

# The Church Is

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[ 0 : 00 ] This is a sermon from Kings Church West! Excellent guys, well Mike is going to come and speak to us but also he is going to come and read the scripture for today.

This is from 1 Peter 2 verse 4. As you come to him the limestone rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to heaven.

You are like limestone that are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in the scripture it says, And 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 builders rejected has become the cornerstone and a stone that funds people to stumble and walk amongst them whole. They stumble because they disobey the message, which is what they were missing for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who pulled you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. Once you have not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Thank you.

[ 1 : 34 ] Brilliant. Thank you so much. It was great to be with you guys. Everyone at Hope Church sends their greetings.

Sound like the star of a New Testament letter, don't I? But they all say hello. And isn't it great that we get to be part of a hub of churches, three churches in Scotland. And you know, it's just such an encouragement to us hearing and being here and seeing what's happening with you guys.

And it's such an encouragement to Kings as well. And I know that we mutually encourage one another. Well, I want to talk today about the church.

This is what has been on my heart for you guys. Some time ago, I visited a church and I walked in and no one spoke to me. No one greeted me at the door.

No one gave me a welcome. No one spoke to me until I sat down on a pew and I was asked to move because it was someone else's seat. That's the only conversation that happened before the start of the service.

[ 2 : 38 ] And I realized halfway through the service that I was the only guy not wearing a black suit. And I thought I didn't realize I'd come to a funeral. But it wasn't. That's what people wore there.

And I don't know about you, but that wasn't my usual experience of church and what it is. I don't know what kind of experiences you've had of church, but certainly being part of Kings here in West Lothian, that's not the usual experience, is it?

No. No. And whatever you have been your experience and whatever you think about the church, I want to encourage us today that actually I think it's too small.

And I think that God wants to challenge us and say whatever we think about church is too small.

And he wants to raise our expectations for what he is building among you here in Kings.

Is that okay? Are you with me? Are you ready for that? Yes. And this passage is actually a phenomenal passage. This text that's just been read out from 1 Peter.

[ 3 : 45 ] And I, one of my favorite preachers, Tim Keller, preached on this a number of years ago. And it's just stuck with me. It's just a passage that just so resonates with my heart.

So, it starts in verse 4. As you come to him. Who? Jesus. This is all about Jesus. As you come to him, the living stone.

There's lots of talk about stones. The stone in Zion. The precious stone. A corner stone. What's going on here? Well, the corner stone was the first stone that was laid in the foundation of a building

or a structure.

And that's the stone that was true and right to which all the other stones were added to. So that the building turns into a proper looking building and not the leaning tower of Pisa.

And in the Old Testament, the temple was built of stone. It's where God met with his people. It's where his presence dwelt.

[ 4 : 44 ] And then Jesus came along and he said in Matthew and Mark and Luke that he was the stone. He was the corner stone. And then he said in John that if you destroy this temple, I'll raise it up in three days.

And everyone said, what? It took us over 40 years to build this temple. How can you build a temple in three days? But what Jesus was referring to was his own death and his resurrection.

So what Jesus was saying is that the presence of God has now been made available to us through him. So he's the corner stone.

He's the temple. And you see what this means? You also like living stones. So we put our faith in Jesus and Jesus becomes the foundation.

He becomes the corner stone of our life. We are made alive in Christ. We have a personal salvation in him. But it's not just personal.

[ 5 : 53 ] Look at what it says. You also like living stones are being built into a spiritual house. Now I think we have an image.

Oh, it's there. Stones. This is a stone wall. I'm sure you're all familiar. We've all seen that. And see how all the different stones, shapes, sizes, they all beautifully fit together to create that structure. But we are being built together as living stones. Not into some stone wall, but into a beautiful, glorious, spiritual house.

The temple of God. And who's the temple? Jesus. So we, the living stones, represent Jesus. We are his body, his church on planet Earth.

And if we jump down to verse 9, it says you are a chosen people. Not just a chosen person, but a chosen people. We all collectively share in the life of Jesus.

[ 7 : 00 ] It's his life that unifies us. We are one church together. No social classes. No racial divides. No age barriers.

