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1 Peter 2:4-10

Seventh Message

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# RECONSTRUCTED IN JEWELS

*SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND*

Ten years ago, I was in the town of Egbe, in Nigeria, participating in a pastors conference with our PBC staff. I taught at a high school located by a missionary compound which served as our headquarters. I grew to love the young people at this school. They asked very insightful questions about the Christian life, and they were keenly interested in everything we had to say.

There were hardly any men to be seen in this little town and I questioned a missionary about this. He told me that the typical pattern in this area was that men married at an early age and had large families. Then they left to go to Lagos, the capital city, to find employment. Most of them never returned to their wives and families. I wondered how this rejection by their fathers would impact a generation of young people.

Today, I find I'm asking the same question in our own Bay Area. Where are the fathers? And what is going to happen to the many children who are facing the same kind of rejection in our own society? Studies have shown that three out of five children of divorced parents regard divorce as a kind of personal rejection, and they struggle with guilt because of that. The same studies show that children from nine through the teen years bear deeper scars than younger children. As the psychologists explore, they are discovering that more and more children are being raised in dysfunctional homes. Alcoholism, drugs, and emotional and sexual abuse are quite common in the homes of America today. People who have suffered these types of backgrounds, and who have found help, discover that a study of these kinds of behavior patterns is an eye-opener. Things seem to click and fall into place for them, and they see for the first time why their families acted in certain ways.

As we see the effects of this kind of rejection in our culture today, the question we must ask is, Is reconstruction possible? Can lives be put back together when the foundations that are already laid are so faulty and crumbling? Our text from First Peter this morning has good news along these lines. God, says the apostle, is occupied in a worldwide building and reconstruction project that is the secret to world history. The good news is that God wants each of us to play an integral part in his new, spiritual temple which he is constructing.

I have always loved construction. As a child, I loved to explore building sites where new homes were being going up. Later, during my college years, and even after I graduated, I worked on construction projects. One building I worked on, at Fourth and Market in San Francisco, I am happy to report, withstood the earthquake! I remember the sense of euphoria I enjoyed while I worked on that building. Whether walking on the steel girders on the 33rd floor, or assisting as a carpenter's helper in the basement, I felt privileged to be part of a major building project.

How much more exciting and significant, then, is this new building project which God is doing worldwide! And how privileged we are to be called by him to participate in a building made without hands, one that will last forever.

We have already seen that our text, 1 Peter 2:4-10, has two parts.

**And coming to Him as a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious In the sight of God, you also as living stones are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ For this Is contained in Scripture:**

**"Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, And he who believes In Him shall not be disappointed."**

**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,"**

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

The text opens with a summary which describes Jesus as the corner stone, and us as the living stones (vv. 4-5). Peter then fleshes out the summary, in verses 6-10. Verses 6-8 (which we looked at last week) describe Christ, the corner stone; verses 9-10 (which we will cover today) describe us, the living stones being built into God's new temple.

## I. The Foundation Has Already Been Laid (2:6)

**"Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, And he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed."**

We will look at four aspects of reconstruction in our lives. People who have suffered rejection are quite fragile. It does not take much heartbreak or hardship to bring their self-worth crumbling down. Their foundations are easily undermined. Quickly, their lives begin to resemble Highway 880, which collapsed in the earthquake. Soon, the entire structure of their lives begins to come apart, as the concrete crumbles and the twisted and broken reinforcement bars are laid bare. How can the mess be untangled and a fresh start made?

The Scriptures teach that the unregenerate man is powerless to do anything about this. He can make a few cosmetic changes, of course, but cleaning up the mess and rebuilding the foundation is beyond him. But the good news of the gospel is that God will not build again on your old foundation; he has already laid a new, perfect foundation, without flaw or blemish of any kind. That foundation is Jesus Christ, the living stone, the tested stone, the precious corner stone. On Christ, the solid, unshakable foundation, God carries out his reconstruction in people's broken lives.

