

Series: First Peter  
**God's Own People**

Sermon by Teaching Pastor Paul Joslin

First Peter 2:4-12

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, September 29, 2024

Jacque: A reading from First Peter chapter 2, verses 4 through 12: “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 to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in scripture it says, ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone. 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 the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. They stumble because they disobey the message, which is also what they were destined for, but you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, so that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you are not a people, but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and exiles to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us,” the word of the Lord.

Paul: Thanks, Jacque. Jacque and his family have been plugged into Waterstone for a couple of years, but he and I actually got to know each other about ten years ago. He was leading the cohort back when I was the youth pastor at Waterstone. He led a cohort for youth pastors there. He works with Young Life and is doing a lot of impactful work in the next generation in our community and stuff, so thanks so much for reading today. All right, how is everybody doing? Good. I have to admit, this is the first time that I have been nervous giving a sermon in a little while, and yesterday, as I was getting ready for the sermon and leaving, Steffi just called out to me as I was walking out the door, “Hey, do a good job preaching, or maybe they will not vote for you.” It is like, “Thanks, Babe,” and for those of you who may not have been here last weekend or did not see the news, we tried to get it out as many places as we could, but Larry announced last weekend that he has decided to retire, and part of that announcement was that the elders have put me forward as the next candidate for the potential lead pastor of Waterstone, and I have been getting a lot of questions this week. So many of you have been so supportive, but the big question that I get the most is, “How are you guys doing?” “You have a young family, and your wife is in a PhD program. It is a big responsibility,” and I really have two answers to that question.

One is throughout this whole process, we have just genuinely felt a sense of peace from the Lord about everything happening, and in the midst of that peace, though, there is a sadness, and several of you have come up to me through tears last week, and you just said, “We like you, Paul, you are great, but we are really going to miss Larry. We love Larry,” and I just want to say, you do not have to apologize for that. Larry has been Steffi’s and my pastor for the last thirteen years too. He has meant so much to our family, and so there is a grief and a sense of loss for us in this season as well. That is normal, and I do not want you to feel guilty if you are feeling sad about this at all.

The second thing that when people ask that question, and I have not really given this answer as much, but I have felt it is that while we feel a sense of peace, we are excited about what God is doing at Waterstone. We are hopeful that we can be a part of that. The second answer to the question how we are doing is, have you ever interviewed for a job in front of six-hundred-fifty people before? It is a little weird, and it has been great, and like I said, so many of you have been so supportive, but there is this sense of, yeah, this is just a strange season for our church. We are navigating change, we are navigating what could be next, and so if you are feeling that, if you are stuck in that space and just want to try to normalize that, we have staff, me, Larry. We would all be happy to talk with you as we begin navigating this season of change for our church, to begin looking towards what's next.

Just in the midst of that, I want to call your attention to one other thing. There is some supplemental material we want to put in your hands as we are going through this series on First Peter. A few years ago, Larry and I had a conversation called navigating polarizing politics, and there was a podcast we put together in the Fall of 2020, when nothing was going on in the world. Remember 2020? Like it was completely, yeah, there was nothing there, so we had this conversation, navigating polarizing politics together. Larry and I had a conversation. We interviewed a few people, and we want to put that back in your hands, so we are actually releasing that podcast on all our sermon platforms, and so if you would like to follow this supplemental material and conversation in First Peter, we think it could be useful for you as we navigate the world we are in now. So much of First Peter is about this idea of how we keep clarity in the midst of chaos, and as we are navigating the cultural moment we find ourselves in, as we are navigating all of the different elements that are going on in our world, how do we, as followers of Jesus, have clarity as to what it means to follow Him in the midst of the chaos that we find ourselves in, and so this podcast hopefully will help you on that journey. We would love for you to check it out, and along those lines, navigating and trying to find clarity in the midst of chaos, we have gotten some feedback on the bumper video that we have been running for this series, and last week, in fact, as it was playing, someone just turned to one of our staff members and goes. "Why? Why are you subjecting us to this?" and can I just tell you really quickly how that bumper video came about?