Look around you. Look around the room. These are your brothers and sisters in Christ. How does that make you feel?

It's an amazing thing. And you have brothers and sisters all around the world because we are part of a global church.

And that's not all. We together, it goes on in verse 9, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.

God's special possession. In the Old Testament, God chose Israel as his nation, his people to represent him on planet Earth.

[ 7 : 57 ] And in Exodus 19, he made a covenant with them. What's a covenant? It's a binding agreement. He was drawing them into a relationship of love. He was saying, I am yours and you are mine.

And when he did that, he made his presence known to them. He revealed his glory. What's his glory? It's the infinite greatness and goodness and brilliance and power and majesty.

It's the presence of God. And Moses, at that moment, said to God, well, let me look right at it. And God said, no. It will kill you.

Because it's my presence. But I will let it pass by. And God came down in fire and smoke and the earth shook.

His glory was revealed. His presence was made known. It passed by. And then God said this to his people. You can read it in Exodus 19.

[ 9 : 01 ] You will be for me. You will be my treasured possession. You will be for me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. Haven't we heard that before somewhere?

Yes. We just read it. It's the same scripture that's in this passage in 1 Peter. And here, Peter is using this text from the Old Testament in the New Testament because what he's saying is the same glory, the same power that came down at Sinai in fire and smoke and shoot the earth.

The presence of God we have access to in the church. And maybe you're thinking, well, that's funny because when I come in here, there usually isn't fire.

The elders aren't running around with fire extinguishers. And the last time I checked, there wasn't an earthquake. That is because God doesn't reveal himself that way. Because the glory of God is revealed to us in Jesus. And you and me, we together have his life in us.

[10:12] So, this is what this must be saying. This is what Peter is getting at. God, in his glory, inhabits his people.

You and me. His church. His body. We, the living stones, the body of Christ, have access to the glory of God that cannot be accessed in any other way.

Do you see why I'm saying our idea of church might just be a little bit too small? Do you see why I'm saying we need to raise our expectations? Do you realize what this means and what's available to us?

In Isaiah 6, there's an amazing story where Isaiah is in the temple. And Isaiah was in the temple most days.

And on one particular day, he experiences the glory of God. And it says in that text that God is high and exalted. And the train of his robe filled the temple.

[11:14] He had this incredible vision of who God is. And holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. The earth is full of his glory. You can read that in Isaiah 6.

His glory came down. It passed by. And Isaiah was undone. He was never the same again. It changed his whole life.

Why? Because he encountered the glory of God. Here's the thing. Isaiah was there most days. Why this day?

Well, the temple was where the priests served. But it was not just that. It's where God's presence, where his glory dwelled.

And that means that his glory, his presence can break out. His spirit can move at any time. In 1856, in Northern Ireland.

[12:15] It's a great place, isn't it, Jill? A young man named James McQuilkin responded to the good news of Jesus.

And he started going to a church in a place called Kells. And the pastor encouraged him and two other young guys to start meeting together, to pray together, and to share their faith with their friends.

And they did. And after a few weeks, some of their friends started to come to faith. And it grew. And after a few months, dozens were showing up at their little weekly meeting.

And then the young people asked the pastor if they could meet in a neighboring town and use one of the churches there. And they did. To share testimony of what Jesus was doing.

And so many people showed up that they couldn't fit in the church building and it spilled out onto the streets. And it went on all evening and all through the night, sharing about what Jesus had done in their lives.

[13:12] Between 1856 and 1890, 100,000 people, God saved, believed in Jesus, and started attending church in Northern Ireland.

That was a third of the population. What was going on? The Holy Spirit broke out.

The glory came down. It passed by. And you say, well, that's fine. That's great for Northern Ireland. What about Scotland? Okay. In 1742, Cambuslang revivals.

That started in a children's meeting. Where children encountered the presence of God and went home and told their parents about it. 1750s, Kilsyth, revivals where God broke out in an incredible way.

1800s, Perthshire revivals all over that area. Early 1900s, there were local awakenings all over Scotland. Where people were just saved and came to know Jesus.