Where do you begin the task of reconstruction? There is more good news here. Your first task is not to rebuild but appreciation for what

Christ has already accomplished. Look at what he has done and thank him for it. When God created Adam, the first man's first day on earth was a holiday, not a workday. It was sabbath. Man rested, and God took him by the hand and showed him the beauty of his perfect, completed creation. On that first day, Adam's only responsibility was to appreciate and enter into the perfect results of what God had done.

What was true of creation is also true of salvation and redemption. When Jesus hung on the cross and took upon himself our guilt, our shame and our mangled lives, he cried out, "It is finished!" With his life, God laid the new foundation of the new temple, and it, too, is finished. You don't have to begin reconstructing your life. Your job is to appreciate what God has already done in Jesus Christ. Then give God permission to rebuild your life, and sign the building permit. This is your first task in reconstruction.

There is a second task.

## II. Secure Yourself To The Foundation (2:4, 5, 7)

Last week we heard from a couple who lost their home in the earthquake, not because the house did not have foundations, but because the builder did not anchor the building to the foundation. Being loosely associated with your foundation is of no value when the judgment comes. It does not pay to be loosely associated with Jesus Christ, either. You need the anchor bolts of faith to tie you to the rock, as Peter says in verse 7:

**This precious value, then, is for you who believe.**

Seeing the beauty and the perfection of the foundation, you then hang your life on Christ, trusting him fully.

But it doesn't end there, says Peter. You need to continue to have faith. You must come to Christ daily.

**And coming to Him as a living stone...you also as living stones are being built up.**

That is passive tense. It is not saying that God places you on the foundation and then expects you to build the building. It means that the new foundation is alive and, just as you first came to Christ by faith, so you continue to have faith in him; then the life of Christ the foundation builds you up. You are not even building yet. You are being built up.

It is very important to understand this. When Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, he rebuked them because they did not understand what the Scriptures said. He gave them a new hermeneutic, a new lens, to understand the Scriptures. Here is what he said,

**"We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel..." "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all the prophets have spoken! Was it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning with Moses and from all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. (Luke 24:21, 25-27)**

All of Scripture, he told them, the law, the prophets, the writings, were not given as principles, as guidelines that they should try to incorporate in their lives by their own efforts. Rather, all of Scripture was pointing to him, he declared.

The Old Testament is like an hourglass: Everything funnels down to one person, Jesus Christ, and then it all funnels down to believers as we place our faith in him. Everything that is his becomes ours. Do not read the Old or New Testaments as arbitrary principles for living life. They point to Christ. And because we are in Christ, his life is ours.

Last week, our pastoral staff studied Psalm 15 together. The psalm asks the question, "Who may abide on God's holy hill?" The answer

comes, "The man who walks in integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart." Ray Stedman commented: "This text can be taken in two ways. We can try to imitate it by our own self-effort and become self-righteous and arrogant; or we can see that we do not speak truth in our heart; we do not qualify to be on that holy hill." This is a description of Jesus. He walked in integrity, speaking truth from his heart. By faith we are in Christ, and we receive his life.

This is how we should read our Bibles. It takes continual faith to draw near and to appropriate the life of our Christ, our living foundation. We are placed on it by faith, and we are built up on it by faith as we come each day to Christ. The longer I live, the more I realize I never get any stronger. I keep living with my weaknesses and in them I keep crying out to God moment by moment. We grow in the knowledge of our own weakness, and this leads us to cry out every day to Christ to save us. That is the Christian life.

Having seen with the eye of faith the value of Christ, we must keep feeding on the Scriptures, and we must do this with the proper lens. If we allow the Scriptures to take us to Christ, not to ourselves and our own strength, then we will be built up in the faith.

Now that we are on the right foundation, and are viewing the Scriptures with the right lens, the actual construction can begin.

## III. Being Constructed: Infinite Worth (2:7a, 9a, 10)

**And coming to Him as a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God...This precious value, then, is for you who believe,...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession,...for once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**

Here, Peter gathers many of the glorious titles that speak of Israel's special relationship to God, and says that in Christ these are fulfilled. Now that our faith is in Christ, we are being grafted into the -people of God, and that special, unique relationship is ours. If you struggle with self-worth, try these terms on for size, for all of them refer to your uniqueness and the special intimacy you are to have with God.

We are "*a chosen race*." The two great doctrines of Judaism were monotheism and election: There is one God, and Israel is his people. "Hear O Israel, the Lord is your God, the Lord is one" (Deut 6:4). Since we have been adopted into this family, now we, too, become the elect people of God.

And we are "*a royal priesthood*"—a kingdom of priests. There are many significant tasks in life but none as privileged as the priesthood. Priests lead men into the very presence of God and build up the temple with his life.

We are a "*holy nation*," a people set apart totally to God (Exod 19:6). And we are a "people for God's own possession," a special treasure for God's own possession. The gold of an engagement ring is special, but the diamond set in the gold is a special treasure that says you belong uniquely to someone. This is what this term "a people for God's own possession" means. We are God's very own property, at his complete disposal, for his personal use. Every day we should see ourselves as God's personal property, available for his personal use in the world.

Deuteronomy 10:14-15 says, "Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affections to love them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day." If you are struggling with your sense of self-worth because you have been rejected, remember that to God you are unique. Nothing enhances our view of ourselves more than a feeling that we are special.

There were no fathers in Egbe, as I have said, but I determined to be a father to one high schooler. I noticed in particular one boy, James, who seemed keenly interested in what I was teaching. One of our ministry team said to me later, "I think James likes you." Next day I sought permission for James to be absent from school for three days to accompany me to a pastor's conference. I was told, "You don't want James. He's not a good student. Take someone else." But I insisted that James be the one. All during the conference he sat next to me as my personal emissary, and listened as I taught. He was greatly encouraged and felt really special because I had chosen him out of all the students in the school to relate to in a special way.

Peter goes on to say that this new relationship, this New Covenant, based on Jesus Christ, is better than the old. The old covenant, from Exodus 19, is a conditional agreement. Here are the words of Moses,

**"Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My Covenant, then you shall be my own possession among all the peoples...and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Exod 19:5-6)**

"If you obey, then..." But there is no condition attached to the New Covenant, says Peter. "You are a holy nation, you are a kingdom of priests," he writes. Under the Old Covenant, this special relationship and privilege as the people of God would continue only if Israel kept the covenant; then she would become a special treasure to God. But Christ has already fulfilled the New Covenant for those who believe in him. Thus we are already a holy nation and a people for God's own possession, according to the apostle.

This New Covenant is better for another reason, as Peter goes on to say in verse 10:

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

In the New Covenant, the doors are thrown open to all comers from all nations so that all may become participants in this new community.

There is a wonderful illustration of this truth in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. This man had two strikes against him under the old covenant: he was a foreigner, and he was a eunuch. On his way home from worshiping in Jerusalem, he stopped by the road to read the text of Isaiah 53, the story of the Suffering Servant who would die for the sins of the nation. As he was reading, along came Philip the evangelist. Philip asked him if he knew what he was reading. "How could I know," replied the eunuch, "when no one will explain it to me?" Wouldn't you love to meet someone asking this question on your way to work in the morning? "Of whom was the prophet speaking?" asked the eunuch, "was it himself or someone else?" Philip knew the correct lens to use. Beginning from that point in the text of Isaiah he preached Christ to this man. How fulfilled the eunuch must have been to hear Isaiah's words just three chapters later, after the Servant had come to inaugurate the New Covenant,

**Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say,  
"The LORD will surely separate me from His people."  
Neither let the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree." ...  
I will give them an everlasting name...  
And make them joyful in My house of prayer. (Isa 56:3, 5, 7)**

We can only imagine the joy this Ethiopian man felt when he realized that not only could he enter the temple but that he was actually becoming the temple. This is true reconstruction.

Thus the foundation has already been laid. We come to Christ by faith, and we take on the precious value of Christ in this new temple.

We have all the unique privileges of the people of God. And this New Covenant is better than the old. It has been initiated in mercy, and made secure by Christ's faithfulness, not our own.

Finally, in this task of reconstruction we move from having infinite worth to having very special work to do in this temple.

#### IV. Being Constructed: Heavenly Tasks (2:5, 9b)

**"They will declare My glory among the nations. Then they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the LORD...I will also take some of them for priests and for Levites," says the LORD. (Isa 66:19-21)**

**you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.**

Psychologists have discovered that it is impossible to restore someone's damaged self-worth unless you give him or her something significant to do. Older people struggle in this area. They feel insignificant because their work is done. But our text points out that God not only gives us infinite worth, he also gives us heavenly tasks—the task of being priests in this heavenly temple. In Hebrew and Greek, there is no distinction between the word for worship and the word for work. They are both the same. We cannot worship without giving service in God's temple. But here we see that as soon as we find our worth in Christ, he immediately puts us to work. As living stones, we are built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood. A couple of weeks ago I baptized a man who was a Catholic. Just before he went under the water I said to him, "Do you realize that when you come up, you are going to be a priest and you don't even have to go to seminary?" "Let's go!" he said, all excited. All the laborers in this new temple are priests.

There is no more significant occupation in life than this priesthood. What do you think is the most highly regarded occupation? A brain surgeon must study many years in medical school. His delicate hands work with scalpel and laser beam to remove a brain tumor. But the patient is still a fleshly, selfish individual who is destined to die anyway. A brain surgeon can remove a physical impediment and prolong life, but he cannot make lasting changes in the soul. A priest, on the other hand, moves among his community with his mind illumined by the word of God and the Spirit of God. He uses his skill in speech and hearing to bring an ailing soul into the very presence of God. He feeds him with a word or an act of love so that he changes for all eternity the very soul he ministers to. A priest permanently reconstructs life not in material things but in heavenly jewels. Can there be any more significant occupation in this world?

Every morning when you awake, think of yourself as a priest. In your closet are hanging the vestments of the Old Testament priest. Clothe yourself in the character of Jesus Christ. Put on the linen, the breast plate, with its twelve jewels representing Israel, and the holy robe. Go to work and there, in the power of prayer, bring the saints into the presence of God.

I have seen many people in our congregation doing the work of a priest. I took my daughter to a baseball game once, together with a friend named Jim. Sitting behind us were two young men who were drinking beer all evening. The more they drank, the more obnoxious and vulgar they became. I was becoming increasingly irritated with these guys and I wanted to cover my daughter's ears so she would not be corrupted by their speech. But my friend Jim leaned over and whispered to me, "I'm praying for them." Later, when I made a critical

comment about them, he said to me, “You know, every form of abusive speech is really a cry for help.” My friend was a better priest than me. He had his breastplate on. He saw through the sham to the hurting hearts and was praying for the men. What a high calling it is to be a priest!

A young man in our congregation is the director of disaster relief for Santa Clara County. This was a rather insignificant title until the day the earthquake struck. Before that he had no power, no authority, no resources, only a team of two others who sat in a small office in a government building in San Jose. A number of weeks ago, however, he and his team planned the entire scenario for what they would do in the event of an 8.3 earthquake; how many buildings would collapse, where they would send relief, etc. He even talked to a geologist who told him that the next earthquake on the San Andreas Fault would not be 8.3 but 7.1—and it could happen any time, she said.

Then the earthquake struck. He was in his office on the 15th floor, and the building began to sway back and forth. While everybody around him was falling apart, my friend told me that his first thought was, “This is my hour!” He immediately drove to his headquarters, a bunker in San Jose, where he remained 20 hours every day for a week following the earthquake. He had telephone calls from all over the State of California, from the governor, state politicians and local officials. He had helicopters and warships, blankets, water and trucks at his disposal. He was thrilled about what he could do to help this area recover, but he told me that he lacked a sense of peace.

Then he began reading the Scriptures. He came to the words of Jesus, “To the degree that you have done it to the least of these, you have done it to me.” He broke down and wept when he realized that he was not only directing the Bay Area relief effort, he also was a priest ministering to Christians who had suffered great losses. Though he could not see them or know them, he knew he was bringing relief to people and serving the Lord Jesus himself in his holy temple. He felt honored and privileged to be a priest in that situation, even more honored than his position as coordinator of relief.

What a high calling each one of us has! There is no more significant task in life than “to proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” The earthquake exposed the materialistic sham of San Francisco and the Bay Area. The packed stadium at the resumed World Series held hands and sang “San Francisco,” the song written after the 1906 earthquake. But as a prophet and priest, you can say that San Francisco is under the same judgment as Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Then you can talk about the new city which God is building, whose foundation is Jesus Christ and whose temple is unshakable. Invite people to become part of this new temple. San Francisco dwells in darkness; tell people about the light.

There are the steps to reconstruction. The new foundation is laid in Christ, and we are secured to it by faith. By faith the very same value that God gives to Christ is yours, as is his ministry as a priest. When you get up in the morning, put on your robes of royalty, your turban of authority, your breastplate of the saints. Then, your mind, illumined with light, your speech graced with the word of God, possessing divine wisdom, fulfills your calling as an ambassador of Jesus Christ.

## Two Exhortations

Two common problems hinder us in this reconstruction. The first is procrastination. Many of us do not want to enter into our heavenly function until God has perfected us. I have noticed, however, that al-

though San Francisco airport was in the midst of a remodeling program recently, business there did not come to a halt. There were many inconveniences, but the airport functioned normally. Streets were tom up, there were temporary boarding areas, plywood ramps were in use, there was dust and debris everywhere, but the airport continued functioning.

In the same way, God’s program with us is *on-site reconstruction*. Don’t wait to start functioning in your priestly ministry. Get on with the work! Every year in our home we invite our neighbors and friends for a Fourth of July celebration. A few years ago, however, while we were in the midst of remodeling our home, I assumed we would not have a party that year. “What do you mean, we’re not having a party?” said Emily. “Just because we’re in the midst of a home building project doesn’t mean we can’t have a party.” Well, we went ahead and had our celebration, and it wits the best one we ever had. It’s the same with the Christian life. God is always engaged in remaking and remodeling various parts of our lives, but he wants to use us in our priestly ministry during the reconstruction.

The second problem that hinders us is blindness. We are blind to God’s curriculum. Jesus epitomized what a priest should be. He had the ear of a disciple who awakened morning by morning to hear the Lord. His eye saw what the normal eye could not. When he spoke, he brought healing and life. He never said the same thing twice, but spoke directly to the soul of those in need. But what curriculum did he study to become so gifted as a priest? Our text puts it in one word: Rejection. “The stone which the builders rejected.” Rejection was the curriculum that made Jesus a priest.

**“I gave my back to those who strike Me,**

**And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard;**

**I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.” (Isa 50:6)**

“He came to his own and his own did not receive him,” says the Scripture. His own brothers thought he was crazy, He had no place to lay his head. He lacked the support of any branch of Judaism. He died alone, forsaken by his own disciples. He was rejected, but this is what made him such a wonderful priest.

In his book, *Orphans Lead The World*, Dr Pierre Rentchnick of Geneva writes that 300 of 500 world leaders were orphans. The curriculum that qualified them to be leaders was rejection and suffering. So many come from dysfunctional homes. So many have faced rejection. But this is no cause for self-pity. Let us thank God for it, for this is what qualifies us to minister as priests in the living temple. We hear hurts that we never heard before. We bring words of comfort to the weary.

We therefore find that we grow spiritually as we come to the living word which teaches us about Christ. This Christ came to build a new spiritual temple, with a new priesthood. And this new temple is not like the old one, which was built with hands. It is spiritual, built without hands, eternal in the heavens. As we embrace Christ, his identity and ministry in the new temple become ours by virtue of our being in him. What a glorious privilege to be part of God’s eternal kingdom! Here is where we will dwell forever, basking in his courts of light and love.

Is reconstruction possible? Yes it is, but this time we are reconstructed in jewels.

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