

What Is Happening in the World

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⁶ Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.” ⁷ Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,” ⁸ and “A stone of stumbling And a rock of offence.” They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. ⁹ But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; ¹⁰ who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. (1 Peter 2:4–10)

When our children were little, like all children, they would sometimes mix up words and mix up syllables. One that we found pretty amusing was a mix-up of a common saying. From time to time we'd say, “What in the world is going on in here?” They heard us saying “what in the world is happening here?” So once or twice, one of our children heard a commotion and came into the room and said, “What is happening in the world?”

That change of word order turns an exclamation about a situation into a very large question about reality. It's one we should ask from time to time. “What is happening in the world?” Not according to CNN or Fox or some news feed. Those may give you some facts about happenings in the world, but they really don't tell you the grand story of what is happening in the world. And actually, everyone does have an opinion on what is happening in the world. They may not think about it all the time, or very much at all. But it's their idea of what's really going on, what life is for, what part do I play, what gives my life significance.

And how you answer the question “what is happening in the world” will probably tell us volumes about what you are living for, how you are living, what you're hoping for, pursuing, seeking. It explains how you'll cope with problems, trials, difficulties, suffering.

This book of 1 Peter is like a manual for Christians in a hostile world. It is all about what the grace of God looks like when under fire: under trial, persecution, pain, and suffering. The first part of the book is like someone putting on your armour, your battle-kit, and telling you in detail what your defences are, what your ammunition is, reminding you of your training. Peter has been telling us who we are in Christ: chosen, born again, with an eternal inheritance, eternally secure, privileged to know Christ, to have our faith tested, to live in the age of fulfilment. And he's begun to give us our strategy for the battle: hope, holiness, and humility. He's reminded us of our refuge from the battle: God's people, and our superfood that we must have an appetite for: God's Word.

Now Peter is going to begin to tie it together by giving a grand summary of who Christians are in Christ. He is going to answer the question: what is happening in the world? What is happening in the world with Christians? What is God doing, what is our purpose, amidst all the rejection and suffering we'll face?

He does this by employing our imaginations. He is going to use some analogies, some word pictures that will help us to catch a glimpse of who we are in this world, what God is doing, what it is all about. And as he draws this picture, the picture will explain our place in the world, then our position within that place, and then our practice. What is your place? What is your position? What is your purpose? Answer those, and you will know what is happening in the world.

I. Your Place in the World: Stones of God's Temple

⁴ Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God *and* precious, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house....

Peter's first description is to describe believers as stones, bricks, masonry, that together make up a house, a structure. Stones, rocks are inanimate, lifeless, but believers are living stones. We are each stones that make up a structure, which Peter calls a spiritual house. Clearly, by telling us who is in this structure and what they do there, Peter means this spiritual house or home is the New Testament equivalent of a Temple.

God has a building project. He is constructing something. What God is building is not the empires of wealth, he is not building the world's monuments to the rich, famous, beautiful or talented, He is not building human political power.

God is building, and as the OT quotations show us, has always been building a great structure. The building is not made of brick and mortar, it is made of people. And collectively, corporately, they make up God's Temple. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, *you are* God's building. (1 Corinthians 3:9) ¹⁶ Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

Now, what is the purpose of a Temple? What happens there? A Temple is where God's presence is made known, and where God's people admire and adore! A Temple is where God's beauty and glory is made known, so that God's people may glorify and enjoy Him forever.

One *thing* I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His temple. (Psalm 27:4)

So what is God doing in the world? Jesus described it this way: But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. (John 4:23)

God is seeking, from all over the world, people who will find their ultimate joy and delight in Him! He does not need worship, if you think of it as giving God compliments. But God does delight to share Himself with those who will receive Him; He delights to overflow, so that the glory He has always enjoyed in Himself is now shared by us. Worship is not us giving God joy that He lacks, worship is God giving us joy we lack, by sharing Himself with us.

God's great project is easy to spot in the Bible. A man once asked Jesus what the most important commandment is. Jesus answered "The first of all the commandments *is*: '*Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.*' ³⁰ *And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*' This *is* the first commandment. (Mark 12:29–30)

To know and love God is worship. Whatever you love with all your heart, is what you treasure, it's what is worth the ultimate price to you. So to love God ultimately is to worship Him. In the eleventh century, a writer by the name of Bernard of Clairvaux asked the question, why should we love God? He answered, "Two reasons, because nothing is more reasonable and nothing is more profitable." To love God is entirely reasonable and rational, because He is the loveliest of all beings – He deserves it, love and worship is due to Him. But it is also profitable, because you will never

find higher joy, deeper pleasure, greater fulfilment than when you grow in your love and worship for God. This is our place in the world. This is what we are here to do.