We were talking about First Peter, and we had this brainstorming session with a bunch of different people on our staff, and we were talking about this idea of clarity in chaos, and we were talking about the context of First Peter, how he is writing to all these churches in the ancient Roman world and in Asia Minor, who are experiencing hostility from the culture there. There is this political turmoil. There is this upheaval going on in their day, and First Peter is a book written to those churches to help them find clarity in the midst of chaos, and so as we were talking about that idea, one of the people from our staff said, "The last few years in our own culture have felt a little bit like that." It feels like a mirror image in some ways, but they came up with this illustration of it. It feels like in our culture the last few years someone put a kettle on the stove and just walked away and just left it on and forgot to turn it off, and if you have ever been in that situation with someone just leaving the kettle on the stove, and it's hissing at you, I mean, it is really hard to have clarity in those moments, isn't it? It is hard. All you want to do is make sure the noise turns down a little bit, and in our culture, the last few years it has felt like everything is dialed up to eleven. It has felt like everything is louder and more intense. Everything is at a fever pitch. There are all of these hot takes. It is hard to go anywhere without being subject to a conversation. You are like, "How did I even get into this conversation about nanobots in bloodstreams and stuff like that? I don't even know how we got there." There are so many different things going on in our world, and at the heart of it, First Peter is this question of how we keep clarity in the midst of chaos. How do we, as followers of Jesus in

the midst of the turmoil that we find ourselves in, keep the main thing, the main thing? How do we live radically different lifestyles from the culture around us?

I think that is the question for the church in this moment we find ourselves in, and I think the reason that question is so important is because I think if we are honest with ourselves, one of the things that we may find is that the church in reality is more influenced by the culture around us sometimes than we are influencing the culture. I think the church, we could argue is actually more influenced by the culture than many of us realize, and so as I was thinking about that, I put together a list of maybe some of the ways that we are more influenced by the culture around us than we are by Jesus, and here is the list. See if any of this resonates with you.

I think some of us in the church are more familiar with the needs of our favorite football team than the needs of our neighbors across the street. I think some of us maybe sing louder at a concert at Red Rocks or in our cars than we do in worship every week. I think some of us know the names of some of the best financial advisors in the world, but if someone asks us to name someone who lives below the poverty line, we might draw a blank. I think some of us know the storylines of the latest TV show far better than we know the storyline of scripture. I think some of us in the church probably spend more time watching pornography than we do praying. I think if we are honest, some of us are probably better equipped to defend the political platforms that we adhere to than we are equipped to explain the Sermon on the Mount, and I think some of us care more about the outcome of the next election more than we do about the salvation of our friend or our co-worker or our family member.

First Peter, he hits hard, doesn't he? Then as I even came up with that list, I was like, "I should be careful, because I still need all of these people to vote for me if I want to be the pastor at Waterstone," and I know this, in my own life, most days, it is hard to have clarity in the chaos, because I feel these influences around me, and I am not even trying to say that all of those things are bad. I have a fantasy football team, and if my kids go to bed sometimes before 8:30 at night, I usually try to watch a little bit of TV. So I am not saying that those things are bad, but what I am saying is that I think there is a problem in the church today where there are so many things that are vying for our attention, that are trying to attract our gaze, that are trying to tell us, "This is the thing you need to build your life on," and that if you give yourself to family or fun or success or career, then that is the thing that will give you what you are looking for. So much of that cultural ethos has infiltrated the church, and we find ourselves just adopting these things, and I find for myself that so many times the chaos in the world out there is drowning out the voice of the Spirit in my life, and so what does it mean to have clarity in the chaos? What does it mean to build our life on a foundation that can actually withstand the pressure that we find ourselves under in this world?

