

God's Building Program

Please open your Bible to the book of 1 Peter 2, or turn to page _____ in the Bible under the chair in front of you.

Well, it's the day of our annual member's meeting. And so I thought today would be a good day to talk about our building program that we'll be pursuing as a church.

Now, that I've made people a bit nervous (including some of our pastors and deacons), let me clarify – it's not *that* kind of building program. I'm not talking about changing or moving from our church's literal building that we're sitting in. That day may come, but it's not today.

No, I'm talking about God's building program for the church as His people. How is it that God intends to build this assembly of believers that He calls the church? Remember, Jesus said that He would build the church upon this rock, and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it. We'll look at that passage more closely in a few weeks in Matthew 16.

No today, I want to pause and think together about what it is that we're doing as a church. Who are we as a church? And what are we supposed to be doing together?

And there are a few places in the Bible we could go to answer those questions, but the one I want us to dive into today is found here in 1st Peter 2:4-10.

And just a word about the context – the people to whom Peter writes are 'elect exiles. They've been selected or chosen and are now living as strangers in a strange land. And he says in chapter one that God has caused them to be born again according to the living hope of the risen Jesus. You've been saved from the futile ways of your fathers and the world around you. Therefore – don't go back to your old ways, you've been ransomed from that. Leave the old behind and head into a new direction, and that's where we pick up in chapter 2, verse 4, which is our passage this morning.

Read **1 Peter 2:4-10**

Intro

Have you ever had a rich dessert prepared by someone who really knows what they're doing? That could be a Michelin chef or your grandmother making something that she's perfected over the years. And when you take a bite, there's just an explosion of flavors and goodness, and you want to appreciate them all.

I think of the cheesecake Caleb Stead and Allyce Rendall make. Or of a certain tres leche cake that I ate in a Cuban restaurant in Louisville. Or a few years ago, my wife and kids made a cake for my birthday that had layers of cheesecake and brownie on a cookie crust with cookie dough as the frosting. Talk about rich!

Well, in our text today Peter has given us a feast like that. It's one of the richest texts in the New Testament, just full of all of these biblical allusions and references to the Old Testament. There's a lot packed into these sentences, and they have a lot to say to us today about who we are and what are supposed to do as a church.

So I want us to dive into this rich text and try to appreciate the flavors of what he is saying. And we'll see along the way, how the truth here shapes our identity and purpose as a church. And we'll end by thinking about what this means for us as a church. But we need to start by doing some exegetical work in the text and savoring the richness of what is being said.

I see three movements here in our passage that show us God's building program for the church. We'll see that God's plan is that His church would draw near, that the church would be built up, and the church would speak out.

Draw Near

First, notice that the church is to draw near. Look at verse 4...

1 Peter 2:4

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,

In the flow of Peter's argument, he has been talking about the great salvation of God which has delivered them from their former ways. He wants us to know that you were not just saved *from* something, but saved *to* something – as you walk away from the former things, now you are coming to Him, to Jesus Christ. He is the living stone. That is, He's alive; He's been resurrected after being killed by the Romans, and He's the rock on which we stand.

Peter will go on to say that Jesus isn't just the living stone, He's the Cornerstone. A cornerstone was used in that day to set the foundation of a building. It was large, and it had to be perfectly shaped or else all of the other stones laid against it would be off. And so builders would search for and try to shape and then evaluate different stones to see if it would be able to serve as the cornerstone. It would have to be perfect.

So look at verse 6...

1 Peter 2:6

For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

Peter here quotes from Isaiah 28. In that passage, God is warning His people against trusting in the lies of the Assyrians. Don't put your hope there, trust in my deliverer! He's the cornerstone that I have chosen. He is my precious chosen one. There is a promised Messiah and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame. But sadly, the people do not believe. They reject the Lord. And then Peter talks about the cornerstone again in verse 7...

