

Sometimes being a Christian's pretty hard...

- It's when we get mocked because of the faith we hold;
- It's when we get shamed because of what we believe...
(and never underestimate the power of shaming....)

And sometimes (in some settings) it might be quite tempting to become all very secretive and to downplay the part that Jesus has in our lives, because we don't want to be shamed....

But can you imagine how Christians who are being severely persecuted for their faith, might be tempted to hide their faith, or to down-play their commitment to Christ....

When the Apostle Peter wrote this letter, he was living in Rome, and he was writing to a people who were **also** living under Roman rule. And at the time, they were suffering terribly (under the persecutions of Nero)...

They were (pretty-much) hated by just about everyone... They were mocked; ridiculed; abused; tortured; being killed... and in all of this, they were being publicly humiliated and shamed... ..

And there's places in the world today, where Christians are suffering in a similar way... And (once again) publicly shamed...

*“One of these people is not like the other.
One of these people is not the same...”*

You're different – you're an anomaly – you don't belong here...

Even in our country, particularly on certain social issues, any Christian who speaks out, (especially if they're a public figure), any Christian who dares to speak the truth and say "The world's way leads to death, and this what God says....", they get publicly shamed...

Over the last few years, social media would have to have become the most powerful Christian-shaming weapon in Satan's arsenal... It's become public sport, to take part in a social media 'pile-on', in a bid to out-do each other, in shaming a Christian... And it's not only social media... It's becoming increasingly common in the liberal mainstream media...

- *I've been publicly shamed, for daring to teach the truth of God's word...*

But nothing like other Christians who are well-known public figures

- *Margaret Court: publicly shamed for upholding the traditional, Christian view of marriage;*
- *Israel Folau: publicly shamed for saying that unrepentant sinners will go to hell*

And that might be true for you – to be publicly shamed for being a Christian, and not trying to hide it...

- *The student who dares to say to their teacher and class, "Evolution can't be a law (like you claim) – it's a theory (because it can't be proven or replicated), and I believe*

that God created life and the universe, and everything in it” ...

- *The Christian who says to your friend/family member, “I love you, but I can’t go to your same-sex wedding, because I cannot help you to celebrate (and commit to) something that God abhors.”*
- *The Christian who dares to speak on behalf of the weakest and most vulnerable in our society, and to say, “It is murder, to take the life of an unborn child.”*
- *Be bold enough to publicly speak the Gospel of Christ, telling the world they need to repent, and submit to Jesus as Lord...*

If you do these sorts of things, the odds are pretty high, that you will be publicly shamed.

And in the context of Public persecution, ridicule, and shame, Peter’s word to us today, is that you might be shamed before the world, but in God’s eyes, God’s people will be honoured, and that’s what **really** matters...

To be a disciple of Jesus (Christian), is to belong to the people of God – actually, it’s more than that – Christians **are** the people of God... And as such, not only is there no shame for us, but in God’s eyes, as we testify to God, to the world around us, we receive honour... And that’s what ‘really matters’, isn’t it....

Righto, let's get into the Bible reading.

It seems a strange sort of a metaphor for Peter to use – Jesus as a living stone, but it's a metaphor that works. You see, for the Jews, the Temple, represented the presence of God.

- Maintaining the sacrificial system **at** the Temple, is what was required for purity; and
- the temple itself (built of stones) was where God dwelt...

BTW: Not long after this letter was written, the Temple was destroyed (70AD), but nevertheless, for the Jew, the temple remained a holy place for them... And even today, the Jews go to the ruined remains of the temple, and pray at the stones of what's become known as the wailing wall....

But the thing is, as Paul said, “The God who created the universe, doesn't live in a temple built by human hands”ⁱ

And there once was a time when the glory of God's presence **did** dwell in the Temple, but by the time that Jesus was born, that time had long passed... (Ezekiel 10) The glory of God had left the temple, and didn't return...

But, when Jesus came, this was the presence of God returning to the Temple. Jesus was the place that God dwelt, (because He **is** God)... But they rejected Him... And what a tragedy... When God visited His temple – when Jesus entered the

religious capital of Jerusalem, and visited the Temple, they didn't only reject Him – He was put on trial, and executed....

Now, when I used that word “tragedy”, don't think for a moment, that it was some kind of horrendous mistake... It was all part of the transition that was foretold by the prophets of old... In fact, there are so many Old Testament references in this passage today, that if we studied them all, we wouldn't have time for the message.

