

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵ 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. ⁶ 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.”

⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,” ⁸ and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ 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. (NIV 84)

Theme: Comfort and Encouragement from being Part of God's Chosen Nation

1. You Form a Spiritual House
2. You Serve as God's Priests

I've sure many of you have seen it—the Coexist bumper sticker. There are different versions of this bumper sticker, but the main idea is the same—it spells out the word “Coexist” using symbols of different religions. For instance, a crescent moon representing Islam is used for the letter “c.” The Star of David representing Judaism is substituted for the letter “x.” And a cross representing Christianity is substituted for the letter “t.” Various other symbols, such as the pagan yin and yang symbol and a few Wiccan symbols make up the rest of the word. What is the message behind this bumper sticker? All religions are the same—or essentially the same. They are all equal; they all teach the same thing. So we should learn to coexist with each other, to love them; and be tolerant of other people's beliefs.

That may sound pretty good at first, but it has one major flaw—it couldn't be any more wrong. As Jesus said in our gospel today, **I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.** There is only one way to eternal life—that is through faith in Jesus Christ. So we cannot be tolerant of other religions. The very basics of faith in Christ demand that we do not coexist with false religions.

And they don't want to coexist with us either. That certainly was the case during Peter's time. He wrote this letter to Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor. They were suffering through some intense persecution. Many suffered because of their faith. Soon many of them, including Peter himself would be put to death for what they believed in. That's still happening today. In fact more Christians are put to death world-wide year after year because of their faith than all other religions combined. Here in America we don't face that kind of persecution. But we are still mocked and ridiculed because of what we believe in. Some try to force us to follow laws contrary to God's Word. Others call us intolerant or unloving for not going along with them and their sinful beliefs or lifestyles.

So what do we do? Well, we might be afraid. We don't want to get hurt. We don't want our life to be harder than it already is. So we are tempted to just keep our mouths shut. We are tempted to keep our head down and our faith to ourselves. That we way don't offend anyone. And no one can do or say anything to us.

You take a look around at the world today, and you may come to the conclusion that it's simply not worth it. It's not worth the hassle to share your faith. It's not worth the grief to tell others about Christ. You don't want to get labeled like the world labels Christians today as unloving ignorant bigots. Perhaps you should just learn to get along with others. Maybe they have a point when they tell us to coexist. Like Peter's readers we may be tempted to give up and cave in. They were tempted to fall back into their old sinful ways. The words of our text today serve to encourage and strengthen us for the difficult times we experience. And these words show us how to live a life among an unbelieving and hostile world.

But why is the world so against Christians? Because they are against Christ. They reject him as the way, the truth, and the life. He's not the rock on which the Church is built—no, they'd much rather fashion their lives by their own design. The Jews 2000 years ago rejected Jesus because of his humility—he didn't look like the Promised Messiah, let alone God. The world today sees Jesus as a loser, a joke, or at best—a fable. How can someone rise from the dead! “What a joke,” they say.

But the joys of Easter still ring in our hearts and minds. Jesus isn't dead but living. It's anything but a joke. That is why he is called the Living Stone. He is the perfect combination. He is a solid rock—strong and powerful. And yet, he is living.

The unbelievers threw Christ out like a bad stone—like he has a major flaw in him and can't be used. But Jesus has no flaw. And so, this stone that was rejected is actually the chief cornerstone. With today's engineering technology the cornerstone serves as more of a ceremonial stone. But for thousands of years the cornerstone was the most important stone. It was the stone by which all other stones were laid. If the cornerstone wasn't right and true, the house wouldn't be straight. If the cornerstone cracked and crumbled the rest of the building would go with it.

Christ looked flawed when he died. But he rose victorious. He is our living stone. He is the chief cornerstone. And on him the Church is built. As Peter quotes Psalm 118 in verse seven, **The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone**—or better yet, the cornerstone. On him our hope is built. On him the Church stands and falls.