And notice the image of corporate. It is not private, individualised worship, but worship with others. One stone doesn't make a Temple. A Christian only finds His place as a worshipper among worshippers.

That is what God is building. But it turns out that this Temple and its stones are all built around and upon one very particular stone. A cornerstone was the stone integral to the foundation. You couldn't build without it. If you reject this stone, you are not a part of the Temple.

Verse 4 says we believers approach and come to Him, a living stone, rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious. And the word *Him* in verse 4 can only refer back to verse 3 – the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ. This Temple is built upon Him, and around Him, and so everything hinges on acceptance or rejection of Him.

So now Peter quotes three Old Testament passages which all used stone imagery to identify the Messiah. 118:22, Isa. 8:14; 28:16.

⁶ Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "*Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.*" ⁷ Therefore, to you who believe, *He is precious*; but to those who are disobedient, "*The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,*" ⁸ and "*A stone of stumbling And a rock of offence.*" They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

Jesus identified himself as the rejected stone, recorded three times. Seven NT passages all quote the OT stone passages and identify Jesus as the stone. Jesus is the core of true worship. True worship can only begin with the Gospel: the good news that Jesus was born, lived, died, rose again and ascended. The good news that His death and resurrection forgives sins and reconciles us to God. You cannot become a living stone, unless you come to Him and embrace Him as the foundation of your life, as the Rock of Ages.

Here we should note that the author of this letter was nicknamed Peter, the rock, by Jesus.

But you can use a stone in different ways. A stone can either be something that builds, or it can be something that harms. You can step on it, or you can trip on it. As a mason, you can use a stone, or reject it. Peter says, there are two reactions to Christ. You can believe on Him, and instead of the shame and rejection that you are now experiencing from the world, you will experience honour. The word for *precious* in verse 7 means honour, and is better translated, honour is for you who believe. But if you reject Christ, which Peter calls being disobedient, then you will trip over Him, stumble, fall, be offended. This worship centres around, and hinges on, and depends upon Christ.

The end of verse 8 has been interpreted two different ways. Some take it to mean they were appointed to be disobedient to the word, which would be a strong kind of reprobation, God's electing them to disobedience. The other way of taking it is that they were appointed to stumble from their disobedience, i.e. God had decreed that whoever rejects His Son is going to stumble. I take the second view, but either way, Peter is reminding us that God is sovereign over all, including disobedience. Sin, as much as God is not the author of it, is still under His sovereign control.

What is my place in this world? God's great project is building a living Temple of worship, founded on His Son. If you accept His Son, you become one of the living stones that makes up this spiritual Temple.

But what then? Peter now changes the image, and goes beyond our place in the world and describes our position.

II. Your Position in the World: Priests in God's Temple

⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, **a holy priesthood**
But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; ¹⁰ who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Peter is deliberately mixing his metaphors here. We are stones making up a Temple. But now, we are not only the living structure of the Temple, we are also the ones working inside this Temple. Inside a Temple you expect to find priests. Twice Peter calls us priests: in verse 5, a holy priesthood, and in verse 9, a royal priesthood.

In the present age, the Jewish Temple no longer functions as the place of the presence of God: it's the living Temple, built on Christ, with His people as the stones. And so the Levitical priests no longer present animal sacrifices and incense in the Temple. The High Priest is now the Lord Jesus, and we His people are the priesthood.

Priests are the ones who work in the Temple to make sure worship happens. Priests are the worship-workers. Priests present the sacrifices, and offer the incense. In Solomon's Temple they would be the singers and the one's praying and doing the work.

And in doing the worship-work, they face two ways. They face God by offering the worship, but then they face the people by teaching them about God. Priests speak to God on behalf of the people, and then speak to the people on behalf of God. Priests are worship go-betweens, worship mediators, worship ambassadors.

But to be a priestly representative, the key word is that we must be *distinct*. Different. Special. Set apart. If a priest loses the sense that he knows the true God, then he has nothing to offer the average man who came to the Temple. If a priest lost his holiness, his separateness, his consecration to God, then he wasn't really a priest. Only by being distinct, could he experience the presence of God and mediate it to others. That's one of the reasons the priests had the particular clothes they wore. It distinguished them, showed them to be in a unique role.

Look at the language But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people He is invoking the language used God's people in the Old Testament.

⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a **special** treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. ⁶ And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a **holy** nation.' (Exodus 19:5–6)

Generation, priesthood, nation, people, all say we are one family, one people, stones in one Temple. And then the adjectives all speak of being distinctive: chosen, royal, holy, special. We were once not a people, but now are a people. Once not obtained mercy but now have.

We are God's unique people, His set-apart, called-out people, His representatives. That's what priests do.

