



Living as Jesus' honored people

Sermon for August 21 2022

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1 Peter 2:4-12

My name is Austin Kettle, and I am training to be a pastor at McLean Presbyterian church, a few miles from here. I am so happy to be here with you today. My wife and I have visited One Voice before, and we love worshipping with you. I am delighted to share God's word with you tonight.

The last time I was teaching the New City Catechism I was in a very different place. This was a Christian children's home in Myanmar, where my wife Rachel and I lived for four years. During that time, I taught these children English once or twice a week. They came from all over the country, mainly from areas with a lot of conflict. The children spoke five or six different languages. For one year, I taught them English grammar and we played language games. Then I decided to take them through the New City Catechism. Each week, we read the question and the answer, and also read the Bible passages in English. Then the children divided into language groups. Each group read the scriptures in their own language, then translated the question and answer into their own language. At the end of the year, they had the whole catechism in their own languages.

That's why I feel it is so beautiful to revisit this Catechism with you, in the USA. Each of you has your own story and your own language. And the word of God is true in every one of those languages.

Before we continue, would you pray with me for those kids? In 2021 there was a military coup, and many of these children have lost the futures they were hoping for. Educational opportunities are gone, the economy has crashed, and the civil war has become much worse. Let me pray briefly.

The New City Catechism is a great summary of what we believe as Christians. I'm going to read Question 34 now, and then let's read the answer together.

Question 34: Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through Christ alone, must we still do good works and obey God's word?

Yes, because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, also renews us by his spirit;
so that our lives may show love and gratitude to God;
so that we may be assured of our faith by the fruits;
and so that by our godly behavior others may be won to Christ.

Here is another way of asking the question: Why would we choose to obey God's word if Jesus has already saved us? And here is another way of answering the question: People who are redeemed by Jesus have the honor of proclaiming God's greatness in the way they live their lives.

This is what the apostle Paul was teaching in today's passage of scripture. I am going to read it now.

1 Peter 2:4–12 (NLT)

4 "You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple.

He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor.

5 And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple.

What's more, you are his holy priests.

Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.

6 As the Scriptures say, "I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem, chosen for great honor;
and anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced."

7 Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him.

But for those who reject him, "The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone."

8 And, "He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them.

9 But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people.

You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession.

As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

10 "Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people.

Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy."

11 Dear friends, I warn you as "temporary residents and foreigners" to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls.

12 Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors.

Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world."

Amen.

In these verses, the apostle Peter is helping us see why it is important to obey God. When we see clearly what Jesus did for us, we will obey Him out of gratitude. Part of this is in the past, and part is in the present. We remember what Jesus did in the past, and we recognize what he is doing for us right now. In the past, Jesus lived a perfect life. You have never seen anything like this. Jesus made every decision unselfishly. He obeyed God in every moment. Jesus was always kind, patient, and loving. He was wise, hard-working, and unafraid of other people.

And at the end of this perfect life, Jesus chose to die incredibly painfully. Why? To pay the penalty for our rebellion against God. I am sure you know about this. How each one of us has rebelled against God. Sometimes rebellion is necessary to achieve freedom from oppression or an evil government. But when people rebel against a genuinely good ruler, then the rebellion is destructive for everyone. God is perfectly loving and perfectly wise. He is never tempted to corruption. God is never unjust. He fights for the weak, and protects the suffering. God is a wonderful ruler, but we have joined the rebellion against him. That's why we deserve punishment. Jesus died on the cross because we deserve punishment. Jesus absorbed all our punishment, and it looked like he was defeated. Verse 4 of our text says:

"Jesus was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor."

We have all rejected Jesus, but he still chose to give everything for us--even his life.

This is what it means to be redeemed by Jesus. He paid the price we owe for our rebellion. Jesus did not take out his wallet and pay a month's wages to repair a car we damaged, or something like that. Jesus paid with his life.

Some people ask: "Do I really need to obey God's word?" This is the question they are really asking: "Do I need to obey the perfect, loving King who bled and died so that I could live?" Yes, I think what he has done for us should change how we live for him.

The Christian life is not only about what Jesus did in the past. Being redeemed is more than something that happened in the past. If you follow Jesus, you are redeemed historically, but you are also redeemed presently. God has given you his Spirit to

live in you. That is true right now, for anyone who has come to Jesus and received new life in Him. Look at verse 5:
5 "And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple.

What's more, you are his holy priests.

Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God."

Do you see how that is what God is doing in us presently? He is building us, together, into something beautiful. We will talk more about that honor in a moment, but right now think about this: Jesus paid a huge price for you, and he did it deliberately. He saw what he could transform you into. He bled and died to take your punishment, and he gave his own spirit to live in you.

And don't miss what is at the end of verse 6: we're not only talking about the past and the present, but also the future.

6 "anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced."

Jesus promises that on the day when everything is revealed, his people will be safe. Nothing that you regret will condemn you. Your sin has been nailed to the cross. The Spirit is at work in you now. And if you belong to Christ, you will rejoice on the day of judgment.

