

[Story] A young boy went to a grocery store and asked the cashier for a box of Tide laundry soap. The cashier was puzzled and asked why he wanted a box of Tide. The boy said that he was going to wash his cat. The cashier said, “Young man, you shouldn’t wash your cat with this kind of soap.” But the boy insisted that it would be okay. A few days later, the boy returned, and the cashier asked about his cat. “Oh, he died,” said the boy. The cashier said, “Well, son. I warned you not to wash your cat with Tide.” The boy replied, “No, Sir! The soap did not hurt him a bit. It was the spin cycle that got him.”

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Often, it’s the spin cycle of life we get caught in by persecution, trials and troubles. Caught in the repeated stress or the same problem over and over breaks us down, more than the problem itself does to us. For me, dealing with the same problem over and over is a killer. I get frustrated if I have to deal with the same problem over and over with no progress. Dealing with a problem itself is not an issue for me, but dealing with the same problem over and over with no progress. It is somewhat a “red button” that brings out “Ugly Sunny.” Sometimes I have to make a hard decision to cut the unhealth cycle of problem for the sake of wellness of all. The spin cycle of life becomes a killer of life if we do nothing about it.

Today’s message is coming from 1 Peter 2:3-5, written for the people who are caught in the spin cycle of life. 1 Peter was written to encourage those people who were emotionally drained and disorientated by traumatic historical and social events. The recipients of 1 Peter were reeling from the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, the dwelling place of God. They were also experiencing alienation and suffering as outsiders of the social and political system. Peter invited them to keep coming to Jesus by telling who Jesus was and who they were because of who He was. We have this invitation before us today.

At the outset I call your special attention to the connection of verses 4 and 5. “To whom coming, as unto a living stone...you also, as living stones, are built up,” or, “To whom coming...are built up...a holy priesthood.” Everywhere throughout Scripture the connection between the saints and their Head (Christ) is perpetually mentioned.

Coming to Him as a foundation, we become a temple. Coming to Him as the Holy One of Israel we become a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices, worship. Coming to Him! Coming closer and closer to Him, we grow up in all things into Him and become perfect worshipers in Christ Jesus. Coming to Him is possible because we have tasted the goodness of Jesus Christ (vs. 3).

Today I have invited Ron Wolfe sharing the story about those who tasted the goodness of Jesus Christ and upheld their identity as worshipers even in the spin cycle of life.

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[Ron] I like many of you have traveled to foreign countries where we see people that live in poverty and a lower standard of living than what we enjoy here. And those of you from such countries know about this better than I. While this makes me uncomfortable or sad, I am also struck by the happiness that I see by such people with so much less. And I think of us here in Hawaii, Alaska, or wherever, with all that we have, and how we find so many things to complain about.

I had an experience at my church in Juneau that took me to a whole other level that I'd like to share with you. A couple from Tajikistan came to tell us about being Christian there. I didn't know anything about this country, in fact I had to look it up on the map. It is on the northern border of Afghanistan. It was in the former Soviet Union. So, it's a young country without much of a government. It's a poor country without much economy and is predominantly Muslim. A missionary couple from Chapel by the Lake heard of them through *Voice of the Martyr*.

The couple told us that they must worship underground; they don't carry bibles around, they hide them. There are no buildings with crosses or signs that say 'church' or anything that would give any place away as a place of worship. They meet at places like child care centers where they can go about in their daily lives and not arouse suspicion and these locations change routinely. There was more to their story but what really struck me is they asked not to take photographs or post anything on social media about them. A fellow Christian from their home town was videoed performing a baptism by full emersion and that video was posted on social media. The local authorities came, took him from his home, arrested and executed him without any process at all. Can you imagine?

This was not an isolated incident and such evil continues today. As I reflect, it truly makes me “appreciate the opportunity to worship with you without fear of prosecution or persecution,” and yes, I admit redundantly each Sunday. I hope we never take it for granted.

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Freely worshiping God without any persecution is a privilege we have. Being the worshipers of God each Sunday, if not every day, is a privilege we have. Probably the spin cycle of life we are dealing with here in Kona, Hawaii is different from the one in Tajikistan or various churches in Asia Minor suffering religious persecution to whom the Book of 1 Peter was written. However, God’s message to all who are caught in the spin cycle of life is same—Come to Him regardless and nevertheless. Be the living stone and be the worshipers of God by coming to our Lord, Jesus Christ. Coming to Him is our hope for all of us who are caught in the spin cycle of life. Let us reclaim our identity, the Worshipers of God, by coming to Christ Jesus today. Amen.