1 Peter 2:7

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”

Here, he’s quoting from Psalm 118 to once again highlight the unexpected way of God in bringing deliverance to His people. In Israel’s history, we know that Joseph was rejected by his brothers, and Moses was rejected by his brothers, and so too was David, the son of Jesse, was overlooked by his brothers. He was an unlikely candidate for being King. So he too was rejected. But even so, just like God brought salvation through Joseph and Moses, so too will He bring it through David. That’s what Psalm 118 is saying.

And it’s this pattern of God’s chosen servant being rejected which is ultimately and climactically fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. He was despised and rejected by men, but He is the living stone, the Cornerstone who is precious and chosen by God to bring salvation to all who would believe.

It’s also interesting to note that there are many references to stones or rocks in this passage. Jesus is a living stone (v4), we are living stones (v5). Jesus is the Cornerstone (v6), the stone the builders rejected (v7), and the rock of offense (v8).

Why is Peter so drawn to this image of a stone or rock?

Well, he doesn’t say this explicitly, but we know that Jesus had renamed him from Simon to Peter (John 1:42; Matthew 16:17). And the name Peter or Cephas in Greek means ‘rock.’

So I can imagine a scenario in which Peter is reading the Old Testament, and all of these occasions where the language of ‘rock’ or ‘stone’ or ‘cornerstone’ are just sticking out to him, and he begins to connect the dots about how Jesus is the living stone through His resurrection. How He was rejected and yet became the Cornerstone of the church.

And there are even more layers and nuances to these allusions here. The flavors of this passage are rich and full. But all of this language serves to highlight how amazing this salvation is that we have in Christ. Jesus is the Cornerstone of the church. It’s all about Him. It’s not about us. It’s not about your pastors or even you as a congregation, or our ‘brand’ (whatever that means). It’s not about what we want to do or how we like things to be, as though we get to make up our own version of Christianity or how we like to do church.

No, the church is about Jesus. He is the Cornerstone. And that means that the life and ministry of Jesus shapes everything that the church is and does. And it’s why the name ‘Cornerstone’ is a great name for a church, by the way.

To take one example. For Peter’s original readers, think about those Christians who were living as exiles in the world, they were living in a culture which rejected them and belittled them and didn’t align with their values – they would have heard this as a great encouragement. Yes, your culture doesn’t support you. Yes, they may make fun of your values and way of life. Don’t be surprised by that – they rejected Jesus too. And we follow Him.

In fact, the more you draw near to Jesus, the more you may face the rejection and scorn of this world. He's the Cornerstone, He's the example we follow. We take our cues from Him.

So how do you draw near to Jesus?

The first and most essential way that we draw near to Jesus is by believing on Him.

I may be talking with someone this morning, and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian. Or maybe you would – you'd say, "yea, I believe in God, and I want to be a good person." And you feel like you're generally doing ok at that.

And I'd say, great, I'm glad you're here. But can I ask you a question: would you say – I'm close to God? I've drawn near to Him? The Bible teaches us that the only way to really have a close relationship with God is by embracing and believing that Jesus really is who is says He is. That Jesus really is alive because he was resurrected after being crucified for your sins. That He is God in a human body. And that He is worthy of following with your whole life.

If you want to draw near to God, then the only way is by believing on Jesus. You must surrender your life to Him, and put your trust in who He is and what He has done to save you. And if you do that, the good news is that, as verse six says, 'you will not be put to shame.' Jesus never shames those who come to Him in faith. No, He gives us honor and a new identity. That's good news.

If you want to know more about that, I'd love to have that conversation with you. Or you can talk to one of the Christians around you about what this means to believe in Jesus and how you can draw near to Him by faith.

For the Christians here, notice Peter says, 'as you come to Him' in verse four. The verb implies that this is an ongoing thing. This is a regular pattern for the believer – we draw near to Jesus, the living stone on a regular basis.

The language of coming to Jesus and drawing near also has echoes of the Old Testament. This is what the priests in the Old Testament did when they offered sacrifices, and it's what the book of Hebrews calls the church to do in our worship (Leviticus 9:7; 21:18; Numbers 16:40; Hebrews 4:16; 7:25; 10:1, 22; 11:6; 12:18, 22). We draw near to God as we assemble together as a church and offer praise to the Lord.

