out of his plans. Well, Peter wants you to know this morning that if your trust is in Jesus, you are not left over at the end.

God has not had to quickly go back to the blueprint and draw in a place to put you. You are not left lying in the dust. God has brought you to Jesus because he designed his house with you in it.

There is a place prepared for you in God's eternal blueprint. He brings us to Jesus and he builds us into his church because that has been his grand design from before the beginning of time.

And unlike so many human grand designs, God's grand design isn't going to go bust or be left half finished. Notice, too, that Peter uses the present continuous, being built, still being built.

Here's a reminder. God's house isn't finished yet. He is still in the business of building. He is still gathering living stones. And so this morning, if you've not yet come to Christ, do you hear God saying to you, there is a place for you here in my house?

[10 : 54] Come home, won't you, to God, to Christ. You can be part of God's family, whoever you are, whatever your background. For lots of us, home is a safe place, isn't it?

Well, how safe and secure we can be, brothers and sisters, knowing that God brings us into his forever home when we come to Jesus Christ.

Christ. And yet, being part of the church maybe doesn't always feel very safe or secure for us, does it? So how does this wonderful identity that God has given us work in the real world?

Well, next, Peter tells us if Christ is not our foundation, he is a frustration. Christ is the foundation or he is the frustration.

Now, we all come from different backgrounds, different ages and stages of life. Many of us speak different languages. Those are wonderful things about belonging to God's family because ultimately none of those things is the ultimate thing that separates us.

[12 : 12] That thing is Jesus. read with me from verse 6 where Peter writes, for in scripture it says, 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.

Now, to you who believe this stone is precious, but to those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become a cornerstone and a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.

So, Peter's following that picture of the cornerstone all the way through the Bible to show us that this living stone was never going to be chosen and precious to everyone.

God is saying there in verse 6 quoting from Isaiah 28, he is laid at a precious cornerstone and it's precious to those who trust in him, who believe in him.

You're like the wise man in Jesus' parable who built his house on the rock so whoever trusts in Jesus will never be put to shame, the house will never crumble, can rest the whole weight of our lives on him and never be let down.

[13 : 28] But to those who don't believe in him, well, the same cornerstone that keeps us standing will be their downfall, a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.

See, Jesus, the cornerstone was always going to divide the world. Humanity stands or falls on him.

God promised that from the beginning. Now, as a church, we want to remove or minimize any stumbling block, cultural or political or financial, that might trip up anyone from coming to God.

We don't want to put stumbling blocks in people's ways, but we can't take away the last stumbling block, because the last stumbling block is the foundation stone of the church.

Jesus is the only thing that we all need to deal with and respond to. Now, perhaps you do find Jesus difficult, perhaps you find he does trip you up spiritually.

spiritually. Well, let me encourage you, if that's you, to keep wrestling with him, grapple with him, and make sure that it's not anything else that is stopping you from coming to him.

[14 : 51] He's the one that you need to deal with, not me, not the church, Jesus. There's only one mediator, writes Paul, between God and humanity, the Lord Jesus, one thing that rightly stands between us and God.

And God has laid him there, placed him there, so that we would see his worth and his security and his beauty and trust in him.

But if we do trust Jesus, if we've rested our lives on him, don't we ever feel perhaps that we're on the wrong side of that divide? You know, it's fine, isn't it, for Peter to talk about a spiritual house, a strong foundation, but when we live in a world that is often frustrated by that foundation, that would rather demolish that house, well, do we always feel so safe and secure?

Remember, Peter's readers were suffering, weren't they, for living faithful lives for Christ. And so, how does this nice picture of a spiritual house work in the real world?

Well, Peter's whole point is that their suffering and difficulty isn't an outlier on the charts, that it's not an anomaly in God's plan.

[16 : 15] No, the whole world turns on its response to Jesus. The Archimedes, the famous Greek engineer philosopher, famously said, give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it and I will move the world.

His point is that with a long enough lever and a strong enough place to put it, he could move even something as big, as heavy and weighty as the world. And Peter's saying the same thing in spiritual terms here.

Here is a rock, he says, that humanity buried but God put back that is strong enough to turn the world on. Here is a lever, the gospel, the good news of his death and resurrection that's long enough to turn the world upside down with.

So that not even the world is big or heavy enough to stay as it once was when the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection is heard. See, God's building project, it flips the world on its head.

The king who died in the hands of sinners is raised to the place of highest honor so that those who come to him, though they die a death every day in this world, will be with him in glory, will not be put

to shame.

[17 : 41] That's why the people of Peter's day could rightly say, these men who have turned the world upside down have come here also saying that there is another king, Jesus, because the message of Jesus turns all the shame and honor of this world on its head.

And so when suffering comes, brothers and sisters, don't be tempted to think that God's plans aren't as sound as you thought they might be, that this house isn't as safe as you had hoped, or that the foundation isn't as strong or secure as you thought it was.

Instead, remember that the Lord Jesus was always going to be a sure and steady foundation for some and a frustration for others. Peter takes us all the way back through the Bible to prove that, doesn't he?

He's always said that his precious cornerstone would also be a stone of stumbling. So friends, it's not a surprise to God that our world is divided over whether or not to trust his son.

And if you do trust his son, you need to know that you are not on the wrong side of history. I will build my church, says Jesus, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

[19 : 04] You think, just think of that honor and the security that is yours and mine belonging to this once crucified, now glorified king, Jesus Christ.