But it was God's plan. The prophets had foretold it, and Jesus knew what was going on... It was a time of a radicle transition:

- God had removed His presence from the Temple;
- God was now present in Jesus Christ (the living stone); and
- Jesus was going to build the new temple – the Christian church

In the Gospel of Mark, we catch a glimpse of this transition:
Let me set the scene:

- Jesus has come to Jerusalem, and He's at the temple.
- The religious leaders have just questioned the authority of Jesus
- and so Jesus tells them a very cutting parable – the parable of the tenants, which is about how the tenants of a vineyard rebelled against the owner, and eventually the

owner of the vineyard said, I know – I’ll send my son – they have to take notice of him...

But they killed the owner’s Son... (Obviously talking about how the religious leaders had rebelled against God and would soon kill His Son). And then Jesus quoted Ps118:

Mark 12:10-11 (ESV)

¹⁰ **Have you not read this Scripture:**

**“ The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;**

¹¹ **this was the Lord's doing,
and it is marvellous in our eyes'?”**

The Apostle Peter heard Jesus say that. And this was something that stuck with Peter, and a lesson that he not only learned, but he shared it, over and over again...

Maybe the metaphor of the rock meant a lot to Peter, because
remember:

Simon ⇒ Peter (the rock)

(Peter’s confession “You are the Christ, the Son of the
Living God” Matt 16:13ff)

And so it stuck with Peter. In Acts 4, after the resurrection of Jesus and His ascension, and after Pentecost, Peter and John had been arrested and brought before the religious authorities,
Acts 4:8-12 (ESV)

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them,
“Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being

examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Alright, Peter had learned from Jesus, and then the Holy Spirit helped Peter to speak it out...

And as it all panned out, it wasn't only Jesus who was rejected by the Jews, but the whole Christian church was eventually rejected, and they were banned from the synagogues, and they weren't welcome at the temple any more...

And so, how could they worship God, if they weren't allowed at His temple???? - isn't that where God lived???

Well, the thing is, this is something completely new, that God was doing...

Yeah, Jesus **was** rejected by men, but in the sight of God, He was chosen and precious. BTW, being chosen, is a theme that

just keeps coming up through this letter – Jesus is chosen; we are chosen....

And as we come to Jesus:

To become a Christian, involves coming to Jesus... And to come to Jesus, means we have to leave other stuff behind – our old sinful way of life – we leave that behind, and we come to Jesus...

And as we come to Jesus (the living stone), we ourselves **like** living stones are being built up as a spiritual house

When we come to Jesus, something amazing – something profound, is happening... And it's something which is much bigger than just us... You know, for many people today (and even people in the church), their perspective is so self-focused (It's all about me. What's in it for me? What happens to me? What's my identity???)...

But, our identity here – what we're being built into, isn't about us as individuals – it's about the corporate us. (& when I use that word “corporate”, I'm not talking about a “business model (corporate)” – I'm talking about “the bunch of us together” – It's “who we are together” (the corporate “us”) (a mutual, shared, communal group)”... We're talking about us Christians together – the church...

Last week Peter started taking us this direction, and we talked about how shared Christian community and love for each other is so important... And now today, we're going deeper, to discover why it's so important..... You see, God isn't building us individually into a spiritual house – He's building us **together** into a spiritual house...

You know, some people think that a church building is the house of God... Not at all... – it's the people – it's the church community, who are the house of God... ... When Christians gather together as the corporate, communal people of God, God is doing something profound – God is building us into His spiritual home. And this is the place where the presence of God dwells...

How do we experience the presence of God in a church???

You know what:::

- It's not when excellent musicians play really moving music that God suddenly becomes present in a church... I don't deny the power of music, and the ability of music to touch us where we feel and stimulate our emotions... But music does **not** conjure up the presence of God; and
- It's not having the right mood-lighting and building design and furnishings, so that everything is 'just so'.... That makes God present in a church;
- And parents, I want you to know that God is not scared away by a crying baby... You don't need to leave the room with your crying infant, so the church can experience the presence of God...

- You see, it's not about 'atmosphere'... These days, so much planning and energy and expense, goes into trying to create the right sort of environment/atmosphere/mood for God's Spirit to be felt...

Do you know what environment is needed, for us to experience the presence of God???

It's simply the people of God – individuals who have come to Jesus, meeting together, being built up (by God) into a spiritual house... It's a picture of unity, isn't it... And remember last week – How does brotherly love, grow into a **deeper** love within the church??? It's a shared craving for the pure word of God...