Christ is the cornerstone because he is The living stone. And The Living Stone makes you living stones. Through him we live because he is the life-giving stone. Even though we die, we will live with him forever. And so we are living stones like he is The Living Stone. And together we make a spiritual house. That is the Church. Paul makes a similar point in Ephesians 2. There he mentions how Christians are, **members of God's household, built on the foundation of the**

apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

Christ, the Living Stone, has made you a living stone that makes up the spiritual house of his true Church. And notice what Isaiah says in chapter 28, which Peter quotes in verse 6, **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.** The Living Stone has made you a living stone. You know where you will be when you die. So you don't have to worry about what others may do to you. You don't have to be afraid of what they might say or do. For you will live forever. You will never be put to shame.

That gives us comfort and encouragement as we live in this unbelieving and hateful world.

But you must remember that you were at one time part of that unbelieving and hateful world. You were conceived and born into it. There was nothing good that lived in you. not even a little spark of good. You didn't know God. You didn't believe in his Son. In fact, you hated God. You wanted nothing to do with him. Paul makes that point in Romans 8. **The sinful mind is hostile to God.**

Plus most, if not all, of us here today are Gentiles. You aren't part of God's chosen nation—the Israelites. You didn't belong to him. You weren't part of the chosen race. Your ancestors rejected God. So to God, you weren't a people.

But now you are a people, Peter says in 10. **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.** You have been chosen by God. He chose you from before the beginning of the world to be his own. He chose you to be saved through the work of his Son.

And so he brought you to faith in his Son Jesus Christ. So now you belong to him. Now you are his own dear child. And through faith in him you receive all the blessings he has won for you. You receive the love and compassion he gives to us through his son.

You are now part of the chosen nation. For the true Chosen nation doesn't depend on physical descent. It doesn't matter whose blood

you share. No, what matters is faith. True Israel are not descendants of Abraham. But True Israel are his spiritual descendants. So through faith you are part of God's holy nation. Holy, pure and without sin, because of his Son.

And as a child of God, you are also his Priest. Peter makes this point in verse four, **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.** In the Old Testament times a priest was only able to enter into God's presence—into the Holy of Holies, once a year. That was on the Day of Atonement. And he only did so after purifying himself, offering a sacrifice for his sins—and then, representing the people before God, he offered up a sacrifice to the Lord. And only those who served as priests and a sacrifice was offered for their sins, could be in the presence of God. But Christ has made all of us holy by his suffering and death on the cross. Therefore, since we are all holy, we are all priests. So not only are the living stones that make up the spiritual Church, but you also serve as the priests in this Church. And as priests we are able to offer up acceptable spiritual sacrifices. But how do you offer up spiritual sacrifices?

Paul explains in Romans 12, **I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.** A spiritual sacrifice is offering yourself up to the Lord. Your whole life is a sacrifice. What you do and what you don't do. Your words and actions, your thoughts and attitudes—they are all spiritual sacrifices. And of course we know that these sacrifices don't earn the forgiveness of sins. They aren't to make amends for what we have done. Rather, they are acts of praise and worship. Therefore, as a priest of God, you don't just worship the Lord when you enter through the doors on Sunday morning, But you worship the Lord with your whole life—all day every day, by what you say and do.

And what is your main job as a priest? Peter says in verse 9, **But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who**

called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. God has made you priests so that you would declare his praises. That is what we do as Christians. We tell others about Christ and what he has done for us. That is what the Priesthood of all Believers is all about. It is the awesome privilege God gives to his church to spread the gospel. You get to tell others about Christ, who brought you out of the darkness of unbelief and despair, into the light of faith through his gospel. You get the joy of telling others about their Savior. To tell them of the one who suffered and died for their sins and rose from the dead for eternal life!

And you get to do that everywhere. The whole world is your pulpit. Every Christian a priest—every place a pulpit. You serve as a priest whenever you share the gospel with others or let your good works shine in the glory of God before men. And you have countless opportunities to do so each and every day. You have occasion after occasion to tell others about the Living Stone—rejected by men but exalted by God. So that they may hear the gospel, be brought to faith, and become another living stone in the Church of God.

The world tells us to coexist with other religions—to be tolerant of their beliefs, because it's the loving thing to do. But it's not loving to let someone go to hell. For Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. There is a much better plan than coexisting with false religions. It is serving as priests of God. Lovingly tell them the truth about The Living Stone. So that he might welcome them into his Holy Nation and make them his people forever. Amen.