



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Peter 2: 6-10

Summer 2024

"The Priesthood"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. Good to see all of you; I know this is where I want to be, so I trust it is for all of you. We are continuing our studies in 1 Peter, and we're in chapter 2, and this morning we're going to look at verses 6 through 10.

Last week, in verse 5, Peter commented, (or wrote), that we are, "a spiritual house", (we are God's temple), and we are, "a holy priesthood"; great privileges that we have.

And now he supports that, gives the evidence of that, in verses 6 through 10, with a number of citations from the Old Testament. He says,

⁶ For *this* is contained in Scripture:

"Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone,

a precious corner *stone*,

And he who believes in Him,

will not be disappointed."

⁷ This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve,

"The stone which the builders rejected,

This became the very corner *stone*,"

⁸ and,

"A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense";

for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed. (That word, "doom", is, as you notice, added as an interpretation of the word "this". I'll come back to that in the lesson.)

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2: 6-10

The great blessings that those persecuted saints had—and are also the blessings that we share with them in Christ. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank You for those great blessings, that Peter unfolds here, as a word of great encouragement to a people who were worn down by persecution and hardship. That is the case with so many of Your saints. We face spiritual challenges and difficulties in this world that's fallen, this world of darkness, out of which You have called us into Your Light. What a blessing and a privilege it is—and we need to know that. And I pray that as we study this text this morning, You will enlighten our minds and You'll give us an understanding of the real blessings that we have in Christ. May this be a time of remembrance, maybe a time of further understanding—but a time of really understanding, and enjoying, and rejoicing in the blessings You give us. We're priests in Your temple—and we are Your temple chosen by You. Why would You choose us? That's the mystery; but you did because You love us. Father, thank You for all of that.

And we know that You're in control of the material things of life, absolutely in control of everything, and it's good to remember that. And because that is true, we can pray about these things; we can pray about the difficulties of life, the material issues of life that we face. Some in our congregation and friends outside the congregation are

without employment. We pray that You'd bless them, open doors of opportunity, give them patience. May they look to You, and may they see Your hand of blessing.

Father, there are other things that we could pray about. You know our condition; You know the condition of each and every one of us here and You are completely, infinitely concerned for each of us. You're in control; may we rest in that and may we see Your hand of blessing in our life physically—but most importantly spiritually.

Bless us spiritually now as we will turn our attention to this great text of Scripture. Bless us as we sing our next hymn to prepare our hearts for a time of study and worship. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.

(Message) In the 1962 British epic movie, *Lawrence of Arabia*, there's an important scene when Lawrence and his Arab companions complete a deadly trek across the Sinai desert. They stand on the verge of the Suez canal. Lawrence is dressed in the garb of an Arab prince, covered in dust, when a British soldier on a motorcycle rides by on the other side of the canal. Lawrence's companions signal to the soldier for help. He stopped and called out, "Who are you?" There's silence from Lawrence. He called out again, "Who are you?" No answer. I call that an important scene because in the movie, that was Lawrence's problem. He didn't know who he was or where he belonged, an Arab or an Englishman?

Now the T. E. Lawrence of history was more grounded than the one in the movie; but I think the question is relevant for Christians today: Who are you? What are you to be doing? Those are important questions, and we can't function usefully if we don't know who we are and what we are to be doing. We might find that a lot of Christians can't answer those questions with any certainty.

Who are you? You are a priest, a priest of God Almighty. There is no more important, privileged position in all the world. What are you to be doing? Priestly work, and glorifying God.

These are the answers Peter gives us in our passage. It's already stated in verse 5, that we are "a holy priesthood". In verse 9 he calls us, "a royal priesthood." Then he gave the reasons for this great privilege and blessing, "...so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you..." (vs 9c).

That's our great goal, or purpose, or chief end in life. The Shorter Catechism famously put it very simply, and clearly, and correctly: It is, "...to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

And as Peter has already explained, 'We are well positioned and well equipped to do that.' In verse 5 he stated that we are 'God's temple'. When we came to Christ, whom he described as, "a living stone", (vs4), we became, "as living stones", (vs5), part of God's temple. But also 'priests', (vs5), in His temple. That word would have been a great encouragement to these downtrodden, persecuted saints. They were persecuted because they were Christians. They were persecuted because they had come to Christ.