Isn't this wonderful.... We're pulling together the last few week's messages (right now), and this is what we come to:

1. By faith in Jesus, we come together as the people of God; and
2. as we crave the pure word of God, our love for each other grows; and
3. God is building us (as the gathered people of God), into His spiritual home...

But it gets deeper yet – it gets even more profound than this –

4. He's making us into a Holy Priesthood....

OOOKKKK... Is anybody here thinking of taking up a new vocation and joining the priesthood????

It's not a job many people want...

There's lot of experts who feel quite capable of telling a priest what he should be doing, but not too many are itching to take it on...

There once was a time, when ordinary people like you and I – we needed an intermediary between us and God. And it was the worthy men from the tribe of Levi who were able to serve in the temple. But even they, didn't get to experience the presence of God... Only the High Priest was allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies (where the presence of God dwelt), and that could only happen once a year...

But now, we (not individually), but we as the communal church of God, are being built into a holy priesthood...

So, how do you feel about that???"

You see, in the church, we tend to think of the Pastor/Minister/Padre as “the priest”... And:

- He does the special God stuff; and
- He has the responsibility to live a bit more holy than the rest of us (BTW, I'm sorry about that, but I've probably let you down, because I'm not any more holy than you are)
- He is the one who is ‘set aside’ to serve Jesus;

- He's the one responsible for making sure the church operates as it should;

But that's not the case at all. You and I together, as the church, are being built up together as the temple of God, **and** as the priesthood of God...

This profound thing that God is doing, cannot be done in an individual – if you're a Christian on your own, you're going to miss out on this amazing thing that God does in a church who are united in Christ...

So, what's the **purpose** of all this???

- Are we being built up into a spiritual building (in which God dwells) so that we can feel really good about ourselves???
- Are we being made into a holy priesthood so that we can have an identity to be proud of??? “Hey guess what – I'm part of the holy priesthood of God...”

No. It's not about us...

- And it's not so that I can say to you “God has a plan and purpose for your life.”...

It's so that we can offer **spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

That's what the priesthood did – the priesthood offered sacrifices... Only we don't need to offer the blood of bulls/sheep/goats & whatnot... Jesus was our once and all (blood) sacrifice offered on our behalf...

The sacrifice that God requires, is the sacrifice that He's always required...

And you might be thinking to yourself, "I don't really know that I've got anything to offer..." And you may very well be right... I know that on my own, I have nothing to offer God...

But for us as His People, and **through Jesus Christ**, we offer spiritual sacrifices, which **are** acceptable to God, because they come through Jesus...

It's not about:

- the blood of bulls or sheep or goats...
- grain/food offerings; or
- any other offerings we read about in Leviticus;
- how much money we put in the offering;
- what we choose to go without (lent/fasting)

The sacrifice we offer, is:

- living Holy lives;
- Praising God; and
- declaring/proclaiming the excellencies, of the God who called us **out of darkness, and into His marvellous light.**

Alright, so our sacrifice is:

- Righteous living
- Adoring praise
- Witnessing to the Gospel

Jesus is building us together (with Him), into His church. And as His holy priesthood (together), our sacrifice is:

- Righteous living
- Adoring praise
- Witnessing to the Gospel

We're going to leave it there now, and we'll come back to this some more next week..

Let's pray:

Lord, it is Your doing,
And it is marvellous in our eyes...
- that the stone that was rejected,
Our Lord Jesus Christ,
Has become the foundation stone of this incredible
thing that you are building...

He was killed, but now He is raised from the dead, and
He is the **living** stone...

Oh Lord, for many of us, there's been times when we've
despised your church, and we've absented ourselves
from the Fellowship, and tried to go-it-alone...

We might've called it:

- Hurt;
- Having time out;
- Justified it by saying "It's all too hard and it's not worth it..."

But Lord, You never said that doing Your will, would be easy... And deep down, we know that fellowshipping together as Your church, is Your will; and Your design; and Your calling,,,

And therefore, when we take our stone out of the building of the living stone, that's sin...

God, forgive us...

And Lord, we want to thank You that You are the builder.

And we want to say, "I am a living stone in Your hands."

I surrender my pride;

I surrender my own designs...

And I submit myself wholly to You.

May we as stones, be built into Your church,

For Your glory,

And as Your royal priesthood,

May we serve You;

And honour You;

And Glorify You;
Live Holy lives (worthy of You);

And to unashamedly proclaim,
Your glorious Gospel into the world,

Amen...