I actually want to take us today to a story from the gospels, in Matthew 16, and that might feel like a weird place to go when we are walking through the book of First Peter, but in Matthew 16 we have this fascinating interaction between Jesus and Peter, and this is when Jesus is going about doing his ministry in the world. Peter is one of his closest disciples. He is one of his friends who is following Jesus, learning everything that Jesus does, trying to do life in the kingdom, trying to follow his rabbi, and they come to this place called Caesarea Philippi. As they come to this place, there are two things you need to know about this location. It is in Israel, but it is a place that is very far from the heart of God. Caesarea Philippi was known for two primary things. One was it was literally considered the gateway or the gates of the underworld, so there was this whole cultic practice of the worship of gods in that region, where they would go into caves, and they would do all sorts of crazy, obscene practices to try to worship the gods in those regions, and so as they came to these caves, they literally considered them the gateway to hell. So, Jesus

brings the disciples to this place, but there is a second thing that Caesarea Philippi was known for, and that is it was one of the only places in Israel that had a temple that had been built to honor and worship Caesar of Rome, and so it is a deeply dark political and spiritual place. Jesus brings his disciples to this space in Matthew 16, and begins a conversation with them, and as they are walking through this region, He says, “Who do people say that I am?” and the disciples respond to Him, “Some say that you are John the Baptist. Others say that you are a prophet, like Elijah or Jeremiah, or maybe one of the other prophets come to show us the way back to God.” So, Jesus hears all these answers. He listens to them, and then He turns to the disciples, and He says, “What about you? Who do you say that I am?” which on the face of it might seem like a simple surface-level question, but if I were actually to sit down with you, and I were to ask you, “Who is Jesus to you? Who do you believe Jesus is?” it would be interesting to see what the answer is that we would come up with. It might be a harder question for some of us to answer than we think, but Peter does not hesitate. The author of the book we have been reading for the last three weeks, he does not hesitate at all, and he answers with all the clarity in the world. He says, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Peter nails it. He aces the test. It is exactly the answer Jesus was looking for, and in fact, Jesus says, “This is such a good answer, I do not even think you came up with it by yourself. God gave you that answer.” With students, that is not a paradigm for how you should study for tests, okay? Do not do that. That is not what the lesson of the story is. Jesus says, “This is what I was looking for. This is the right answer.” So, “Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven,’” and then, listen to these words, “‘and I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it.’” Jesus praises Peter’s answer in this proclamation of who Jesus is. He is the Messiah, which is a deeply political and spiritual answer that is coming in a very deeply political and spiritual place, and He says, “You have nailed it. This is who I am. I am the Messiah, the Son of the living God,” and declaring that in the presence of the gates of hell and the temple to Caesar has some very intriguing possibilities of what this answer means. It is this way of sticking it to Rome in this moment, that Peter is saying. “You are the one who will conquer Rome and hell,” and Jesus says, “On that declaration is what I will build my church, that I am the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Then the story continues, and Matthew tells us that after this moment of proclamation, after this answer that Peter gives, where he declares Jesus is the Messiah, and Jesus says that the gates of hell will not prevail against his church, because this is the rock, this is the solid foundation for his church and for his people, the conversation continues, and Matthew tells us that Jesus then begins declaring to his disciples from that moment forward that his destiny was to go to Jerusalem and to be tortured and crucified, killed, and buried, and that after having died, He will rise again in three days. As Jesus begins teaching them this, Peter has a very different response. He hears Jesus’ answer and Jesus telling the disciples what is supposed to be, and he pulls Jesus aside. He actually pulls Him aside. “Jesus, you have to stop talking like that. That is nonsense. You are the Messiah. I just told you. You just said that I got the answer right. You are the Messiah. The Messiah does not die. The Messiah is not tortured. The Messiah is not crucified.”

Peter had this very specific expectation of what it meant that Jesus was the Messiah. It was deeply political and deeply spiritual, and what Peter understood about this idea of the Messiah was twofold. One was that the Messiah was the person who was supposed to make the people of God holy again. He was the one who was supposed to kick out all of the foreigners and the exiles, all of the people who did not

belong in Israel, because they could never be holy as long as they had the blemish and the mark of Gentiles and exiles and foreigners living among them, and so Jesus was the one who was supposed to cast them out, conquer Rome, and get rid of all the filthy Gentiles, who had infiltrated the people of God. He was supposed to make the people of God holy once again. That was an essential task that Peter understood the Messiah was supposed to do, and the second was this. Peter believed that the Messiah was someone who would restore the temple to the space where heaven and earth met, and where the people of God could encounter the presence of God.