So the question for us is – are you drawing near to God in a regular, ongoing way? At a pretty basic level that means gathering with the church to worship God. Are you faithful in that? The people that do church surveys say that faithfulness in attendance used to mean going to church 3x a week, now faithfulness means going 3x a month. That's a sad thing.

It is so easy for church to become just another thing on the schedule. And so we ask, do you feel like going? Will it align with what I'm hoping to get out of it? It is going to fit in with my plans for the week?

Let me tell you – those are the wrong questions. They're the questions our world would call you to ask – what is church doing for you? How is it meeting your needs and helping you accomplish your dreams? No, brothers and sisters, we draw near to God because he deserves our worship. We come to Him to offer praise because He is the point. He's the Cornerstone. We shouldn't try to make God fit in with my goals or my priorities as though I'm the cornerstone. No, He is the priority, and everything else revolves around Him.

God's plan for this church is that we would draw near to Him, the Cornerstone who was rejected by men but is chosen and precious to God. That's step one in God's building program.

Built Up

Step two is that God's people would be Built Up. So look again at the progression in the passage...

1 Peter 2:4-5

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, **5** you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Believers are to leave behind their old ways, and come to Jesus as the living stone. When we draw near to Him, we are like living stones. And as we do that, Peter says, you yourselves will be built up as a spiritual house. He's mixing metaphors here, but the idea still comes through. As we approach Jesus, we are like stones ourselves who are being formed into a new spiritual house or, we might say, as a temple of the Spirit.

And there are two things that I think Peter is emphasizing here. One is the sovereign work of God. And the second is their new identity as believers.

So first – the sovereign work of God in building up His people. Notice that the words 'being built up' are passive. God is the one who is building up the church. Paul said in 1st Corinthians that he planted, Apollos watered, but God gives the growth. The spiritual growth of the church is something that God does.

And if the spiritual growth of the church is up to the Lord, then that affects the motives and methods of the church. Our motives are not rooted in trying to come up with gimmicks and tricks to try to get more people to join our church. We're not trying to do a bait-and-switch sales pitch when we tell others about Jesus. It's not about keeping up with what the church down the road is doing or trying to be bigger and better all time. Our motive is to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

And our methods are also grounded in the truth of God's sovereignty. We're not tasked with trying to come up a message that people will like. We're not after helping people feel better about themselves or be a part of a group. No, because God gives the growth, we want to grow by following His commands and walking by faith in Him.

And so we are being built up as living stones as we pursue the simple means of grace that Jesus gave us – the proclamation of the gospel and the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. These are the means that God has ordained for the growth and health of His church, and they aren’t flashy or novel. We have received them from God. We don’t create them or try to come up with some new way to build ourselves up. Rather, we grow as the Lord fits us together as living stones, taking our cues from Jesus the Cornerstone. God is absolutely sovereign over the whole process.

Now, let me make a comment on verse 8, because maybe that caused a question in your mind as you read it, particularly as it relates to God’s sovereignty. It says,

1 Peter 2:8

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

The difficulty is in that phrase, ‘as they were destined to do.’ What’s he saying? Some take it to mean that the natural consequence of disobeying God is that they would stumble. That’s their destiny.

Others, and I lean toward this view, understand that this is saying something a bit stronger – that even those who reject God are fulfilling their part of God’s sovereign will. Just like it was ordained for Judas to betray Jesus, so also those who fully and finally reject God are still acting in accord with God’s eternal purposes, yet without making God responsible for their sin. The Bible is clear that people are responsible for their own free choices, and yet God is super-intending it all for according to His will. And there are questions there, and I don’t claim to have it all figured out, but I think that’s what Peter is saying here. You cannot escape the sovereign will of God.

