

1PETER 2:4-8 "A Living House"

Peter has told us in verses one and two of chapter one that we are chosen by God that we may obey Christ. He's told us in that same chapter, verse 4, that we have an inheritance that is imperishable. In the midst of this great news he also tells us that our faith grows as we are tested by fire.

But our ability to persevere in testings and trials is entirely dependent on keeping our eyes on Christ as God, and only God, enables us to go forward in His grace and strength. Peter addresses this when speaking of our risen Lord.

1Pe 1:20-21 "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. 21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."

Last week we saw how our faith and hope grows as we, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of God's word so that by it we may grow in respect to our salvation if we have tasted the kindness of the Lord. [Vs.2-3]

But we want to remember that though the word of God is our means for growth it is God Himself who causes the growth and this is why it's essential to seek Him continually.

Paul touches on this truth in 1Corinthians when explaining how we are used by God to bring the truth of God's word, but we don't actually have the ability to make that truth grow in a person.

1Co 3:5-6 "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe--as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow."

And this is why we should always seek God in His word and in prayer, asking for this growth. We don't want to remain babes in Christ, and if it is God who causes us to grow we should go to Him always. But then we must be willing to obey Him as we seek Him.

But this coming to God is what Peter addresses next in our text.

1Pe 2:4-5 As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-- 5 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."

"As you come to him." Peter is assuming that we are coming to Him. And as such this is the beginning of our walk with the Lord. But coming to Him we should have an anticipation of His personal touch in our lives.

Remember what Jesus said in Mat 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Jesus wants us to come to Him with expectation. Not necessarily expecting what we want, but what He wants for us, knowing that whatever He wants of us He will give us the grace to go through. As we take His yoke upon us we will find rest for our souls.

It's when we put on our own yoke, or the yoke of this world that rest doesn't come easy. And keep in mind what a yoke is. It's an implement that's used to connect oxen. The imagery here is that Christ wants us to be connected to Him and go in the direction He wants to go.

As we follow Him He will always lead us to paths of righteousness and like a deer who pants for waters He will give us refreshment in Himself.

But when we come to Him we must come with an understanding that He is who He says He is. That's why we can trust Him. Peter says, "And coming to Him as a living stone."

That seems like a contradiction in terms. Stones are not living. And yet this metaphor is designed to teach us, not of an inanimate object, but of One who is alive and can be relied upon; a firm foundation.

By the way, the word stone here in our text in the Greek is *lithos*. And as Dr. Hiebert points out in his commentary on Peter, this "word is used in connection with the construction of a building; Palestinian structures were commonly made of stone. It refers to a prepared stone, one that has been shaped for its place in the building."

He goes on to make an important distinction. "As such [this stone] is to be distinguished from *petros*, a loose lying stone on a field or roadside, and from *petra*, a rock, or simply a rock in contrast with sand or metal." The term appropriately refers to Christ as One prepared and qualified to carry out the prophetic functions of a messianic stone."

And so this prepared stone, which was specifically designed to be part of a building, is the living stone of that building. And we'll see that this entire building is living as well, because this prepared stone gives it life.

But in our text Peter encourages us to come to this stone and then he shows us that this living stone is rejected by men, but it is choice and precious in the sight of God. This language is reminiscent of other passages we see in both the O.T. and the N.T. which speak of unbelievers who reject this stone.

Now I'm going to skip from verse 4 to verses 6-8, because they're all connected in the same thought and then I'll come back to verse 5.

Peter makes the assumption in verse 4 that we who are in Christ will come to this stone, but he makes the point that there are those who will reject this stone.

We read in 1Pe 2:6-8 "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." (Isaiah 28:16) 7 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, [Or cornerstone]" (Psalm 118:22) 8 and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." (Isaiah 8:14) They stumble because they disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for."

Let's start with verse 6..... "For in Scripture it says:..." Peter is about to quote three O.T. passages in reference to this stone. He starts with a quotation from Isaiah 28:16... "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."

In Isaiah 28 God is speaking to the leaders in Israel and rebuking them for their rebellion and self-determining attitude. And the point is that God Himself will prepare this stone, the stone which

we're told in verse seven, is rejected by the builders. Those builders are these same religious leaders.

The world-at-large may deem this stone to be of no value, they may see this stone as something to be cast on the rock pile to be broken up and used for trodding under foot, but God has deemed this stone precious and choice.

Sometimes we may find ourselves looking at this stone and wondering, can so many people be wrong? So many deem this stone of little value? Though we may not consciously say it, at times we begin to act as though this stone is of little value.