The temple of God had not been restored since the days of the exile, and while it was a building that was there, it had never been restored back to his former glory, and so the belief was the Messiah would be this priestly warrior king who would kick out all of the bad guys, John Wick style, take vengeance on all the people who had ever done anything wrong to the people of Israel, and restore worship to the way that it was supposed to be. So, when he hears Jesus say that the Messiah is supposed to be crucified, killed, and murdered, he has no paradigm, no understanding of a Messiah that would take up that role. It does not fit with what the role of the Messiah is supposed to be like, and Peter carries this worldview the entire time he follows Jesus, even though Jesus tells him, “You are wrong.” In fact, He does not just say, “You are wrong,” but He says, “Get behind me, Satan.” He says that you are so wrong that you are a stumbling block to the thing that I am supposed to be and the thing that God has called me to be, and He says this, “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

He is setting up that there is this desire within Peter for what the Messiah is supposed to be, this priestly warrior king, who will make everything right, the way that it is supposed to be, who makes Israel great again, and Peter carries this mentality with him the entire time he follows Jesus. On the night Jesus was betrayed, Peter is one of the disciples who is carrying around a sword, because he thinks this is the moment when the revolution will rise upon and we will overthrow our oppressors, and we will take back what is ours, and Jesus’ response to him is, “You are missing it. You are thinking too small. You’re thinking about the earthly kingdoms. You are thinking about how to make kingdoms come the way that they do, and you are thinking about using the mechanisms and the levers and the power and the violence and the vengeance that the world always uses to make the kingdom come. You are missing the heart of God’s kingdom and misunderstanding the nature of God’s kingdom.”

So, with that story in mind, this story about how Jesus declares that you are the rock that I will build my church on, this proclamation, and then Peter is the stumbling block when he says this idea about the Messiah that does not fit the paradigm Jesus is trying to fulfill, with those two images of mine, I want to take us back to the passage that Jacques read for us earlier, First Peter 2, verses 4 through 12, and this is thirty years after Peter had had this conversation with Jesus at the caves of Caesarea Philippi. I want you to notice the transformation in his worldview as we walk through this story.

Peter begins in this section, and he says, “As you come to Him,” as you come to Jesus, “who is the living stone rejected by humans, but chosen by God and precious to Him, you also,” comparing us to Jesus, “are like living stones being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices, acceptable and pleasing to God through Jesus Christ.” Peter here begins with the assumption that Jesus Christ, the living stone, will be rejected by humans, not that He will be some conquering warrior king who will end all his enemies, but someone who is rejected, and there is also some sort of shift that is happening in Peter, where he is not looking for a hope of a physical building, a temple where they will be able to worship. He is saying that the believers, the followers of Jesus, are also living stones, being built into a spiritual house, that now it is not a specific place in Jerusalem or a specific building in Jerusalem

where heaven meets earth, but now it is anyone who follows the way of Jesus, that that is the temple that is being built now.

Peter's worldview has drastically shifted. He is no longer looking for the temple to be restored. He is saying that it is being built in a completely different fashion. He is no longer looking for a Messiah that would be a conqueror, but that one that would be rejected, and he goes on, and he quotes scripture to help drive his point home, and he 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 the builder rejected has become the cornerstone, a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." Do you see some of the imagery that's picked up from Matthew 16? They stumble because they disobey the message. They do not understand the true nature of the Messiah, which is what they were destined for. Peter makes the same point, and he tries to drive home this idea that those who believe in God, they believe in a person who was rejected, but that person was also precious to God, and that He was the cornerstone, the foundation of this new movement.