So the point is that God is in control of all things. And that leads to Peter’s second emphasis here on how we grow. We grow out of and because of our new identity in Christ. And again, the thread through this passage is that the Lord is the one doing the work. He is the one who gives us our identity.

You are not defined by who Rome says you are. You’re not defined by what your culture says about you or even by how you feel about yourself. Your identity comes from God. Look at all the things that are now true of you in this text...

1 Peter 2:5

you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood...

You’re a spiritual house. That doesn’t mean something immaterial, but rather the house or temple or dwelling place for the Spirit of God. And you’re a holy priesthood. We’ll talk more about this idea in a moment because he repeats it in verse 9. Then look at...

1 Peter 2:6

...and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame

1 Peter 2:7

So the honor is for you who believe...

So we are not put to shame but rather have received honor. And then Peter takes these ingredients from the Old Testament and mixes them up for us to feast on in verses 9.

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession...

He continues in verse 10...

1 Peter 2:10

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.

There are allusions here to Exodus 19 and the book of Hosea and the Psalms. Peter wants to persuade us that God has done this amazing thing – He has taken these promises given to His people in the Old Testament, and He has brought them to fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the Cornerstone. And now, God is building His church to be His people who also receive these promises and are called to fulfill the mission given to His people since the beginning.

Peter is telling his readers – hey, you have a new identity. You're no longer defined by all these categories the world uses to classify people. You need to understand who you are because of who God says you are.

A little while ago, my kids took this kind of aptitude test thing at school that is intended to help them see what careers they might be good at. You ever looked at something like that? You could be a teacher or an architect or a graphic designer or whatever. And it gives these possibilities based on how you answered the questions.

I was talking with another guy from our church about this, and he mentioned that those tests, which are meant to inspire, may also be limiting. Some people take a test like that and now they think, "Well, these are my choices. This is what I'm supposed to do with my life – I can be an underwater basket weaver." And their identity gets wrapped up in what some test says.

And I see that happening in all sorts of ways in our culture. People want to judge and classify people based on all kinds of criteria – what your job is, the color of your skin, how much money you make, what you believe about politics or the social issues of the day. Or people will be told that they have a condition or a diagnosis, and it comes to be the dominant way they view themselves and how they go through the world.

And we can hide our weaknesses or our sins by appealing to some label they've received or given to themselves. "Well, I'm bi-polar." Or "I have ADHD." "Or I have trauma in my past." And friends, I'm not saying those things aren't real and don't affect our lives. But labels like those can sometimes be unhelpful in the process of sanctification and growth in Christ.

For some people, maybe's it's not even something someone told them, sometimes people just say things about themselves like it's an unchangeable fact. "I can't get involved around church, I

don't like to be around people." Or "I have a short fuse." Or "You know me, I'm just going to tell it like it is!" And so we think, my behavior is just how I am. No, you're just being a jerk. And we may try to justify all kinds of sin because of some label we put on ourselves.

Or on the other hand, sometimes, something like the opposite can happen. It may be your own conscience that tells you that you're not ever going to be good enough or that you deserve whatever bad things happen to you. You know the wickedness of your heart and the anger and lust and pride that arises in your thoughts, and so you think that your guilt and your shame is right. And I've talked to many people who live in this prison of their own making because of what they've told themselves.

Let me just say this – did you know that not one time in the New Testament are believers referred to as sinners? Not one time is someone who has trusted in Jesus and following Him referred to as a sinner. Now, we are sinners – I get that. I know you, and you know me. It is true that we still struggle and war with sin. And yes, we should have a humility that says, I'm totally underserving of the grace and mercy of God. I'm the chief of sinners as Paul says.

But, brothers and sisters, that is no longer our identity. Yes, before trusting in Christ, sin had affected every part of us. We had no hope in ourselves to do anything to recommend ourselves to God. But now Jesus has displayed His perfect patience in saving even me!

And so God is saying here in 1st Peter, I am the One who gives you your identity. You're not defined by all these other things – by what the culture says, by your past, even by your own conscience. When you believe in me, you will not be put to shame. Rather you have the honor of being mine. And let me tell you what's true about you – you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession. That's who you are.