But what they had come to was an unimaginable blessing. Solomon was amazed when he built his temple, that God would condescend *to dwell among* His people. Here we're told that we are part of His temple. So they hadn't given up anything in coming to Christ; they had gained everything. They were God's temple! God dwelt in them and they were His priests. That is really an amazing thing.

Now some might say, 'Yeah, that is an amazing thing. Prove it!' So now, in verses 6 through 10, Peter does just that. He supports his teaching and encouragement with several Old Testament quotations. They have been called "Stone Prophecies." He introduced them by saying, "For *this* is contained in Scripture." (vs6). In other words, 'The Old Testament is the evidence' for his bold claims about our position and our privilege. And that is conclusive proof; there's no greater proof nor higher authority than the one he gives, which is Scripture.

One of the watchwords of the Reformation became, "Scripture alone." This is one of the '*Five onlys*', and it is listed first because only Scripture, only Scripture, is our

final authority. And if we don't have Scripture, we can't know that the other four are true—we can't know that it is, 'Salvation by grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone.' Those are all true, but we can't know they're true if we don't have Scripture to teach us and prove it.

Now that's not just the Reformers, that's the apostles. Peter's authority for what he taught here is based on God's Word, (as all our beliefs must be). Not feelings, or general consensus; and certainly not tradition. Scripture alone.

Peter then quoted from Isaiah 28, (*verse 16*),

"Behold, I lay in Zion a choice *stone*,

A precious cornerstone." (vs6b).

That is a prophecy of judgment on the leaders of Jerusalem; a prophecy that God would sweep them away and would establish a permanent foundation for a better temple—and better service. He would, 'lay a cornerstone.'

Now that's an important stone; it is the first one laid as the corner of the foundation of a building. And the fact that this stone would be laid "in Zion", the place where the Jerusalem temple was, indicated that it would replace the temple and replace its priesthood.

Peter indicated that back in verses 4 and 5; but this is the scriptural proof for it. It's a very different temple from the stone structure that Solomon built—and then the stone structure and grand structure that Herod built. This is, 'a spiritual temple'. (vs5).

In one sense it is Christ. And I say that because in John chapter 2, verses 19 through 21, He, (*Christ*), says that, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again." (vs19). And then John explains: He's not speaking of 'that stone temple': "But He was speaking of the temple of His body." (vs21). And earlier, John wrote, "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us...", (meaning, 'He *tabernacled* among us', literally), "...and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." (Jn 1:14).

Christ is the tabernacle, or temple, of God. And since the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was given and the church began, we, too, are His temple because we are joined to Christ.

Today you can visit Jerusalem and go to the Western Wall, 'the Wailing Wall', and you can see the religious Jews crowded before it, praying—praying earnestly. It's all that's left of the second temple. It's not actually the temple proper, it's the western part of the wall that surrounded the temple; but you get a sense from it of the grandeur that structure had with its massive and finely cut stones.

But as great as it was, it could not compare to the glory of the present temple of Christ's body—the church. The temple was temporary; that one was, as Solomon's was. And it's all gone; only a few ruins remain.

But the church is eternal. It can never be destroyed. Not even 'the gates of hell will prevail against it.' (Mat 16:18). Christ is the cornerstone. And Peter and Isaiah promised that all who come to Him, all who believe in Him, all those who build their lives on Him and go through difficulties and are rejected by the world, all of those will not be disappointed or put to shame, embarrassed. Well, they may be rejected by men, they might be persecuted as a result of believing in Christ, but ultimately the faith, our faith, will be vindicated and there will be no disappointment in Christ. All that we have gone through, all that we have suffered, *will be as nothing*, compared to the glory that follows and the reward that follows.

In fact, in verse 7, Peter promises us "value", (or honor). Literally, the Greek text is, "For you therefore who believe is the honor." There's no greater honor than to be joined to Jesus Christ, to be friends of the King of Kings, Ruler of the universe who, as the author of Hebrews said, "...He is not ashamed to call us brethren." (Heb 2:11).

And through faith and faith alone, (not merit on our part), but by God's grace alone, we have believed in Him and we are joined to Him; and participate in Christ's life; have a part in His ministry; that's the honor.

