

Christianityworks
A Confident Life in Uncertain Times
0056-4
Living a Rock Solid Life

God wants a people who can shine his light into a hurting world, a people who can enjoy what he's called them to be, people who shine his love and his joy into this world.

Firm Faith Foundations

Well this is the last of the four messages in the series that I've called A Confident Life in Uncertain Times. Life is full of uncertainties, on the one hand we can say, 'I believe in God. I believe in Jesus. I believe in what he did for me. I believe I have eternal life and in God's glory'. But there are things in our lives, little things like termites, that eat away at the foundation of faith, here and now.

I'm not talking about what's happening in the future. I'm talking about living life today, right where you are, right where I am, with all the stuff going on around us that we have going on around us. Without firm foundations of faith, life is pretty miserable.

I was talking to a man recently who had just been retrenched. He was devastated, and that's a natural response. This man's in his early sixties and he's not ready to retire but the question for him is, in a society that's geared towards young people and youth, how is he going to find another job? And he said to me, "All my life I've put my trust in the Lord." But now life had hit rock bottom for him, he was passionate about what he did. I'll never forget the look in his eyes because the eyes are the window to our heart and you could really see the grief and the pain in his eyes.

Now whether it's a major thing like that or just a whole bunch of small foxes in life that spoil the vine, those things can undermine our sense of security, our sense of confidence in what God's doing. To put it bluntly, those things can undermine and attack our faith, like little termites eating away at our faith foundations.

Maybe a husband and wife aren't as close as they'd like to be; maybe things are a bit hard with the kids at the moment; maybe there are financial worries; maybe there are work pressures and all of those things add up and they nibble away. And before we know it, what once were firm faith foundations, are like a fragile honeycomb ready to collapse.

Here's the good news, here's the great news, **God wants us to have a confident life, to have faith in Him through all of those things** and you know what? That sort of life is a life worth living, a life where we can weather those storms.

That's why over the last three weeks and again this week, we've been looking at 1 Peter. This is one of the last books in the New Testament. And the background of this letter, 1 Peter, is that Peter the Apostle is writing to a whole bunch of Christians who are exiles, who have been dispersed out of Jerusalem and out of Judea, through persecution against Christians. And these people are really being persecuted. These people are being tarred and torched at garden parties by Caesar; these people are being tortured and beaten and burned for their faith. And so that's who he's writing to.

And he writes about a life of purpose, a living hope that we have in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He writes about living a holy life. And the whole point of Peter's letter is to breathe certainty and confidence into the lives of the listeners and the readers of that letter despite everything that's going on in their lives. And that's the point. We can sometimes think, "If I'm going to put my faith in Jesus, if I'm going to put my faith in God, nothing should go wrong, everything should be perfect in life". But life's not like that.

So today we're looking at this last message in this series and I've called today's message, 'Living a Rock Solid Life', an unshakeable life, just like Peter wanted for the people he was writing to. These people who were going through all these trials and struggles. We looked at the first chapter in the last three weeks and today we're going to look at the second chapter of 1 Peter and how to live a rock solid life.

It's about being a part of God's team so if you have a Bible, go and grab it, open it up right towards the end of the New Testament and go to 1 Peter, chapter 2 and we're going to look at verses 1-10. This is what he writes:

"Therefore rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk so that by it, you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, the living stone - rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him - you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For in Scripture it says: "See, I 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 capstone." And, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message - which is also what they were destined to do.

But you, you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you weren't a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy."

It's interesting, these days, so often we see faith in God, faith in Jesus Christ, as being an individual thing. 'My' relationship with God, 'my' faith walk; 'my' life and of course it is but as you read through the New Testament, faith is always set in the context of community. It's startling to read Romans and Corinthians and Ephesians, all those letters from that perspective, there's a very clear and strong community dimension.

These Christians were undergoing persecution and trial and Peter is writing to them about the certainty that they get from being a community in Christ, a people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. C S Lewis once wrote, "Is any pleasure on earth as great as a circle of Christian friends by a fire."

Another Brick in the Wall

It's interesting that as the Apostle Peter starts this bit in his letter, this letter about breathing confidence into the lives of Christians who are being persecuted for their faith. He begins with an admonishment. You see this section that we just read is about living confidently in a community but he begins, before he talks about community, he begins with this admonition,

"Therefore, rid yourself of all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander of every kind. Like new born babies, crave pure spiritual milk so that by it, you might grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

So, get rid of all malice, all deceit, all hypocrisy, envy, slander of every kind. Those things tear communities apart. Stones in a wall,

which is the picture that we'll look at that passage in a moment; it's a picture of community of these stones being built together into this strong solid wall. Could you imagine how strong this wall is going to be if all these stones are arguing and fighting?