I am guessing many of you are semi-familiar with this language of cornerstone, but essentially a cornerstone is the most important piece of the building, a block to make sure the structure stays the way that it is supposed to be, and if the cornerstone is off just a little bit, then it begins to make the rest of the structure wonky, and that is the technical term. You can ask anyone in construction, all right? The idea is this cornerstone is the most foundational support. The whole thing is held up by Jesus, the cornerstone, and if you take Him out of the building, the whole thing will collapse. What Peter is saying is that we are to come and rest our faith on Jesus alone, and then we are joined together in this spiritual structure as living stones built into God's holy temple, that our identity is based on who Jesus was and what He came to do, and so if Jesus is the pillar of the structure, if He is the foundation stone, then our lives as living stones will begin to look like his life. So, the way that He interacted with the world, the way that He experienced the world will be the same way that we experience the world. So, if Jesus was a living stone who was rejected, then it is likely that followers of Jesus will also be rejected. So, what Peter is essentially saying more pointedly is for followers of Jesus, if the Messiah was rejected, and He is the cornerstone of our faith, then we should not be surprised when we experience rejection also.

I feel like we got a taste of this idea a few months ago with the opening ceremony of the Olympics. Does anybody remember the opening ceremony of Olympics? Yeah. I do not even know if I want to touch this one, all right? There was this moment in the Olympics in the opening ceremony, which many of you saw it, where there was this recreation of the Last Supper, and then there was some debate about whether or not it was actually the recreation of the Last Supper or whatever, and there were all sorts of back-and-forth about are they mocking Christianity, or are they not mocking Christianity? I was on Twitter at the time, and as we were watching that, I just saw all of these different pastors and Christians and thought leaders just blasting off about, "How dare they?" and listen to me. When people mock our faith or particularly our savior, absolutely we should feel offended, and we should feel like, "No, you cannot mock the Son of the living God. That is not okay," but what I was fascinated by was how surprised everyone was that the world was acting like the world, because we should not expect anything different.

Of course that is what the world thinks of our savior. They do not have a paradigm for the Last Supper where the ruler of the universe comes down and gets naked and washes the disciples' feet. There is no paradigm or story in our world that understands that. Of course they would mock that. It flies in the face of everything the world believes. One thing that sometimes happens to Christians is we can be offended when we interact with the world, and I understand the offense, but we cannot be surprised when

we experience rejection or persecution or hostility, because that is the foundational stone of our movement. That is who Jesus Christ is, so we should not be surprised when the world acts like the world.

In First Peter, he goes on after this explanation of the cornerstone, and he begins to flesh that out, and he says, “But you are a chosen people. You may be rejected by the world, but your truest identity is that you are chosen by God, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession.” He says the world may mock you and may ridicule you and may reject you, but you are 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.” So, Peter drives this point home that though we may be rejected, we are still chosen and this special possession of God, but it actually goes deeper than that, because I want you to understand the shift in Peter’s world, because there was once upon a time a Caesaria Philippi where Peter’s worldview was that the Messiah was supposed to come and kick out all of the Gentiles and to wage war on them in vengeance and in violence, to make the nation of Israel great again. Here he is writing a letter to a group of churches that are composed primarily of Gentiles, and what he says to them, these people that once he wished he could have persecuted, he would have found it joyful to persecute these people, he is now writing a letter to them, encouraging them in the midst of their own persecution. What else can bring about that kind of transformation, except for the gospel of Jesus Christ? Peter moves from this place where he wants to distribute violence and vengeance and see the Messiah come and take names and take back what is theirs, and now he is pouring himself out for these churches and these people that he once considered his worst enemies, trying to encourage them to hang on to the faith just a little bit longer in the midst of this chaotic world.

Then he goes on, and he says, “Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles,” this same Peter that wanted to kick out all the foreigners and exiles, and that wanted to establish the kingdom of God in this world, he says now that we are foreigners and exiles in this world. Peter is driving home this point that if we are followers of Jesus, then this world is not our home, and everywhere we go, we are going to feel like foreigners and exiles as long as we are following Jesus. The same Peter who wanted to make sure that there was a physical kingdom with a physical temple established in this world now says that there is no such thing, and that that is a false hope, because we are exiles and foreigners in this world, and as foreigners and exiles, we are to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against our souls, and we are to live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse us of doing wrong, they may see our good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.