And instead of resting on the cornerstone, we doubt it by our actions. Sometimes we doubt that this precious stone can deliver us, protect us, and finally give us the victory.

But don't ever forget that though the world has rejected this stone and has deemed it worthless, the Almighty God Himself has declared that it is in fact choice and precious in His sight. And in turn we must also trust in this precious and choice stone which is the corner stone of our salvation.

God has laid that stone in Zion. The name Zion is connected to a variety of places in the Scriptures, but overall it is connected to the people of God and in the O.T. that would have been the Jews in the land of Israel.

And so in a metaphorical sense this stone has been placed smack dab in the middle of Zion or right in the midst of Israel for all to see. This choice stone was chosen by the Father to undergird His people and give them hope.

This is why Peter continues the quote from Isaiah 28..... "the one who trusts will never be dismayed." The NKJV has it, "the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

The KJV has it, "he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded", while the NAS has it, "he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed."

The idea here is that our faith in Christ, who is this cornerstone, is such that we don't have to fear that it's a faith which is in vain and leads to disappointment, or a shame for having trusted Him.

Dr. Hiebert makes the comment: "The man of faith has the firm assurance that he will never be put to shame, will never be disappointed because the stone failed him, resulting in personal shame and disgrace."

And the reason for this is because God said it. We may feel disappointed at times, or even ashamed and confused about the reliability of this stone, but because God has assured us that this stone is our foundation those feelings we have at times are misplaced, and should be considered in light of our faithful Almighty God who never lies.

The Psalmist David knew what it was to be distressed with life and the trials he faced and he knew what it was to doubt, but he always went back to God to seek His strength and then to rest in God's grace.

Psa 31:1-4 "In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. 2 Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. 3 Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. 4 Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge."

Where else could he go? Where else can we go? And yet we find ourselves thinking that we have a better way. Or if we don't have a better way, we conclude no way is as good as God's way, and we take a vacation from life by retreating to self pity.

No, we can and must stand on the Rock of our salvation, and trust that He will be there for us and that we don't have to be ashamed to call Him Father and Savior. He always comes through. The problem we have is that He may not come through according to our time table and in the way we expect Him to come through.

The Father has deemed this stone as precious and choice and so should we. No matter how much the waves want to crash against us, we will not be washed away as we stand on this Stone by faith.

And so Peter continues in 1Pe 2:7 "Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" (Psalm 118:22)

The last part of verse 7 "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone", is taken from Psalm 118:22. I mentioned

earlier that the builders are the religious leaders in Jerusalem who have rejected this cornerstone.

The imagery goes like this. A building is being erected and all of the stones are cut out for a specific part of the building. A cornerstone is a stone which is the standard by which all of the other pieces fit. It regulates the line of the building going in all directions.

Once the corner piece is put into place you know where to start and you put the next stone next to this cornerstone. The whole building expands from this one focal point.

Now imagine a builder in Israel getting ready to build this structure and he along with other advisors decide to start without the cornerstone. A stone is placed in the general location of where this building is to go and then someone decides to place another stone thirty feet away.

One group starts on one side while another groups starts on the other and hopefully they'll meet to where the building takes the proper shape.

The builders have rejected the cornerstone. The implication is that they are trying to build a building according to their standard instead of according to the standard of the Contractor who has drawn up the plans.

God is the Contractor and the builders are the religious leaders who have decided to build this building we call Israel, without adhering to the proper plans and using the proper materials in their proper place.

Should it surprise anyone that Israel went astray? In fact, in rejecting the Stone, which God selected, the religious leaders actually set Israel up for deception. The Stone was still in their midst but it was placed in such a position, outside of the building, to be seen only as a stone which got in the way.

And this is what Peter says in 1Pe 2:8 "and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." (Isaiah 8:14) They stumble because they disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for."

This rejected stone was now an offense to Israel. And they stumbled over it. And in their stumbling they only despised it

more. But what we see in verse 7 is that this stumbling is directly related to a choice.

Yes, they stumbled over the stone because they were blind, but they chose to put on the blindfold. And here in our text we see why they stumbled. "They stumble because they disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for."

The NAS puts it, "for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word; and to this doom they were also appointed."

The Jews had the word, they had the message of hope found in the cornerstone. But they chose to reject it. During Christ's earthly ministry Jesus brings this out clearly.

When speaking to the religious leaders of Israel, the Pharisees, Jesus says in Mat 21:42-45 "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? 43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44 He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." 45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them."

Jesus took the lampstand out of the midst of Israel and gave it to the Gentile world. This didn't mean that Jews couldn't and didn't come to Christ, but it would not be in the context of a unified nation under Christ.