Before I became a Christian, my favourite saying used to be, "It's so hard to soar like an eagle when you're surrounded by turkeys." Now that sort of attitude is not about community. Selfishness and getting your own way and wanting to do it our way; we're not going to be a community and that's why Peter begins, "... *get rid of all malice, all deceit, all hypocrisy and envy and slander of every kind.*" Because if we're going to live together in a community, in a faith community, we need humility and kindness and gentleness and forgiveness.

Maybe Gods convicting you right now about the people that you're in a faith community with, the people that I'm in a faith community with. You see, there's no perfect Church! We can look at the people that we know and maybe you've been going to a Church for years and you've known these people for years and you think, 'My goodness, I know everybody's weaknesses and it's never going to change and ... grumble, grumble, grumble.'

Let the Holy Spirit convict you right now if you're in that space. Get rid of all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander of every kind because those things tear communities apart. Instead, like new born babes, crave spiritual milk, the word of God, drink it in. There's nothing better for a young baby than mothers milk, man-made formula doesn't have the same goodness or nourishment or antibodies. Mother's milk was made for the baby and it's the same with Gods word, there's no substitute.

The worlds wisdom, me, me, me, numero uno, get what you're entitled to, no wonder there's so much uncertainty in life, we've forgotten how to live with one another, how to live in community. Gods word is about sacrifice, going without those things and unless we do that there'll be no community and with no community comes no confidence, and then, talking to these people undergoing so much pain and uncertainty and fear because of their faith, look at what he writes,

"As you come to him, the living stone - rejected by men but chosen and precious by God." You also, like living stones are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus. Because scriptures said, "See, I 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 don't believe, the stone the builder rejected became the capstone," and, "A stone that causes men to stumble," because they stumble because they disobeyed the message which they were destined to do."

In other words, he begins this discussion of community with the living stone rejected by many that is Jesus. Jesus was rejected by many. He was reviled and He was beaten and He was spat upon and He was crucified but He was chosen by God and precious to God, God's only Son. And just like Jesus was the first one, the cornerstone – capstone; you, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. For what purpose? To offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

The reason God builds us into this house is not for us, even though we get benefits. It's for God. The picture of this house being built, these stones being laid is, **firstly** a stone had to be cut to size. This wasn't one of these manufactured square bricks, perfectly shaped, no this was a stone in rough, and for a stone to become part of a building, first it has to be cut to size by the builder. In other words God is going to cut us to size, humble us, sacrifice, that's what being cut to size means. It's no fun being cut to size but that's what God does with us. He cuts us to be the right shape to be amongst his people as a stone in this wall.

Secondly, a stone gets laid in place where the builder wants it, where God wants it. 'Oh, I want to be a preacher; I want to be this; I want to be that; I want to do this; I want people to notice me.' But we have certain gifts and abilities. God knows them better than us because He gave them to us and when He lays us just in the right place, it's brilliant. The apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 11, puts it this way. He's talking about the giftings that God gives us and he writes this,

"All these gifts are activated by one and the same spirit who allots to each one individually, just as the spirit chooses."

In other words, our gifts and abilities are gifts for the body of believers but God chose what he gave us and God chooses where He puts us and when we're operating in God's gifting and His anointing, that's an awesome thing. It confirms who we are, we delight in what we're doing, it builds our confidence in Him.

The **third** thing, firstly we're cut to size, secondly we're laid in place and thirdly a stone in this building, in this spiritual temple bares the burdens of the other stone, it's a mutual thing. You think about the

stones being laid down in the wall, the stones below me are carrying my weight and I'm carrying the weight of the stones above me, in other words we share with one another, if one suffers we all suffer, if ones honoured we all rejoice.

When we're surrounded by God, by people who are on fire for God, that lifts us up, that builds us up, that holds us up. Now I'm someone who always spends time in the Word of God because that's what I do. It's a powerful thing, it feeds me and it's such an honour and a privilege to be able to put these programs together. BUT I have a small group of people in my church, one man in particular called James. They are my support and encouragement and strength.

I need those people because without those people, life gets tough, I'm out there on my own. That's the way it's meant to be and all these stones being built by God into this temple. Jesus is the corner stone. In other words, He's the one that got laid first, the one that we're all lined up against so that we're in a row, we're straight, doing things His way, not all over the place doing things our way but lined up beginning with a cornerstone.