What a drastic change there was in the life of the of Peter. He thought the Messiah was someone who was supposed to come and establish a home and a kingdom here in this world, that He needed to reestablish the temple and kick out the bad guys and rebuild things the way they were supposed to be, and now he says to a group of people who are experiencing persecution and hostility and chaos, he says it is okay, because this world is not our home. We are exiles. We should not expect the world to look like us. We should expect rejection. We should never feel completely at home here, because this world is not our primary reality, and it is such a shift in his worldview.

The question then becomes, “I thought the kingdom of God was here and now, but not yet,” so there is an in breaking of the kingdom absolutely, but it is far different than the way Peter first expected and hoped the kingdom of God to break in. He did not expect the kingdom of God to break in through sacrificial love, but through vengeance and through violence, and now his clarity in the midst of this chaos comes because he understands the cross. The clarity in chaos for our own lives comes when we understand

that the cross gives shape to the reality that we live in, when we understand the nature of the cross, and we understand the nature of the kingdom. In the middle of the chaos of this world, of the hissing kettle that someone forgot to turn off, Jesus is a king who did not come to sit on a throne but be hung on a cross, and the way that we engage with the world in the midst of that chaos is not through vengeance or trying to take back a kingdom that we think is ours or trying to make everyone think like us or get a certain person in political power or make sure that certain laws are passed. It is through the same sacrificial love that Jesus showed in his own life. I think life as an exile is a thirst and a drive to know God in his fullness in an unashamed commitment to obey God, whatever it costs, wherever we are.

So, Peter gives two application points of what it means to live this out, and he says we are supposed to abstain from sinful desires, and we are supposed to live such a good life among the pagans. I was thinking about this idea of abstaining from sinful desires, and I was thinking particularly, I think so much of the ways that we are tempted in our own lives to build foundations on the things that the world says will satisfy our desires, the things that the world says, “If you give yourself to this, if you pursue this, if you chase after this, then that will lead to the satisfaction you are looking for,” and I was actually thinking particularly of our youth, because I think so much in life, this temptation, the war that is waged with our soul around sinful desires, I do not know if there is a time in life when it is more intensely felt than when you are a teenager following Jesus in this world. What I often see so many times is when I am pastoring people who are who are a little later in life, and there is less life to live, their vision has shifted heavenward a little more, and their focus begins to change from the temporary pleasures of this world to this eternal perspective. What I also see in them so many times is this desire that they could go back and say to their younger selves, “What were you living for? What were you giving yourself to that you thought would satisfy yourself more than Jesus?” The whole premise of this idea of abstaining from sinful desires is in understanding that all of the pleasure, all of the things that this world tells us to build our life upon, that they are not living stones. There is one living foundational stone that brings life to our lives, and that is Jesus Christ.

Then it also goes on to say that we are supposed to live a good life among the pagans, and I think that is another place that sometimes where we adopt the world’s influence in this idea of what it means to live a good life, because I think when we understand what it means to live a good life, so much of what the world says is living a good life is chasing after the things of this world that will satisfy us, and it is really in this way that I see the church adopting it. It is the idea that if you are a follower of Jesus, then you need to make a drastic difference and impact in the world around you. You need to be a mover and shaker. You need to shift the whole world. You need to save the world, if you are a follower of Jesus. Now I firmly believe that there are some people in this room who are movers and shakers, and they are called to do big things for the kingdom of God. We have some of those people here, who are building trailhead community centers, or helping immigrants and shifting and doing all of those sorts of things, but let’s be honest. For some of us, that call to live a good life among the pagans, when it is a call to this kind of exceptionalism or this idea of making a deep impact, it is just exhausting a little bit, isn’t it? I mean, most of us are just trying to make it through the day, faithfully love our families or our friends, and make it through the workday.