And you know, if you've built a house, if you've seen it done, if you've been part of that, you know that the shape of the foundation is of all important for the shape of the house that is to be built on it. You've so much time and effort goes into getting the foundation right so that the design and the shape of the house will stand. Well, it's no different, says Peter, with God's house.

The Lord Jesus sets the direction and the pattern and design for this house, and he was a suffering, then glorified, style savior. And so God's house is a suffering, then glory, style house.

If you go around all the church buildings, you'll see lots of them were built to reflect that, because they're built in the shape of a cross, a long seating area with two wings on either side.

[20 : 15] And that's purely symbolic. I'm not here to begin another building renovation, that design only mirrors the spiritual reality that is true of every true church, that the church, us God's people, we are built in the shape of a cross, because our foundation is cross-shaped.

And so how could it be otherwise for us? We will face the frustration of unbelieving friends, or being misunderstood by unbelieving family, or the offense, perhaps, of unbelieving co-workers.

But remember, brothers and sisters, we stand on a Savior who faced the same and worse at the hands of this world. He was now raised to honor and glory, chosen and precious to God.

We will suffer now for being his people, but we will be with him in glory, because we are united to a crucified and risen king through faith in his death and resurrection.

And so in that unity then, finally we see that God's house here and now is the true home of worship as we glory in his rescue.

[21 : 37] Lastly then, we are built together for true worship. Have a look with me in your Bibles, verse nine. Peter writes, you, 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.

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. One writer calls this an avalanche of blessings.

He is just piling up the honors for God's people today. But he's doing that in a surprising way because every honor that he gives to us now is one that had been given to God's ancient covenant family in the Old Testament.

Judy read to us earlier, didn't she, about how when God called his people the rescue from Exodus to himself, he said, you will be my treasured possession.

Although the whole earth is mine, you will be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. And so now God is gathering you to Christ, says Peter.

[22 : 55] That is true of you. You have all the honors, the privileges, the blessings that God has ever given his people. Which is amazing, partly because the people Peter's writing to were not born into God's family.

They weren't ethnically Jewish, but mainly it's amazing that Peter uses these titles because these people were not a kingdom or a nation or chosen or precious or treasured in the world.

They were exiles, left out or shut out of normal life for following the Lord Jesus. Yet, says Peter, though all the earth belongs to God, you are his.

that's your true identity, he says. And out of that true identity flows true worship. Why has God chosen and set you apart for obedience to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood? Well, just glance down at that second part of verse 8. So that, so that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

[24 : 09] God has saved you for his praise and glory. So this house, the church God is building, is the home of true worship. And it's praise that God accepts because it's not done in a self-serving way.

We don't worship God to get something out of him or to get into his good books. We worship him in response to his rescue. you. And because of all that he has given us, every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, because he's turned our shame to honor and our guilt to righteousness and our death to life, because he's called us out of darkness into this wonderful light, and so we praise him. And our thanks, our praise, our worship of him, says Peter, our spiritual sacrifices that God accepts, because they are offered through the one great true sacrifice of Jesus.

So this isn't the first time that God has built a house. His first house was, if you like, a grand designs failure, because the temple in Jerusalem was built for the true worship of God, but God's people failed in that, and so it was destroyed.

God's people died. But now God is building a new living temple, Luke verse 5, a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood for offering spiritual sacrifices.

[25 : 41] Peter is describing there what failed to go on in the temple, but now what does go on in the church. And so Bonacord, this now is the home of worship, because you are standing on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Peter talks about sacrifices there. He's not saying we add anything to Christ's death. God wouldn't accept that. He's saying that for all he has done for us in and through Jesus, God accepts our praise of him.

And as we close, something Peter wants us to see here is that we do this together. If we're united to Jesus through faith, we are united together in our praise.

You all the way through this section, he's speaking to us not individually, but collectively. A people, a priesthood, a nation, so that you, plural, may declare his praises.

Our church exists for praising God, says Peter. If you're part of the church, that is why you are part of it, for praising God.

[26 : 55] God. And so we live out this calling, first and foremost, when we come together to praise God as we are today. This praise he's talking about isn't the same as having Christian music playing at home, or even our own devotional time, as important as that is.

We praise God, church family, together. That's what our services are for, that's what our prayer meetings for, our neighbourhood fellowships, our Bible studies, that even where two or three are gathered, says Jesus, there I will be with them.

If we're Christians, we belong to a church, united to him by faith, united together in praise. You know, our culture tells us, I think, that we should see ourselves as individuals who go to church. The Bible tells us, in fact, we are members that are part of God's church. And so we rest in the security we have in being God's house through Christ.

But the challenge is, are we living out this God-given identity? Do we see our church family as the new living temple of God's worship?

[28 : 18] Are we committed to one another as co-worshippers, worshipers together of the God who has saved us? Are we committed to coming together to praise him for his rescue?

Have we embraced this new identity, a chosen people, a holy nation, God's special possession? Is what flows from our hearts thankfulness and praise to God?

God is our purpose in life to praise him who called us out of our darkness and into his wonderful light. God is building his church.

He's doing it here and today. So are you part of it? And if you are part of it, will you embrace your part in it?

Let's praise God together as we pray. God, our Father, we praise you for your grace towards us that we can be here today.

[29 : 30] Our Father, we praise you that the doors of your church are open to us through the blood of Jesus. We thank you for his death for us, for his rising again to new life.