And then Peter writes here, "*... and he became a capstone,*" and the picture there is when one of those stone arches was built with all those little stones in an arch, the top stone was the capstone and it bears all the weight and holds everything together. In other words, Jesus is at the top and yet He serves us by holding us together.

Jesus is the first stone to be laid and we're lined up against him. We're not just a bunch of people, we're a spiritual house with Christ at the head, and the Holy Spirit and our obedience binding us together. Beautiful picture, that we are being built by God into his house, a spiritual house but for what purpose?

A Royal Priesthood

God wants a mature people; God wants a people who can shine his light into a hurting world; a people who can enjoy what he's called them to be. Confident people, not cocky, not arrogant. People who have a quiet confidence in who He is, in who they are in him, what God's called them to do. People who shine His love and His joy into this world.

And that's exactly how Peter finishes off this passage that we've been looking at today in the letter of 1 Peter, chapter 2, to these exiles who are under extreme persecution. Let's have a look at how he finishes it off in chapter 2 beginning at verse 9. He says,

"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once, you weren't a people but now you are the people of God. Once you hadn't received mercy but now you have received mercy."

You see, Peter is saying here, 'you know how God wants to cut you to size and lay you as one of those stones in this wall? This wall, that's lined up against Christ, this wall that will be a spiritual temple, a spiritual house of God. You're a chosen people, this is Gods plan before time began. You're a people, you're a body, you're Gods family as well as just an individual and not only are you a chosen people, you're a royal priesthood, you belong to the king.

But why does he call us a priesthood? Well, a priest in the Old Testament, the role of the priest was to serve God in the temple and to be a 'go between', between God and the people. But here, in the New Testament we're being told there are no special priests anymore. We're all priests! We're all part of a royal priesthood and our job is to serve Christ and to take Him out into the world.

That's why God calls us a 'royal priesthood'. We're the ones that can go into the Holy of Holies, we can stand in the throne room before God, we can see His glory, we can experience His goodness but He wants us to take that out as a priesthood into the world, glory to God.

Once you were not a people, once you were a rabble, once you were a bunch of selfish individuals wandering aimlessly around in futility. But now, now you are a people, not just a people but Gods people. Look at the next verse, *"Now you are the people of God."* God has an amazing plan. As we humble ourselves and lay our lives down, He builds us into a royal priesthood, a holy nation so that we may declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into this wonderful light.

You see, when we declare God's praises, when we walk out into the world with that joy in our hearts and on our faces, people look at us and say, "There's something different about them. I want what they've got." When we declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness, we are being the royal priesthood; we are carrying Christ into the world.

God has this plan that as He builds us into a royal priesthood, a holy nation, that we're part of His family and His plan for His glory and

living in love and reaching out to the people who don't know him yet and in love, bearing our brothers and sisters in gentleness and with humility and encouragement and support. As we are a stone in the spiritual house - a living stone, not a dead stone, not some piece of rock - a living stone in the spiritual temple that God is building us up together to be and we have to let other people do the same for us.

If we want to live a certain life in uncertain times, this is a powerful letter from Peter, this first letter of Peter. He tells us, you and I, if we believe in Christ we've been chosen with a purpose, we have a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus. God is protecting and guarding, in heaven, an imperishable inheritance, unspoilable, unfaded, undefiled for us and as we live holy lives, as we put away all slander and malice and envy and pride, all that stuff that will tear us apart, God builds us up.

Jesus said, "*I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.*" As we allow ourselves, by God, to be built into this spiritual house together, we're living out of Christ. That's what it means to be a living stone and we discover this stuff works. We see how He cuts us and polishes us into shape and He puts us just in the right place next to other people. And then life's no longer about winning, it's about living and walking in love. It's certain, it's true, and it works day by day.

When we live like that the spirit of God ministers His peace and His confidence into our souls, deep into our spirits. Remember, Peter was writing this to people who were suffering such terrible things. The world says, 'Buy this, spend that, eat this, go there, drink that - you'll be happy'. But you, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

God has a plan to use you and me for his glory and as we live that plan out in fear and trembling, we discover in our own experience that He's for real, day by day, week by week, month after month. He builds us into a spiritual house. He builds in us a confidence that is unshakeable no matter what the world will throw at us.

It's a life-long journey but that's His plan, it's a wonderful plan, it's a beautiful plan, it's a delightful plan. It's a plan for a confident life in uncertain times.