Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want you to try and imagine living, as a Christian, in Afghanistan right now. The Taliban is in charge and the opposition is ISIS K! At best, you will be allowed to practice your religion, only at home, *and* pay extra taxes as a non-Muslim, *and*, if you are a woman, you will have to wear a burqa when you leave the home. At worst, you may well be killed, simply because you are a Christian.

Well, that is close to what life would have been like for the Christians that Peter originally wrote this letter to. They were exiles who had been forced to flee their homeland because of their religion. The families of Jewish believers wanted nothing to do with them because they had renounced Judaism. There were many jobs that believers could not do because to do that job you had to swear allegiance to a pagan god and participate in pagan worship. They were hunted by soldiers if they refused to worship Caesar as Lord or if they were caught at a church service. And if you refused to join in with the sexual immorality that everyone else participated in, and called those practices evil, you were hated and this too was evidence that you were one of those Christians. And if you were arrested for any of these things, then you were tortured until you gave the names of others who were part of the church. And I am sure you know that killing Christians became entertainment in those times.

And the reason I have painted this picture for you is because living pretty much free of persecution as we do, we can read a passage like this one and view the words as nice, but not see how absolutely necessary and important they are. So, we have to try and put ourselves in the sandals of Peter’s original readers, or the persecuted church today. And we have good reason to do this because there is every likelihood that more overt persecution is on the horizon for us also. But there is also general encouragement in this magnificent passage.

As I indicated last week, in this section of Peter’s letter, he is describing the character and calling of the church. And he does that here using **Old Testament concepts to Remind believers of the privilege of being part of Christ’s Church**. So, we will first look at **the two Old Testament concepts** that Peter uses in this passage and then we will consider **three points of application** that arise from this passage.

1. So, first of all, let’s consider the **two Old Testament concepts** that Peter uses to remind believers of the privilege of being part of Christ’s Church.
   1. The first of these is the church as like a **Stone Building**, which we see in verses 4-8.
      1. And the obvious thing about stone buildings is that, in comparison with wood or bamboo or tin sheets, stone is **solid and enduring**.
         1. Some of you will remember that it was once possible to travel to Europe. And one of the things that was so wonderful about traveling through Europe is the historical buildings – museums, churches, galleries, and government buildings that have survived for centuries *because they were made from stone*.
         2. And perhaps some of you, when building or buying a house, opted for brick for the same reason – its permanence.
      2. Well, it was common in Bible times to begin your stone building project with a **cornerstone**. Often at great cost and care and effort, the cornerstone was obtained from a quarry that might have been many miles away. And it was transported all the way to the site and placed precisely at the corner where construction was to begin. One archaeologist discovered a temple corner stone measuring 23m by 4m by 5m! That’s the size of a small house! And once your cornerstone was in place, the rest of the building was built: All the measurements and angles were calculated off the corner stone, and every other stone was placed in alignment with that stone and anchored back to the corner stone. Well, Peter wants believers to know that the cornerstone of the spiritual house that God is building is **the Lord Jesus Christ**. And he does this by describing Jesus in **verse 4** as the “*living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious*.”
      3. And to demonstrate that this truth is nothing less than the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, Peter quotes from the three passages we read earlier – **Psalm 118**, **Isaiah 8**, and **Isaiah 28**. For in those passages, the Psalmist and Isaiah prophesied that the coming Messiah would be a “*cornerstone chosen and precious*,” who would be “*rejected*” by “*the builders*.” And this is why we also read **Matthew 21** and **Acts 4** earlier. For there, Jesus and the Apostles quoted those passages to prove that Jesus is the One promised by God. And the builders who rejected Jesus were the leaders of the Jews who had Him crucified. But He arose from the dead and ascended to heaven and poured out His Spirit and established the church. And that church will continue to grow until the full number of the elect have been gathered in.
      4. And this idea of Jesus as the cornerstone of the spiritual house that the Father is building so rich and important that Paul uses it also in **Ephesians 2:19-22**. He said of believers, You are the “*household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit*.”
      5. Can you see, then, why this image is a **powerful encouragement** for believers? The cornerstone of the spiritual house that God is building is the Lord Jesus. And the Father loves His Son! He is described here as “*chosen and precious*” in the sight of God. And each person who believes in the Lord Jesus is like a living stone that the Father attaches to Jesus in this spiritual house.
         1. Earlier in the week I learned that our local bakery was doing contactless delivery. You put through your order online and pay by internet baking and then your order is delivered the next day. Well, my wife had mentioned a craving for a **cream donut**. Sorry dear! So, being a good husband, I recognized that I could fulfill this need. So, I put through the order and waited, and eventually the donut arrived! Now, for the purposes of full disclosure, I should mention that there were two donuts in the order and a steak and cheese pie – yummo! But my point here is that this donut was a gift of love for my wife. So, I cared about the donut, I cared about the person baking the donut, I cared about the box the donut was delivered in, and I cared about the delivery driver. Because of my love for my wife, I cared about every aspect of getting that gift ready for her and I was determined that nothing would get in the way of that donut arriving!