This week I came across an idea from a pastor named John Tyson, who talks about this idea that living a good life is not actually what we think it is. It may not be about making such a big difference in the world, and he says this kind of sobering thinking: “You cannot save America from Trump or Kamala. You cannot close the economic gap. You cannot stop the melting of the ice caps. You cannot fix educational



inequality in the nation. You cannot solve world hunger, and you cannot get rid of toxic technology and go back in time. You cannot stop World War Three,” and then he goes on to say, “To be clear, I am not pushing for fatalism or passivity. I am pushing for discernment and responsibility. You are not accountable to do the will of the whole world. You are just accountable to do the will of God for your life.” Sometimes I think we get this idea that in order to follow Jesus and live a good life, we have to do something grand and exceptional, and I just think that has imported American exceptionalism into the Christianity that we are trying to follow.

Look at the life of Jesus. He never wrote a bestseller. He never visited any of the major cities of his day. He did not start any organization. He did not ever hold political office. Jesus never even had a podcast, and everybody has podcasts, right? He did not do any of that. What did Jesus do? He disciplined those who were around Him. He ate dinner with sinners and tax collectors and prostitutes and the people nobody else wanted to eat with. He preached the kingdom of God, and He died as a sacrifice for sins. If you look at his life and the things that He did, you could look at every single one of those things and say, “Yeah, they were incredibly small, and yet potent, Earth-changing, and life-altering.” It is actually this simplicity that we see in Jesus of what it means to live the good life. He shaped history through having dinners with sinners. I think some of us need to be let off the hook a little bit that there is some grandiose plan God has for us, where we have to change and shift and make an impact on the world. For some of us, what if following Jesus and living a good life among those around us were as simple as loving our family, working hard at our jobs, serving on a Waterstone Serves weekend, and going about living life the way Jesus taught us to?

You do not have to save the world. Jesus has already done that, and I wonder what would happen if we learned the lesson that Peter learned, because I think that is really where some of this idea comes from. We have this idea of the Messiah or the kingdom coming in, and we really have just taken this same ethos of what Peter thought and believed before he had this conversation with Jesus. We fall into this trap of believing that following Jesus is this grandiose vision for our lives, and that it means taking back all of these things and making all of these things happen. Peter here thirty years later is writing to a church experiencing hostility and chaos, and he has so much clarity about who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him. He says, “Push back against the sinful desires you have in your life, and live a good life among the pagans, so that they will glorify God,” so I think what Peter learned and what he did was he began to understand that building his life on the living stone is what makes all of the difference.

So, we can build our life on these foundational things in our lives that we think will satisfy us or lead to the life we want or that are even what it means to follow Jesus, and we forget that we are foreigners and exiles in this world, that when we are building our lives, we are not building our lives in this life. We are building lives for eternity and life with Jesus. So, we can give ourselves and we can experience football and family and career and whatever else, but none of those stones are strong enough to support the weight of expectation we put on them. Peter says Jesus is the living stone, that it is only on Him that we put our faith and our expectations.

So, as we close today, what I am going to encourage you to do is we are going to sing a song together called Cornerstone. The first line of the song is, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness,” and as we enter into this space, I would ask this, that your heart and your posture would not just look at the words on the screen and recite them, but that you would actually take a moment to contemplate, “What are maybe some of the places in my life that I have been building a foundation on? What are some of the places in my life that I think if I get this right, if I get this stone set just the way it is

supposed to be, then all the other stones will fall into place?” What Peter says and what he found out is that if that stone is anything other than the person of Jesus, we are set up for major disappointment.

So, the next few minutes I am going to invite you to stay, and you can go ahead and stand, and as we sing this song, Cornerstone, I would ask you to pray this simple prayer: “God, thank you for your word, and now Holy Spirit, come and bring the change that we need.” This is the time we have created to reorient our lives around what the Holy Spirit is saying to us, so contemplate, pray, and sing these words to our Lord and Savior, Jesus.

40:33 minutes

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Edited by Tom Kenaston

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