[14:15] Lewis revival in the Outer Hebrides. In 1949, it started into the 50s. And it started with a church meeting.

And God started convicting people. And he carried on. The Holy Spirit just kept moving. And meeting after meeting, people would just encounter the presence of God.

And people that never attended church in their lives were suddenly would meet God in spectacular ways. Be convicted of their sin and need, have this desire to get right with God.

Whole communities transformed. The pubs emptied. Crime rates dropped. Churches were overflowing. Thousands of people on those islands came to faith in Jesus.

And the Holy Spirit broke out. And the Holy Spirit broke out. His glory passed by. You see, where God's glory dwells, it can break out.

[15:15] The Spirit can move at any time. And we just read, you, me, us, are a chosen people.

A royal priesthood. A holy nation. We, the church, are that spiritual house. The temple of God where God's presence, where God's glory dwells.

God inhabits His people. And that means we have the access to the glory of God that is not otherwise available. We have access to the glory of God that is not otherwise available.

So what if? What if we were to see the Spirit break out? And God's presence come down? What about this community?

What if we were, imagine, we were to see people started showing up at the door saying, Are you a church? Because I need to get right with Jesus.

[16:27] I don't know what's happening to me, but there's something in me stirring and I just need to join you guys. Can you imagine that? Do you long for that?

Because this can happen, guys. How do we activate that? How do we build an expectancy for that? For more of God to move in this way?

Well, before every move of God, there's a fresh encounter with His grace. And the answer is right here in this same text.

God's grace. And this is what I want us to see. The gift it is, and how loved you are. Verse 10.

Let's jump down to that. 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.

[17:30] Peter is on a bit of a roll here. He's quoting again from the Old Testament. This time from Hosea chapter 2. So if we double click on that and consider what was happening in Hosea 2, then we get the understanding of this.

Hosea, the prophet, was married to Gomer. And she was unfaithful to him. She had numerous adulterous affairs. And she had children by some of those affairs.

And he names one, Lo-Ami. Not mine. Not my people. And she leaves him for someone else. But he abuses her and sells her into slavery.

And God says to Hosea, go and love her again. So Hosea buys her out of slavery, brings her home, and said, I have chosen you.

You are loved by me. Hosea was living out the prophetic heart and message of God to his people.

[18:42] And God was saying, not my people, but now you are my people. And one day, that's what I'm going to do for my church.

And guys, this is us. And this is included here in this very text. You see, in Jesus, when we weren't in the slightest bit interested in him, he died for me and you.

He died on that cross and said, I see you. I'm doing this for you. He gave up his life for us. And through his death and resurrection, we have free access.

We have access to God and all that he has for us. He takes our past. He takes our shame. He takes our guilt. And we are gifted with a new life in him.

We are literally bought out of slavery. And you say, oh, I wasn't aware I was in slavery. I know my job's hard work, but I wouldn't exactly call myself a slave. We are slaves to ourselves.

[19:50] We are slaves to our sin. We are slaves to hopelessness. But in Jesus, it is all put right. Not my people.

Now my people, says God. Now you've received mercy. Through no effort of our own. It's a gift. It's a gift. And that gift is grace.

Do you see what a gift it is? And it says, you were a royal priesthood. A holy nation. Ever felt unimportant?

Ever felt not good enough? Well, this says you were a chosen people. I don't know about you. But when I was at secondary school, I hated PE.

Not because I was lazy and didn't enjoy sports. But because every time we did a team sport, it seemed that the two cool guys who were really, really good at sports and knew it.

[20:54] You know, the kind of guys that walked down the corridor and girls giggled. You know, those guys. They always got to choose the teams. And I hated it. Because you'd be standing there.

And it was no good for anyone's self-esteem. And you'd just be hoping and praying that you might get picked and not be the last guy left standing there. And I used to think, choose me, choose me, choose me.

Guys, we have already been chosen by God in Jesus. He chose us through grace. He loved us first.

And we bear his name. We're royalty. We belong to the King of kings. You have the life of Christ. That is your standing before him.

A royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's special possession. A more accurate wording there is you are God's treasured possession.