So why should we obey God's word? Because when we look at the story of what he has done for us, we see that he has given us amazing things. He has given us forgiveness, and he has given us his spirit. Before we knew Jesus, we lived with despair and fear and emptiness. Now God has given us peace, and hope, and a better way to live.

The first reason to obey God's word is gratitude for what he has done. Second, we are honored to be called by God to believe, therefore we obey Him as a privilege. We find this in verses 7-9.

Before I say this, remember that it is everybody's duty to obey God, whether or not they are a Christian. Romans 1 teaches us that everyone tries very hard to reject our duty to God. But duty for a good cause is a good thing.

As a father, it is my duty to care for my daughter. It is hard work. But is it a bad thing? No! It is an honor--I get to be the person she turns to for help.

It is a great honor to be an astronaut. But would you live the way astronauts live if you believed it was unfair or wrong? Would you train, and endure, and spend months alone, and eat dehydrated food, and risk death?

To do hard things and live differently, we need a good reason. And the world believes living God's way is not worth it. Those who do not believe in Christ think that living his way is not only unnecessary, but offensive.

Obedying God is a duty, but also an honor. Look at verses 7-9.

7 "Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him.

But for those who reject him:

"The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone."

8 And, "He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them.

9 But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people.

You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession.

As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light."

In verse 7, Peter tells us that God has given us honor when He calls us to live differently. Then Peter tells us what that honor looks like.

Peter tells us that we have honor, but that those who do not believe do not share this honor. And this is our second reason to obey God's word: because living God's way is a privilege. In the Old Testament, Israel wasn't annoyed that they had to keep God's law while all the other nations were free. The law was their privilege! God loved them so much that he taught them how to live as his special people.

Do you see that same call in these verses? Verse 9 tells us that there is a specific reason that God has given us the honor of obeying him: to be his representatives in the world. Each of those four names for his people tells us something about this. We are from many different countries, but we are called one chosen people. God has chosen us, with all our differences, to be his. He has also called us royal priests. Royal means you belong to the king. If you are a Christian, you belong to the King of kings. You have the privilege of being a member of God's family. You are also a royal priest, and you have a job to do! Priests bring people to God.

That helps us understand the purpose of this honor we receive from God. Peter explains this with two more images: Peter says we are a holy nation, and a people for God's own possession. God treasures us, and he honors us.

How do you know that someone really honors you, and isn't just saying nice things? If someone truly honors you, they will trust you with difficult things. God knows that we are not very good at obeying him. God knows we struggle to live holy lives, and it is hard to tell people about Jesus. But God honors us by asking us to do these hard things. He gives us the Holy Spirit so that we can do things that we cannot do alone.

Allow me to review a little bit. First, God has honored us and called us his special possession. Second, we obey God out of gratitude, but we also obey him as a privilege.

Here is the third thing: God has made our lives meaningful, therefore we obey him as a testimony. Sometimes we are tempted to believe that our lives are not important. We see rich and powerful people, and we think we are insignificant. The things worry about this week make us feel that we are only surviving. We can be tempted to believe that God's word is distant from the daily realities of our lives. We might feel that the way we live is not important. Verse 10 recognizes this feeling, but also tells us of a big change that has happened.

10 "Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people.

Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy."

When we feel like we are nobody, God says we are his people. When we think God must be disappointed in our ordinary lives, full of mistakes, we read that we have received mercy.

Then verses 11 and 12 tell us that we are going to face two choices: We can live like we are God's people, so our lives and decisions are meaningful. Or we can live like lost people, and do whatever we want. Listen to verses 11 and 12 again:

11 "Dear friends, I warn you as "temporary residents and foreigners" to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls.

12 Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors.

Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world."

Peter reminds us that we have a choice to live as God's people and obey His word. Our identity will be revealed by what we don't do, and what we choose to do. We will say no to things that God tells us not to do. We will "live properly" and live honorable lives. We will choose to do good things, according to God's word. Why? Not so that people think we are good people. They won't. They will think we are wrong, foolish, and even bad.

But when we choose to live God's way, our lives become a living testimony. We become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, that we saw at the beginning of the passage.


This will have two effects: We will encourage each other that God is at work among his people. And we will give evidence to the lost. We give evidence in the things we do and in the ways we live. We give evidence that God is good, and God is king. It's what God has commanded us to do with our words and with our lives. And one day everyone--saved and unsaved--will glorify God, overwhelmed by the evidence of his goodness. Not everyone will come to Jesus. But God will receive glory, even when people choose to reject him and live as rebels.

Let's all try to ask ourselves these questions this week: What am I tempted to do, that I should reject because I belong to God? And what can I do to show the world that God is good? How can I proclaim his excellencies, in my words and with my actions?

When you are tempted to ignore God's word and "follow your heart" remember the ways Jesus loves you: He bled and died for you. He gives you an honorable position. Jesus makes your actions, and your life meaningful, consequential, and important.

Jesus has been very good to you, therefore it is good to obey God. We obey to show gratitude and as a privilege. Because we recognize how blessed we are to have lives that are full of meaning. Praise God! God cares about us so much that he cares how we live, and has taught us how to do it. He has provided the Holy Spirit to help us. And he has taken away all fear of failure in the beautiful gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together now.

 One Voice Fellowship