You are still in the world, you live a normal life of school and work and family and leisure. But you

are not *of* the world. You belong to God, you are part of His nation, His culture, His generation. So you cannot treat this world system as your true home, as your culture, as your family, as your ultimate citizenship. You stand as a bridge between two worlds for all the people who come into your life. Your loyalty is with God, and you still have responsibilities towards the world.

So what does that look like? It means that tomorrow you will go to your workplace, or your school, or move about the retirement village, or be in your home with your children, and you realise, I am to represent the God of the universe. Are you mediating the presence of God to people around you? As a living stone connected to the Living Stone, as a priest of the High Priest, are you showing people what it looks like to have Jesus in the room? What's it like to have Christ as a manager, a nurse, a teacher, a doctor, a student, a pilot, a developer, a designer, a coder, an assistant, an accountant? Sometimes that is by what you say or don't say. Sometimes it is by your attitude. Sometimes it is by your work, the way you do it, the quality of it. Sometimes it is by your actions. I'm not just a data capturer, a strategic planner, a team leader, an engineer, a director. No, I'm a distinct, set apart, Christian manager, entrepreneur. I am a priestly worker. I am not just doing my work, but being a representative, an ambassador for Christ. I worship as I work, and work as I worship.

So if God's construction project is a great, living Temple of worship and love, what is your position in it? If you are a believer in Christ, then you are a priest in that Temple. You worship Christ, and you display Christ to the world. You know Him and you make Him known. You are the representative, the diplomat, the ambassador who speaks and acts like Christ in front of the world. This is the position you have, on top of, and in combination with your vocations and positions in life.

But Peter makes it even clearer for us. Our place is stones in God's Temple of Christ-centred worship. Our position is worship-workers in that Temple, priests that know Christ and make Him known. But Peter clarifies this even further by giving us our purpose.

III. Your Purpose in God's World: Offer Up Sacrifices of Praise

to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Here is the work that priests do in the Temple. Priests in any Temple would offer sacrifices, animal or plant or even gifts. It cost the worshipper, and that's what made it worship – it was a symbol of the value of the god. Levitical priests offered up the commanded sacrifices of the Law, but on the cross, the veil of the Temple was torn in two, those sacrifices were no longer valid, because Christ Himself was the fulfilment and embodiment of all those sacrifices. He became the full, final and perfect offering. No animal sacrifice or other kind could add or complete what He did on Calvary. The book of Hebrews teaches that Jesus is both the High Priest and the sacrifice, the one who offered and was the offering.

So if the Mosaic sacrificial system is over, what kinds of sacrifices do we as his priests offer? He tells us in verse 5 and verse 9.

Verse 5 says, “to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Spiritual sacrifices mean they are no longer physical, animal sacrifices. Just as the house here is not a physical house, but a spiritual one, so the sacrifices are not actual animals, but sacrifices of a deeper spiritual kind. But what is important is that they become pleasing to God through Jesus Christ. The person and work of Jesus is why these sacrifices are rendered pleasing to God, holy,

spotless, without blemish. His perfection is like the filter that our sacrifices go through, that our work is covered by.

Verse 9 tells us more: that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light;

The sacrifices we offer proclaim or preach how praiseworthy God is. Sacrifices always do that: they cost the offerer something. And however excellent the offering, they show much we think God is worth. In other words, these sacrifices are the works of our lives. It is our whole life on display, a life of worship.

¹ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)

¹⁵ Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name. (Hebrews 13:15)

My whole life, my words, thoughts, deeds, are supposed to show God is first in my life, God is ultimate in my love. God is my priority loyalty. God is in the centre of my goals, plans, and ambitions. God is my motivation and desire. Maybe one of the best texts to understand worship is a short, one-sentence parable:

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (Matthew 13:44)

All day, every day, I am putting a price on God in front of the watching world. I am saying, this much will I give up to know Him. This much do I want to live for Him. This much would I suffer for His sake. This much do I want to please Him and represent Him.

And when those are offered through the person and work of Jesus Christ's perfection, they are pleasing to God, and a testimony to the world.

What is happening in the world? It turns out that the big plan, the grand priority is worship. The grand construction plan of God is to seek and find worshippers who will find their full satisfaction in Him. God is building a glorious Temple made not of stones, but of people and personalities. Everyone who embraces Christ as Lord and Saviour, becomes part of this living, breathing Temple

But we are not simply stones, static and immovable. We are also people who perform the worship unto God and in front of the world. We offer distinct and holy worship for our holy God. We face both God as we worship Him corporately and individually, and we face the world, showing them the worth of our God. The form of that worship is the offering of our lives: displaying to the world that we have found the pearl of great price, that we have found a treasure worth leaving everything for, worth giving up everything for.