         2. Well, in a much more wonderful way, the church is the ‘love present’ that the Father is building until it is ready to be presented to His Son. So, He cares about the church; He deeply loves every member of the church. And His love is permanent and enduring!
         3. And this would have been a powerful encouragement for the believers Peter originally wrote to, who were part of a small and hated church that looked like it might soon be hunted out of existence.
         4. And let us hope and pray that believers in Afghanistan and China and Nigeria and elsewhere are encouraged by these words also.
         5. And when persecution comes to us, may we also remember the magnificent truth of this text.
         6. But even if we do not suffer persecution, let us love the Church because the Father loves the church! Let us be active and contributing members who pray, often, for the church.
   2. Well, we see more of this in the Second Old Testament concept that Peter uses to remind believers of the privilege of being part of Christ’s Church – **A** **Royal** **Priesthood**. In **verse 5** the term used is “*holy priesthood*,” and in in **verse 9** it is “*a royal priesthood*.”
      1. Now, when we think of the priesthood, we typically think about the men who served as priests at the tabernacle and temple in Old Testament times. But when God formed the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai, listen to what He said to all the people in **Exodus 19:6**: “*You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*.” So, God wanted all the people to be holy, to be obedient, to serve Him, and to offer Him themselves as a living sacrifice.
         1. But because the people were rebellious and disobedient sinners who deserved death, they were not able to be priests.
         2. And so, God set aside one tribe to the priesthood, and they offered sacrifices on behalf of the people. But they too became increasingly corrupt and wicked.
         3. And so, eventually **God sent His Son, Jesus**. And the Book of Hebrews explains that “*He became a merciful and faithful High Priest in the service of God, to [present Himself as a perfect sacrifice] for the sins of [all God’s] people*.” And because of His sacrifice, each believer is now holy and blameless in the sight of God.
         4. And as a member of Christ’s church, each one of us is part of this “*holy*” or “*royal priesthood*.” You are a priest of God! And if you wonder, how do I be a priest? Well, listen to **Romans 12:1**: “*Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship*.” So, you offer every aspect of who you are, to the Lord. You obey His commands, and you serve Him with your money and gifts and abilities. And in this way, you are what Israel failed to be!
      2. And this is Peter’s key point here: **The New Testament church of Christ is the new Israel**. And Peter makes this as plain as the nose on our faces by describing the church as “*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession*.” You see, you will find each of these terms used in the Old Testament in relation to Israel. But the church is the new Israel of God! And if you know your Old Testament, you will know how much God loved Israel. Well, you are His new Israel, in Christ. And He loves you!
      3. And I want you to see this also from **verse 10**. There we read, “*Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy*.” What is that all about? Well, turn with me to **Hosea 1**. Hosea was an Old Testament prophet who was told by God to marry a woman of prostitution. So, he did marry her and soon she gave birth to a son. Look at **verse 4**: “*And the LORD said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel." She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the LORD said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen." When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. And the LORD said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God." Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God." And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head*.”
         1. Who is this one head? It is Jesus! And who are the children of Judah and the children of Israel that are gathered together? The members of the church of Jesus Christ. We are those who “*once … were not a people, but now … are God’s people*.” We are those who “*once … had not received mercy, but now … have received mercy*.” The believers Peter originally wrote to and you and me are the fulfilment of Hosea’s prophecy. The church of Jesus Christ is God’s new Israel!
   3. And congregation, before we move on to our three points of application, what we have seen already demonstrates **the remarkable unity in the story of the Bible, and its reliability and trustworthiness**.TheOld Testament terms and promises and prophecies we have noted go back as far as 1500 years before Jesus was even born! And they all came to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus and His church. And this should give us confidence that the promise of Jesus’ Second Coming and the blessed life that we shall enjoy with Him in eternity will definitely come to pass.
2. But there are at least **three points of application** that arise out of this passage. So, we will use the rest of our time to briefly consider each of these.
   1. The first flows out the first words of **verse 4**: “*As you come to Him*.”
      1. Very shortly I am going to speak about the doctrine of election and reprobation. And it is important that we do that, but it can give us the mistaken impression that we are like ‘puppets on a string’ who can do nothing about our eternal destiny. So, I want to be as plain as I can here, using the words of the Bible:
         1. When the Philippian jailer asked Paul what he had to do to be saved, Paul replied, “*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household*.”
         2. **Romans 10:9**, “*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*.”