And this is where the Israel of God begins to take center stage as all of those people from all tongues, tribes and nations come under the protection of the living stone who alone is their firm foundation.

The lampstand has been given to the church which is made up of all nations and peoples and tongues, what Paul calls the Israel of God.

Galatians 6:14-16 ¹⁴ But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. ¹⁶ And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

Before I leave verse 8 it's worth noting a very hard saying concerning Israel, and for that matter all who would reject the Stone. "They stumble because they disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for."

The idea here is that their destiny or that to which they were appointed was doom, which is separation from God because of their unbelief. We need to understand that God is Sovereign. Nothing is out of His control.

He has planned all things from eternity past, even allowing those to reject Him and suffer the consequences. This is hard for us to understand and sometimes we may conclude based on such passages that God is unfair.

The fact of the matter is that God is holy and perfect and there is no injustice with Him, only those things which are ultimately good and for His glory.

Simply because someone opts out of Gods plan through unbelief in Christ does not mean that you can opt out of God's Sovereign control.

Dr. Kistemaker sums it up this way. "No unbeliever ought to think that his stubborn unbelief gives him independence from God and freedom to ignore Him. God is in control. He holds the unbeliever accountable and tells him that because of his unbelief he is destined for eternal damnation."

All men will continue on a path of eternal destruction because **THEY** have rejected the living stone, and God has chosen to leave some on that path. But praise God He has chosen to bring many from this darkness into His marvelous light.

And we need to glory in this living Stone and in the grace that has been bestowed upon us in Christ who is that living and abiding Stone which the builders rejected.

You see, as we go back to verse 5 we can now appreciate why this living stone is so important and what this living stone has done in our lives.

1Pe 2:5 "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."

God's master plan as a Master builder is to unite us with Him in this living hope and to use us to build a future outside of this dying world as we look to a new world, an everlasting Kingdom that finds its expression in the new heavens and new earth. But this future is found only in the living Stone, Jesus Christ.

But it is Jesus who makes us living stones in this Kingdom He is building. We are stones which He has cut out for a special purpose, to be built up as a spiritual house.

The word house in the Greek is the same word that is often used to describe the temple of God in Jerusalem before its destruction in A.D. 70. And so, in a sense this spiritual house into which we are built is a new temple, a living temple. And of course our bodies are called the temple of the Holy Spirit who gives us life in Christ.

As a spiritual house we must be connected to each other as we rest on the Cornerstone. William Barclay points out in his commentary that, "The Christian is likened to a living stone and the Church to a living edifice into which he is built. Clearly that means that Christianity is community; the individual Christian finds his true place only when he is built into that edifice...."

..... Solitary religion is ruled out as an impossibility. C.E.B. Cranfield writes: The free-lance Christian, who would be a Christian, but is too superior to belong to the visible Church upon earth in one of its forms, is simply a contradiction in terms."

This means that the true Church is meant to be spiritual and alive. A church building that is made up of wood and block and mortar does not qualify. It simply houses the true spiritual house of God, His people.

But as a spiritual house we are being built up for a purpose and that purpose is to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

In short, a priesthood is meant to give a picture that we represent our Great High priest, Jesus Christ. As priests we have a purpose in this world.

A priest is one who has access to God. And we as believers in Christ have such a relationship. A priest is one who extends God's love to others as we bridge the gap to people with the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Again, I refer to William Barclay. "The Latin word for priest is pontifex, which means bridge-builder; the priest is the man who builds a bridge for others to come to God; and the Christian has the duty and the privilege of bringing others to that Savior whom he himself has found and loves."

A priest is also the man who brings an offering to God and that offering should be himself. Everything we do should be done for God and that means that even the smallest things in life can be done as a way of saying thank you to Christ.

Paul says in Rom 12:1 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship."

All of life is to be worship to God as priests before Him who carry out our duty to be those living stones which are part of His spiritual house to His honor and glory.

There is the tendency in this world to think of salvation as being man-oriented. In other words, 'I'm saved, so I can concentrate on myself and where I'll spend eternity.' Peter clearly teaches that salvation is God-oriented.

We belong to God to be used by God to give glory to God as we offer up to God our spiritual sacrifices of praise for so great a salvation. The writer of Hebrews sums it up this way.

Heb 10:19-24 "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

May we go forth into this world as the living stones we are in Christ, who is our living Savior and Master Builder, who molds us and uses us to further this spiritual house, this eternal Kingdom He has allowed us to be a vital part of.