So there a lot of background that we need to know if these phrases are going to land with us.

Chosen Race

First, he says that you're a chosen race, meaning that God picked you. You've been selected. Your race isn't defined by your ethnic heritage or who your ancestors were – now you belong to a chosen race. This isn't to say that cultural or ethnic differences go away, but rather that there is an identity that runs deeper than the earthly categories of race or nationality.

Who are you? You're a chosen race. You belong to a people who have been selected by God.

Royal Priesthood

Next, you are a royal priesthood. To someone familiar with the Old Testament, this phrase sounds kind of like an oxymoron – like jumbo shrimp or deafening silence. Or I read that recently the courts decided that Buffalo Wild Wings can legally call their chicken nuggets – "boneless wings." That's an oxymoron. Those things don't make sense together.

For the Israelites, a royal priesthood is an oxymoron. Priests weren't royal. They were Levites. Their role was to represent the people to God and represent God to the people – they stood in

the middle, in between. The royalty came from the tribe of Judah, they were descendants of David.

And now, Peter says, the church is a royal priesthood. How is that possible? It's possible because Jesus is both a priest and a king. And so in Him, His people become royal priests in this world as we draw near to God through Jesus and represent Him to the world around us. Now, you carry with you the authority of King Jesus, and you represent Him on the earth. That's who you are now.

Holy Nation

In addition to being a chosen race and royal priesthood, you are a holy nation. In the Old Testament, Israel was called a holy nation, and they were given laws and commands in order to set them apart from the other nations of the world so that they would be devoted to the Lord. To be holy (with an 'h') is to be wholly (with a 'w') devoted to God. Holiness means that you're whole, walking with integrity and not just trying to do good things externally or to be seen by others the way that our world does.

No, God says, now you're a part of a holy nation, one which has been set apart for my special purpose in the world.

God's Own Possession

And finally, you are a people for His own possession. God wants you. You're His. When you put your trust in Jesus, now you belong to God and are a part of His people forever. We're His possession.

And we're His possession because He has redeemed us at great cost to Himself. Listen to

Isaiah 43:1

But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.

God has redeemed us and we are now His. And because we belong to Him, we are freed from the need to belong everywhere else. You don't have to chase approval from others because you already have acceptance in Christ. You don't have to struggle for significance because you're already His inheritance. The world may not notice you. Your family may misunderstand you. Your boss may overlook you. Your neighbors may not know your story. But God says, "You're mine. You belong to Me. And I treasure you."

Cornerstone family – you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. That's who you are. That's our identity in Christ as a church. And because this is true of you, Jesus is building us up as living stones.

So far Peter has described the first two steps of this movement, God builds His church as we draw near to Him and as we are built up as a people with a new identity. And then finally, let's see the purpose for which have been built up – that we should speak out.

Speak Out

Look at last half of verse 9...

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

We have been given this new identity for a purpose. Namely, that we might proclaim the excellencies of Jesus. That's what this verse teaches us. As we've pointed out, there's a logical progression in these verses. As believers draw near to God, we are built up as a new people in order that we might be priests who proclaim His excellencies.

Our new identity brings a new purpose. In the Bible, being chosen is always for a purpose – for a mission. And our mission is to be priests who proclaim His excellencies. We gather as a people to draw near to God, as we do we are being built up by God, and then we speak out to the world about God.

So our outreach and evangelism and spiritual service starts with our worship of Jesus. You see that? It starts with our worship of Jesus, but it doesn't end there. Then, we are to move out and proclaim His excellencies so that others might draw near with us.

The pastor and scholar Sam Storms says this...

"Perhaps the most important task of the church, God's temple, is to prize Jesus as precious so that all the world may see Him as such (1 Peter 2:9-10)."¹

When Peter says that we are built up to be priests, he has in mind this purpose of representing God to the world and bringing others in. That's what priests do – they stand between the people and God. This is how Paul thought of his own ministry.