         3. **Acts 2:38**, “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins*.”
         4. And the reason why Peter began verse 4 as he did is surely the words of Jesus Himself, recorded in **Matthew 11:28**, “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*.”
         5. To be saved you must go to Jesus in repentance and faith. You must consciously confess your sins and turn away from sin and choose to believe that Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins. You must do this. And if you have not done this yet, and you do it right now (in your home), you will be saved. That is God’s promise to all of you listening today who choose to repent and believe!
   2. But having done that, our further study of Scripture reveals that those who do repent and believe are those whom God chose to save before the creation of the world. And this is the wonderful mystery that is the doctrine of **election and reprobation**.
      1. In **verse 4**, Jesus is described as “*chosen*” of God. So, clearly, being chosen of God is a wonderful thing!
      2. And in **Genesis 6** we see that God chose to save Noah and His family, and to destroy the rest of humanity. And in **Genesis 12**, we see that of all the people on earth, God chose to covenant only with Abraham. And **Deuteronomy 7** describes Old Testament Israel as God’s chosen people. So, this idea of God choosing one and not the other is all over the Bible.
      3. Well, in **verse 4** believers are described as “*like living stones being built up as a spiritual house*.” Have you ever seen a brick get up by itself and climb up the wall and plonk itself in place? No! The builder chooses which bricks he will use, and he places them in the wall. And this is a picture of election.
      4. In **verse 9** we see that those who come to Christ are a “*chosen race*.”
      5. And **verse 9** also speaks about believers as those “*called … out of darkness*.” And if you study this concept in Scripture, darkness = spiritual death. And the dead simply cannot make themselves alive. Only God can do this.
      6. Andin terms of when this election took place, **Ephesians 1:4-5** says, God “*chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world*.”
      7. So, those who choose to believe and are included in the church of Christ are those God chose to save before the creation of the world.
      8. Now, the other side of election is **reprobation** – God leaving some in their fallen and sinful condition, which will result in their being sent to hell. And we see this reality here in **verse 8**, in reference to those who refuse to believe in Jesus for salvation. Peter says, “*They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do*.” Those who continually and knowingly and stubbornly reject Jesus *were destined to do so by God*. The Bible is very clear about this: **Romans 9** talks about “*Gods’ purpose in election*.” And we read, “*Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated*,” and “*so then [God] has mercy on whomever He wills, and He hardens whomever He wills*.”
      9. So, putting all of this together, if you have repented and believed, it is because God chose you in Christ before the creation of the world! And God wants you to know this because if your salvation was entirely up to you, you would have no basis for the assurance of salvation. But God is unchangeable! His purposes always come to pass! So, you can be assured that He will bring you to heaven!
   3. And if you understand and believe this, then you will want to do **the two things identified in this passage as the calling of the church**; they are:
      1. **Verse 5** – “*To* o*ffer spiritual sacrifices*…”
         1. In his commentary on this passage, Pastor John MacArthur identifies seven ways we offer spiritual sacrifices:
            1. Your body – **Romans 12:1**, “*Present your bodies as a living sacrifice*.”
            2. Worship – gather with believers to praise the Lord!
            3. Good deeds – obey the commands of God.
            4. Money and possessions – share with those in need. **Philippians 4:18** describes a gift of money to Paul as “*a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God*.”
            5. Converts – tell others about Jesus that they may come to Him.
            6. Loving one another – **1:22**. **Ephesians 5:2** calls our love “*a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*.”
            7. Prayer – Revelation – our prayers are like incense that rises to heaven.
         2. And note the last part of **verse 5**:“…*acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*.”
            1. It is Christ who makes our sacrifices acceptable to God.
            2. And so, we do not do these things to earn salvation; we do them because Christ has secured our salvation. So, we do this out of thankfulness. We do this because we want to please our Father in heaven! We do this because we want to glorify or praise His name!
      2. And this is the second thing that Peter identifies as the calling of the church – **verse 9**: “*that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*.” We should want to tell everyone about our excellent and saving God!
         1. I once read about a man named Bob Edens who was born blind. For 51 years He lived in darkness. But then a skilled surgeon performed a complicated operation and, for the first time, Bob Edens had sight. He said, “I never would have dreamed that yellow is so…yellow! … I don’t have the words. I am amazed by yellow. I can see the shape of the moon—and I like nothing better than seeing a jet plane flying across the sky leaving a vapor trail. And at night I look at the stars in the sky and the flashing light. You could never know how wonderful everything is.” And anyone who heard Bob’s story heard about his excellent surgeon!
         2. Well, if you have put your faith in Jesus, it is because God called you out of darkness into His marvelous light! And knowing this is the powerful privilege of being part of God’s spiritual house. So, you have every reason to tell others about your excellent Saviour! Amen? Amen!