But what is an encouragement for believers is, at the same time, a warning for unbelievers—because the One who they rejected is vindicated and exalted by God:

"The stone which the builders rejected,
This became the very corner *stone*." (vs7b).

Not 'the capstone', meaning, 'the top stone', as the New International Version has it. The word is literally, 'the head of the corner.' It refers to the first stone laid for the foundation. The "cornerstone" gives direction, gives proportion to the rest of the foundation—and to the whole building. Christ does that for all who build their lives on Him. And though the world will reject us, (you can see this from the problems these congregations faced, that it's common to the church), though the world will reject us, we will never be disappointed.

Not so those builders who rejected the great and glorious stone; 'they left it lying around', (that seems to be the picture that's given by the prophet), and 'stumbled over it'.

That's how Peter, in verse 8, described those who rejected Christ, the cornerstone, (which is a blessing for believers), is,

"A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense" (vs8a).
for unbelievers.

Now that's a quote; his next Old Testament quote from Isaiah, chapter 8, verse 14, where the prophet states that, "Then He, (*the LORD*), will be a sanctuary," for those who follow Him—but the reason for a fall and destruction for those who reject Him;

"A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense", to the "disobedient." (vs8).

Isaiah meant that for both of the houses of Israel; the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom; Peter here, applied that to the unbelievers of his day, Jews and Gentiles—and then explained that they "stumbled" because they were "disobedient to the word." (vs8b).

Now Peter was not writing to unbelievers. He was writing to believers; and he wrote this to encourage them. So you might wonder, 'Well how does the stumbling of the unbeliever and the destruction of the unbeliever, how would that be an

encouragement?' Well, the reality is, he's explaining here all that happened—everything that happened at the cross; and as a result what happened in their own lives—all of that was part of God's all wise plan.

The rejection of Christ and the world's hostility that surrounded these churches was not unforeseen; it was predicted centuries earlier by Isaiah. This is the nature of life in a fallen world; in this world of darkness, the 'sons of darkness' are against 'the children of light'—but Peter also said, 'It's not only prophesied-but planned.'

The New American Standard Bible translates this verse, "...to this *doom* they were appointed." (vs8c). "*Doom*" is added as an explanation for the pronoun "this". What is, 'the *this*'?, "...to this they were also appointed." (ibid.) Well, the translators and the editors interpreted that as, "to their doom", 'their ultimate destruction'. That's possible; that's a possible interpretation.

The English Standard Version puts it: "They stumble because they disobeyed the Word, as they were destined to do." In which case, 'what is preordained' is their *stumbling*—their *unbelief*.

So either one could be true. I think that the second, the English Standard Version is probably more harmonious with the context.

And here's the point: The rejection of Christ was not only prophesied, it was ordained. God is absolutely sovereign over the souls of men—and He has a purpose for their unbelief. Human unbelief and rebellion are not outside of God's absolute control, outside of His plan. They are part of it; they are within the plan of God.

There are the verses of Scripture that teach that very thing—and very significantly in regard to the rejection of Christ by His own people, Israel. We have numerous examples of that; that it was part of God's plan, as I say.

Peter made that very point on the Day of Pentecost, in Acts chapter 2, verse 23. And then the church, in Acts chapter 4, verse 28, made the same point; 'that the cross was ordained.' The most heinous crime in history is described as being predestined by

God. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter said to his audience, 'You nailed to a cross and put to death Christ, by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.' And here, in his epistle, he wrote that same point.

Obviously the cross, the crucifixion, which is the very means of our salvation, the remedy for sin and guilt, was planned and ordained by God from all eternity. It was 'the cup' that He gave His Son to drink. Yet that doesn't in any way mitigate, lighten, the guilt of those who carried out the crucifixion. They rejected Christ freely. They rejected Him deliberately, willingly, knowingly—knowing that He was innocent. They disobeyed God's Word.

It's the same here; there is a warning in that for all those who reject Christ: They are "stumbling" over 'the rock'; they are 'stumbling over the stone', the Savior, to their eternal destruction.

Now, does that mean that these unbelievers couldn't repent? Many did on the Day of Pentecost, as we read that in Acts chapter 2, verse 41, that, "about three thousand souls" afflicted themselves—repented, believed. And then later, in Acts chapter 6, verse 7, there's this amazing statement that, "...a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith." You'd like to read more about that: 'many of the priests came to faith in Christ by the grace of God.' So there was hope for the pagans as well, then and now.

But Peter intended this text to be encouragement to the beleaguered churches; for all of this fit within God's good and sovereign plan. Just as He brought good out of the crucifixion, He will do that in your life in the difficulties that you face at this present time—or that you will come to face. God is in control, and will bring good out of it.

In fact, He had already blessed these saints greatly; and Peter gets back to their blessings in verse 9 with the happier side of God's sovereignty—the doctrine of election; that and more. "But you..." he wrote, (that is in contrast to the disobedient unbelievers), "But you are a chosen race..." (vs9a). This is the fourth time the word "chosen" has been used in this letter. We're halfway through chapter 2, and four times Peter has talked

about election. Peter was not embarrassed by the doctrine of divine election. If you are, I'm sorry. Peter accepted the fact of it, and he recognized the blessing of it.

'Chosen people' has always described God's people. It was used of Israel; in Isaiah 43, verse 20, God called Israel, "My chosen people." And then, in the next verse, (vs21), He explained His meaning, "The people whom I formed for Myself.." They are God's work of grace—and it's the same for the church. Christians are like Israel in that we have been, 'chosen by God' in the same way, *unconditionally*. He *'formed us for Himself!'*

So, who are you? Well, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you are, 'a chosen one', chosen by the sovereign grace of God in His unimaginable infinite Love.

Now does that mean the church is 'the new Israel', or, 'spiritual Israel'? No, we're not called that. Galatians chapter 6, verse 16, is addressed to believing Jews, not Gentiles. That's the one verse that people often point to, and it's not calling 'the church', the "Israel of God." He's speaking of the Jews within the church—they are the true "Israel of God". (Gal 6:16).

And it doesn't mean that we, (*the church*), have replaced Israel. Romans 11 is clear that there is a future for ethnic Israel; that at this time it has been largely broken off from the tree of blessing, (the olive tree), but that it will later be grafted in again. Peter uses this terminology here of the church because the functions Israel performed in the Old Testament is what the church does today—yet in a far greater way.

In the future, according to Romans 11, verses 14 and 15, God will save Israel and use the nation again to bless the whole world. In the meantime, unbelieving Israel has been removed from the place of blessing—as Paul put it, 'branches broken off from the olive tree', and Christians, (mostly believing Gentiles), have been 'grafted in'.

So the nation Israel, as "the apple of God's eye", (Zec 2:8), has not been replaced by the church. In fact, I think it's more accurate to say that the church, believers, 'have been incorporated into Israel.' We are "wild branches" in their tree 'partaking'. Paul wrote, "of the rich root of the olive tree." (Rom 11:17). Paul wrote in Romans

chapter 11, verse 26, that someday, "all Israel will be saved." And we will inherit, we Christians, (we Gentile believers and Jewish believers), we will inherit their blessings with them.

In the meantime, the nation has been set aside in unbelief and God is working through the church, His chosen people, "a chosen race". (vs9a). We are the objects of His grace; we are the object of His loving initiative. We are, "a royal priesthood", (vs9a), just as we are "living stones", (vs5), in God's temple. Because of our connection to Christ, we are "a royal priesthood", due to our connection with Christ—our King and Priest.

That's one of the great truths that was recovered in the Reformation: 'The priesthood of all believers.' All believers—Luther and others didn't invent that, they recovered it. It's found elsewhere in the New Testament; in Revelation chapter 1, verse 6, "...He, (*Christ*), has made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father...". And that is one of Peter's main lessons here in chapter 2: 'We are priests'—and in Luther's day, that was a revolutionary thing, a revolutionary thought.

Again, he didn't invent it; Calvin didn't invent it; the Reformers didn't invent it—they *recovered* it. And in doing that, it was a liberating discovery; it freed men from the hierarchy of priests who claimed to dispense salvation, and who claimed to be mediators between man and God.

Christ is the only mediator between God and man—that's 1 Timothy chapter 2, verse 5. It can't be argued against: 'The only mediator.' And we are in Christ if we're believers in Him. The priestly ministry of Levi ended when the Old Covenant ended. Now, all believers are priests, and enter God's presence at any time.

And that's an amazing thing. We can go into the throne of grace with our prayers and our offerings any time of the day without any hesitation. We're priests. And we all have spiritual gifts; not the same gifts; some are evangelists, others are teachers. Some exhort, others have a special gift of mercy—but all of us are gifted in one way or another, and all of us are priests.

All believers, male and female, are equally endowed with the Holy Spirit, sealed with the Spirit. He dwells within us and we have access to God; and the freedom to approach Him in prayer with confidence—absolute confidence; with “boldness”, as the author of Hebrews puts it, night and day. Always. (Heb 10:19).

So, we should be doing that, being priests to one another with encouragement and counsel, with instruction and prayer. That's our priestly function in the body of Christ. And, as Christ's body and priests, we function in our worship together by taking the Lord's Supper. That's very important to Christ. He said, "Do this in remembrance of Me." (Luk 22:19). That is part of our priestly function; and essential for spiritual growth and love for Him who gave Himself for us—we do it out of love for Him. And we do it out of necessity because it is essential that we be regularly reminded of who we are in Him, and what He has done for us. We do it together; it's part of being, “...a chosen race... a holy nation”, and His “possession.” (vs9a). We are privileged above all people on earth—but that privilege comes with responsibility, because as God's priests and as God's possession, we are to, “...proclaim the excellencies of Him.” (vs9b).

That is what Israel was to have done. That's what the LORD said in Isaiah 43, verse 21. They are His, “chosen people”, people ‘He had formed for Himself’, and He said they, “Will declare My praise.” (Isa 43:20&21). That was their task, their purpose in life. They had much to praise Him for—you review their history and you see nothing but the hand of God's grace on them. Everything they had was a gift of His sovereign grace.

Moses told them in Deuteronomy chapter 7, (*verses 6&7*), that ‘God set His love on them and chose them above all of the nations—not because they were great in number; they were not; they were the smallest; they were the fewest of the nations.’ In fact, when we go back to ‘the choice’, (the ‘choosing’), it's Abraham. —‘One!’ At most, ‘Two!’ with Sarah. They were ‘the smallest’, “the fewest”. He chose them, not because of anything in them, not because of their greatness—He chose them because, ‘He loved them’. That's what Moses told them.

They were debtors to mercy alone. Their whole history was one of blessing: His sovereign, merciful, gracious blessing. He saved them out of slavery in Egypt and destroyed their oppressor. He gave them the land of Canaan with splendid cities that they did not build, and fruitful vineyards that they did not plant. —All a gift.

He gave them the Law and the prophets, the temple and the sacrifices, the light of God's truth for the nations, the Gentiles, the simple Gospel and the promise of the Messiah and Redeemer to come. Those are great gifts that He gave to Israel.

But Israel never declared God's praise, (not fully), as a nation. At best, only a remnant was faithful. Some day they will be, 'grafted back into the olive tree', and then the prophesy of Isaiah 43, verse 21, will be fulfilled.

But that is what we are to do now. And we have those "excellencies" revealed right here in verse 9. The God they were to praise is the One who 'called them', (these Gentile believers scattered throughout Asia Minor, these churches all over that continent), He 'called them', "out of darkness into His marvelous light." (vs9c).

"Out of darkness", 'out of *ignorance*', (which *darkness* represents). "Darkness" represents many things; like ignorance and corruption. He called them out of corruption of all kinds—harmful and self-destructive practices, sins. He called them out of Satan's realm, (which is a realm of darkness), and from all of his oppressive slavery.

That's grace. In fact, that's Colossians chapter 1, verses 13 and 14; "God rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom," Paul added, "we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." We were rescued. Not one of them, not one of us, is any better than those of verse 8, 'who stumble over Christ, the cornerstone.' What distinguishes us is grace— unmerited, undeserved favor.

That's what Peter celebrated in verse 10 by quoting Hosea; "...for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." All the privileges we have, (and Peter has recorded here): Being 'a chosen race', being 'a royal priesthood', God's people', 'God's possession' ... (Imagine!—That He'd want us as His possession, as His inheritance. That's what we are!)

All of that, all of it is due to God's undeserved favor—His infinite, eternal love. And we had a great picture of that love in Luke 15, in the parable of the prodigal son, (that Mark taught this morning), of God's love for us, His amazing love that's beyond our comprehension.

These people, Gentiles mostly, previously pagan, had no claim on any of these privileges. They were not His people. They were far away. They were lost in the darkness when He called them out of that darkness, and into the light.

That's every believer; and the more we understand that, the more we will want to do what we are to do, "proclaim" it to those around us—'God's undeserved, omnipotent mercy and sovereign grace!'

Our problem is, we really don't understand the depth of the darkness, out of which we have all been called. That's why grace means nothing to the natural man; and unfortunately very little to many of God's people. We are inured to sin; (*accustomed to*). It is so common around us, and we've become so used to it that, 'we receive it', as it were; we tolerate it; we're accustomed to it.

So, because of that I come back to the medieval theologian Anselm, who explained the problem in his book, *Why God Became Man*. His partner in debate couldn't see why Christ's incarnation and death were necessary for salvation; 'Why did that have to happen—it's not necessary! Just repent! Just turn! —Just believe!' Anselm then stated this 'partner's' problem: "You have not yet considered the greatness of the weight of sin." And that's everyone's problem.

But when we understand, 'the greatness of the weight sin', we then know that only by the death of God's 'Son become man', could the debt we owe be paid off in full—and that only He could do that.

And then, when we know that, we acknowledge His mercy—gladly acknowledge His mercy, because then, by knowing that, we know who we are: Sinners, saved by grace and greatly privileged; we are God's temple.

Who are you? —God's temple. Who are you? —God's priests, and debtors to mercy alone.

I think the parents of T. E. Lawrence understood that. Just before the outbreak of the First World War, his father wrote a letter to his five sons to be opened upon his death. It disclosed a family secret: He had been married before he met their mother, (who was a governess in their home when unfortunately, (as he put it), they fell in love). He abandoned his wife. He abandoned his family to start a new family, a new life. He called it, "a cruel fact", and knew it would cause them great sorrow; but he wanted them to learn from his and their mother's mistake.

He wrote, "There was never a truer saying than, 'The ways of transgressors are hard.' " He concluded, "But I say most distinctly that there is no happiness in life except you abide in Him through Christ; and Oh, I hope you all will."

Well, it seems one of the five brothers did; he became a medical missionary in China. Lawrence became a soldier, a national hero, an international celebrity, dying at the age of 46 on his motorcycle. He had fame, but not the happiness in life that his father said is only ours through Christ.

Fame is fleeting. But happiness in Christ is forever; and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.

Have you believed in Him? Then you have entered a life that will not be a disappointment. But remember, this life is not easy. This life you've entered into is like the life that these saints, (that Peter wrote to), had entered into—a life of difficulty, a life of challenges. We are in a spiritual war, and it is a 'hot' war, and it will be so till the day of our death. That's the reality.

But, you are a priest of God in the midst of it. We are priests, and we have great responsibilities, and we have the grace of God to support us. So, 'Proclaim His excellencies!', 'Proclaim His grace and mercy!' Live it before others; live out the glory and

the power that is yours in Christ. May God help you to do that, help all of us to be faithful to our responsibilities and our ministry.

But if you've not believed in Him, you are invited to come to Him—and come to Him in the only way anyone can, and that's through faith, by knowing that He is God's Son, who came into this world, became a man in order to represent sinners and bear the penalty of their sin. He has done that; and all who believe in Him, come to Him through faith, are saved. So may God help you to trust in Him, and then live for Him.

(Closing prayer) Father, we do thank You for that mercy—and what a great thought that our names are written on, 'the palms of His hands'. (Isa 49:16). All He came to die for—multitudes beyond number, He saved. He paid the price. He made the atonement that was necessary. He satisfied Your justice. And now, through faith, and faith alone, which You give by Your sovereign grace, we come to Him; and to the forgiveness of sin; and the righteousness that's in Christ—and we're Your children forever with a glorious inheritance and a secure present. In the 'now' we are secure, regardless of the difficulties of life. Whether it has to do with employment, or health, whatever the strife that we go through, You're in control, and You're going to see us through the storm. We give You praise and thanks for that.

That's the encouragement Peter gave to those ancient Christians in that troubled land of Asia Minor—and it's true for us today in this place. We thank You for that encouragement and thank You for Your mercy. We thank You for Christ and His death for us.

And now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you shalom, peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

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