Romans 15:16

...to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles **in the priestly service of the gospel of God**, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Paul says, I proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles, so that their lives would be acceptable to God. I'm doing the work of a priest, representing God to the nations. Proclaiming the excellencies of Christ and sharing the gospel, that's priestly work. And that's the work we're called to do.

We're to be a holy priesthood. Look back at verse 5...

¹ Sam Storms, 1st Peter in ESV Expository Commentary, 317

1st Peter 2:5

you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Do you think of yourself as a priest? Depending on your background, that idea may conjure up for you images of men with black robes and collars, like a Roman Catholic priest would wear. And for Peter's first readers, it would likely have brought images to mind of men offering sacrifices at the temple, slaying animals and burning incense.

But now, Peter says, you are to offer spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to God. What does that mean? How do you offer spiritual sacrifices?

Other places in the New Testament help us out.

Romans 12:1

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

So we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. The word sacrifice has with it this idea of being brought near to God and offered up. That's what you and me are called to do.

Hebrews 13:15-16

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. **16** Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

So here our praise and worship of God is called a sacrifice. And also our service of sharing and serving each are called sacrifices which are pleasing to God. I don't think we're far off to say that when we are giving ourselves to God and serving one another with our bodies and our praise and our possessions – that's an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord. It's an aroma that is pleasing to Him.

We've had a few days recently that have just about been warm enough to have a little bonfire in our firepit in the backyard. And if I'm wearing a jacket or sweatshirt or something around the fire, it'll smell like that for days to come. And according to my wife, that's one of the best smells in the world. And so sometimes, I put a fire together, just to be a pleasing aroma to my wife. I want to smell like I've been near the fire. (maybe that's more than you wanted to know...)

When we gather together as a church family, we are drawing near to God. It's like we're approaching the fire. And that builds us up, and so then we ought to smell like smoke wherever we go. There should be an aroma on us that smells like we've been near the Lord.

When we are around others in the world, they should notice – hey, there's something different about the way you treat your spouse, the way you speak about others at work, the way that

you handle hardships in your life. And we can say, yes, I've drawn near to Jesus. And we can proclaim His excellencies.

So we've see from this passage what the church is called to be and do. We're to draw near, to be built up, and to speak out because we've been given a new identity.

How does that apply to us corporately as a church today? Does that shape what we do here at Cornerstone? Well, the movement of the text is that we draw near to God, are built up, and then speak out. Another way to say that would be to say that we know God, grow together, and serve others.

I think our mission is right in line with what we've seen here. And this mission affects all that we do. Our worship services on Sundays are aimed at proclaiming the excellencies of Christ. We gather to offer a sacrifice of praise because it's all about Jesus the Cornerstone.

We aim to help others know God, and not just on Sundays. Most evangelism happens out there in the world as we smell like spiritual service and represent God to lost world.

Our grow groups and equip classes and counseling relationships are designed to help us grow together and be built up by God around His Word. As we come to Jesus, we are living stones who are active in our pursuit of learning from and following Him.

And then finally, we serve others. We make sacrifices to do good for each other, to give up convenience and our preferences in order to love and build one another up. We consider each other more highly than ourselves, and we want to represent Jesus well to our community. And just like Paul, we desire that the nations would come to Him in faith and be an acceptable offering to the Lord. That drives our missions efforts.

That's how this fits together for our church's ministry as a whole. So the question for you is – where do you need to take a faith step? Maybe that means drawing near to God in faith for the first time? Maybe it means committing that you will be faithful in your prioritizing worship with the church? That it's about Him more than anything else on your schedule. Or maybe it means getting involved in grow group so that you might be built up in the faith? Or maybe your step is speaking out to that friend or co-worker or person in your life who you know needs Jesus?

What is your step today?

Brothers and sisters, we have received a new identity and a new purpose in the building plan of God. Let us draw near to Him, being built up by Him, and speak out about Him.

Let's pray...