[ 21 : 57 ] Now, let's just say that you don't own anything particularly valuable. You don't have anything more than a few hundred pounds. And then suddenly, out the blue, you receive an inheritance from a distant relative you didn't know you had.

And you've been left an antique watch. And you think, okay, well, maybe I'll take it to the jewelers and get it valued. And to your astonishment, the jeweler says, hmm, this is a very rare piece. There were only ten of these ever made. Do you know what value it is? No idea. Six million pounds. Oh, my goodness. Well, that changes things.

I mean, I better change the lock on the front door. I better not wear it to church in case Michael takes a liking to it. I better guard this very valuable watch.

Is that now your most treasured possession? Yes. It's worth more than everything else put together. And for God to say to us, to you, that you are his most treasured possession, what he's saying is out of the whole of the universe, out of all of creation, out of all of the heavens and the earth and the galaxies and the highest mountain and the deepest ocean, out of the greatest generous act that's ever been done in humanity, out of all of that, you are worth more than all of that put together to me.

[ 23 : 29 ] That's what God is saying. That's what God is saying. You are his treasured possession. Do you see how loved you are?

You're free. You're loved. You're accepted. You are made holy in Christ. This is who you are in him, and it is all by grace.

This is where grace becomes amazing. And the extent that we get that will activate just how expectant we are and how much God can work through us and in us.

Because there's a link. The James McQuilkin story, the guy on Northern Ireland. You see, there was one woman who was doing door to door, sharing the good news of Jesus.

And she said, it didn't bear much fruit. But one guy responded to her message. It was James McQuilkin.

[ 24 : 41 ] Do you see the link? Are we expectant for what God can do through us and in us? Guys, God is on the move in this nation.

I have never known such spiritual openness, particularly amongst younger people. I've just never seen anything like it. We've just encountered, I've got personal stories just over the last few weeks of people saying, I just, I don't know what it is, but I want to get right with Jesus.

I don't know what this is, but will you help me follow Jesus? There's a guy I met with once in the street. And he just, I'd met him briefly.

And then he, one day I was praying for him. And to my astonishment, I bumped into him, literally in the street. And he said, Mike, I've been listening to your sermons. And my first thought was, good grief.

You've been listening to my sermons and you still want to speak to me? Well, that's good. But I had a coffee with him. And he said, I just, there's something, he said, can you explain to me why when I read the Bible I cry?

[ 25 : 52 ] I said, maybe the Holy Spirit's doing something. And then the second time I met with him, I stopped him halfway through the conversation. I said, hang on, are you telling me that you believe Jesus died on the cross for your sin and rose again and that you have new life in him?

He said, oh yeah, yeah, I believe all of that. He said, I already believe. Just show me what to do. How do I follow Jesus? Those were his exact words. There's other stories. And I'm sure you have stories.

But what if we have more stories? What if we see God do that on a larger scale? Are you longing for that? Are you expecting for that?

Because look, verse 9. Let's continue, finish the verse. You are God's special possession that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

We, the church, are where his glory dwells. We reveal him. We reveal his glory to the world. There's a glorious temple being built when we gather together like this.

[ 27 : 04 ] We are on display to touch the lives of the people around us. And as Carl Henry put it, the gospel is only good news if it gets there on time. Because there's work to be done.

With me and you. So will we let this text from 1 Peter reignite the wonder of who we are in Christ? The gift of grace. How free it is. How loved you are. Will we let it reignite the wonder of what it is we've been called into as his church?

And maybe you're thinking, yeah, but the church is just full of flaws. The church is full of people that let me down. True. Because it's filled with people like me.

People that don't have it all together. People that have hang-ups and hurts and a propensity towards sin. That's me. That's us. But by God's grace, he is transforming us into something majestic and beautiful.

[ 28 : 12 ] He is building a glorious temple. And guys, the church is the only organization that Jesus came to start. And he said he's building his church.

The church is where God's glory dwells. And it can't be accessed any other way. It can break out. His spirit can move at any time.

So let's give up our small thinking. Let's raise our expectations. And let's imagine and dare to believe what God wants to do in this area of Scotland.

Because you, me, we are the church of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen.