



Session 4

2:1-10

Study Guide

This periscope is really about *identity*—specifically, the identity of Jesus-followers as exiles. It approaches this issue of identity in terms of two metaphors: *milk* and *stones*. Ultimately, 1 Peter’s message in this regard is identical to that of the Pauline epistles, which is to say that the new life of being a Jesus-follower is more than just a matter of behavior; it is equally a matter of becoming a new person.

2:1-2

1) 2:1 opens, “Therefore,” a reference to the new life that is ours as Jesus-followers called by God into Kingdom community. This necessarily entails changing how we live. Note the behaviors Peter specifically lists we’re to rid ourselves of (not an exhaustive list, I think we can assume).

2) Peter compares our identity as Jesus-followers to being like “newborn babies.” In one sense, this is true: at some point in our lives as Jesus-followers we were new to what that meant and the demands it makes. But we should be cautious not to take Peter’s use of the metaphor too literally. In saying we should “long for pure, spiritual milk,” Peter isn’t necessarily saying we have to have a simple understanding of discipleship, as opposed to the “solid food” of a more mature understanding later. It’s more likely that he’s referring to what we might call “spiritual sustenance” in general, feeding ourselves not on worldly things but spiritual things, i.e. the teachings and life of Jesus and the Kingdom.

3) The NIV translates the second half of verse 2 as “so that you may grow *up in* your salvation”; the NRSV, which in this case is probably the better translation, says “so that you may grow *into* your salvation.” The distinction is subtle but important: *up in* suggests a full understanding of salvation from the beginning; *into* suggests an understanding that grows with experience over time. Why is the NRSV better? Because while salvation is not earned it does come with expectations—expectations that we cannot understand, let alone live, all at once but can only grow into over time.

2:3

4) "...now that you have tasted the Lord is good." This is a reference to Psalm 34:8. Partly, these words resonate with how we understand the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. But they also suggest something important about the true nature of our relationship with Jesus. What might that be?

2:4-8

With these verses, Peter shifts the metaphor from milk to stone and, in support of the shift, draws on multiple OT passages: Psalm 118:22, Isaiah 8:14, Isaiah 28:16. You may find it helpful to look at those passages as you work with verses 4-8.

2:4

5) Jesus, Peter says, is a "living stone" chosen by and precious to God. On the face of it, "living stone" seems like an oxymoron but, as a metaphor, it will carry much of the theological weight of Peter's argument. So, what do you think he means by referring to Jesus as a "living" stone?

6) Peter makes the distinction between God choosing Jesus and humans rejecting Jesus. What implications does this have for our identity as exiles?

2:5

7) It's important to follow the logic of the chain of metaphors Peter employs here: we are living stones > stones are built into houses > houses are also temples > in temples, holy priests offer sacrifices. This chain provides much of the reasoning why truly living as a Jesus-follower means living as an exile. Can you see what that reasoning is?

2:6-8

8) The logic of the chain of metaphors in verse 5 is continued in verses 6-8 as Peter identifies Jesus as the cornerstone of the house/temple into which you and I as Jesus-followers are being built. Assuming you know the role of a cornerstone in construction—especially in construction as it was done in Jesus' day*—what, specifically, does it mean that Jesus is our cornerstone?

**If you don't know, I have a suggestion for you: Google.*

9) Why would Jesus, the living stone, be a stumbling block to those who reject him?

10) In many ways, Peter's metaphor of Jesus as the cornerstone is about worldview. I urge you to consider this connection. It's important, and I'll have more to say about it in the video.

11) The second half of verse 8 presents us with a dilemma. Peter's comment that "They [those who reject Jesus] stumble because they disobey the message" [NIV] seems straightforward enough: one who rejects Jesus and his message is likely to stumble because they are rejecting the way that leads to life. But then Peter says, "...which is also what they were destined for." Thus, the dilemma: does election mean God elects some people to understanding of and obedience to Jesus while electing other people to rejection of Jesus, *or* does it mean that if you

reject Jesus it simply becomes inevitable you won't be obedient to the way of life he demands? This is a similar question to the one of God and suffering we considered in a previous session. If God elects a person to rejecting Jesus, God necessarily elects that person to suffering and, ultimately, damnation. Is that something a God of love would do? How do you reconcile this?

2:9-10

12) The thrust of these verses is to articulate precisely that being a Jesus-follower who is called into Kingdom community necessarily results in a new identity. Note the descriptors Peter uses (all of which are allusions to the Old Testament): chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation, people belonging to God. There is a common thread that runs through the descriptors, however, that is more than just their Old Testament roots. What do you think that common thread is?

13) To fully understand the impact of Peter telling the recipients of his letter that they are to consider themselves as exiles we must acknowledge that the recipients all lived in societies which, to varying degrees, were defined by codes of honor and shame (this is still true throughout many Mediterranean, near Eastern, and middle Eastern countries today). A person's behavior brought honor or shame not only on him- or herself but on a person's entire family. And the shame, in particular, could be extraordinarily toxic, resulting in life and death decisions. Mindful of that, how do you think the letter recipients reacted to the suggestion that their status as exiles in the eyes of God matters more than their status as exiles in the eyes of humans, especially non-Jesus followers?

14) Note (verse 9) the reason Peter gives for receiving new life/new identity: to praise and worship God and to declare the Lordship of Christ, both of which we now understand as we didn't before (i.e. called from darkness to light).

A final question for your consideration: how would you and your life be different if your identity as a human being, first and foremost, was not in your ethnicity, gender, sexuality, what you do, what you own, where you live, who you know, etc. but, instead, was in your commitment to be a Jesus-follower and, therefore, an exile?