

1 PETER 2:6-8

Coming to the Precious Cornerstone – Part 2

(2:6-8) *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.’ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,’ and ‘A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.’ They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. (ESV)*

Last week, we were struck with the reality of all of the incredible things that take place whenever we come together as a group to spend some time in the presence of Christ. Let’s take just a moment to read verses 4 & 5, and review what is going on there before we jump into our text for tonight. **Read 2:4-5.**

Beginning at verse 4, Peter focuses in on our identity and our responsibility as a community of Christ-followers. As I read last week from a sermon on this text, Peter is not so driving home our identity as individual priests, but as our community identity as a priesthood; driving home what all Christians need to embrace wholeheartedly; we have been saved into a community, to live in close quarters with one another (figuratively speaking), to do life together, to give our lives in ministry to one another. We have been saved so that we might minister to the needs of other people who have been saved.

This is much of what happens, Peter says, as we “come to Him”; as we come to Him in a unified commitment to seek fellowship with Him; to meet with Him together; to find spiritual sustenance from Him. As we do that, Peter says, we are being made into a spiritual house where as we continue to do life together the Lord will choose to manifest His power increasingly. As He does this, He is also making us a community of priests who have been called to give their life to build up the community of believers in Christ (the ministry of the priest is primarily directed toward the body); for the purpose of offering sacrifices from pure hearts; sacrifices that are empowered by Christ, out of obedience to Christ, and to the glory of Christ.

We ended our time last week by asking a few questions that I said we were going to try to answer this week, because *so* much of what Peter has addressed in the past several verses, is contrary to our common understand of what the Christian life really is; so says one pastor:

The modern evangelical thinks about salvation and about becoming a Christian in almost entirely individualistic terms. The convert doesn’t hear about the church, about the community of faith, until after he has gone forward at an evangelistic meeting or confessed faith at a retreat or in someone’s living room. He may never be told that his Christian life, to be authentic at all, must be the life of someone who lives in the most intimate and structural fellowship with a community of believers like himself and that his great calling as a Christian is to serve the Lord in and through that community. To the extent that the typical evangelical thinks about the church, he thinks of it as an institution that exists to help him in his own, individual walk with God. He does not see the church as his home, his mother, his people, his place of life and work, his family, his calling, his very body, which is the way the church is viewed in the Bible over and over again! He does not think of himself as a stone in the wall of a spiritual house.

(Robert Brayburn)

So, let’s get back to our questions from last week, as a way to get us thinking along Peter’s lines.

1. Where do we see this kind of “individualistic Christianity” around us today?
2. Where does this perspective come from?
3. What does it look like in our culture, to do life with one another and to minister to one another as modern-day priests?
4. Is there a reward that comes from doing life like this?

Let’s read 2:6-8.

THE DEEP ROOTS OF PETER’S ENCOURAGEMENT

There is beautiful structure to this passage¹ (what scholars call a “chiasm”), that I don’t want you to miss, simply so we can appreciate with greater depth, its richness.

- A. Christ: Rejected by Men (2:4a)
- B. Christ: Chosen and Precious (2:4b)
- C. Christians: Living Stones (2:5)
- A. Christ: Chosen and Precious (2:6)
- B. Christ: Rejected by Men (2:7b-8)

The point in this structure is to show us that God’s plan for us is as old and as sure as His plan is for Christ! This is going to come into play more obviously later in chapter 2, 3, and 4, where we’ll see that just as our sufferings are to be expected because of the sufferings Christ experienced, so our honor and reward are to be expected and embraced with confidence because of the honor and glory that Christ will experience for all eternity.

But Peter teaches this to us here by much more than structuring His writing in a specific way. He does it by reaching back into the OT and applying 3 OT passages to Christ.

The first passage he quotes is from Isaiah 28:16 (though not an exact quotation).

Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. (2:6 – ESV)

In that passage God is dealing with the leaders of Israel who though they have turned from His ways, they believe that they are still secure in the world because of their political alliances. Isaiah there announces directly to them that the only thing that will preserve them in this world or the next is to trust in YHWH alone. There is no security for people who refuse to trust in God. True security comes in seeking to be near God in His presence.

Peter applies the meaning of the “precious cornerstone” which the original readers probably understood to be referring to the temple of God, and applies that truth to Christ. Whoever trusts in Christ, as ancient Israel was called to trust in YHWH will not be put to shame on Judgment Day. Whoever “comes to Christ” (i.e. seeks Him for security and sustenance – v. 4) and seeks to build their life on Him (i.e. seeks His wisdom for decisions, makes

¹ What this does is show us with great clarity what Peter’s point really is here. On the whole, Peter is doing what he did in part in verse 5; tying the identity of God’s people with the identity of Christ Himself (“a living stone...like living stones”). He is speaking as much of us as He is of Christ in this passage, showing that God’s plan for us is rooted in His plan with Christ.

decisions for His glory, makes allegiance to Christ his ultimate priority in life) will have no reason to be ashamed when his life is judged by God in the end. But those who seek to build their life on anything other than this “precious cornerstone” will be completely embarrassed and full of regret when they find out that their life was lived ignorantly and completely in vain.

Peter then goes on to interpret this passage for us.

So the honor is for you who believe... (2:7a – ESV)

The ESV is the only translation in my opinion to get it right on the first part of this verse. Most translations translate to the effect “so then, He is precious to those of you who believe...” The problem with this is 2-fold. First, “honor” (τιμῆ) does not mean “precious” it means “honor” or “respect”. Most translators see some kind of correlation with the word in verse 4 about Christ, translated “precious”. Though these two words are related, they are not the same word. Secondly, “honor” in this passage is the subject of the sentence. If “precious” were Peter’s intended meaning for this word, it would not make sense as the subject of a sentence since it is an adjective.

So then, Peter’s point is to remind us that the honorable life is one that trusts in Christ. Even though the wicked often prosper in this world, and even though the Christian life is at many points extremely difficult and not even remotely glamorous, it will prove to be the only life worth living in the end, because our foundation stone is “in the sight of God chosen and precious.” He has a plan for His people, and it will involve “praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Not so the wicked. Look at the rest of verse 7 and into verse 8.

...but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.”

Peter quotes 2 more OT verses to continue making his point in verse 7; where his point is that just as God has a plan for His people who believe in Him, so He has a plan for those who don’t, which also has to do with Christ.

He first quotes from Psalm 118:22, which was originally applied to Israel, and applies it here to Christ as he did in Acts 4:11. The Jews in Jesus day thought they were the stone that the builders (the rulers of the world) had rejected and oppressed, but who were also destined for glory (to become God’s precious cornerstone), but Peter here says, “No, Christ is this stone. Christ is the one whom all unbelievers have rejected, but who has become the stone on whom all men must seek to build their life upon.”

Then he quotes from Isaiah 8:14. To unbelievers, Christ also serves as a “stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.” To some, those who refuse to believe in Christ, He will lead directly to their destruction and to their ruin. Just as He will lead some to life as they believe in Him; He will lead those who do not directly to judgment.

The point here in all of these quotations is that all men who encounter Christ must deal with Him. They cannot get around Him. They cannot push Him to the side. They cannot ignore Him and expect that He will go away. When they encounter Christ, people are forced and demanded to either accept Him on His own terms, or reject Him as a stone not fit to be the cornerstone of their life. Those who do not build their life on this “precious cornerstone” will throw it away and trip over it where they throw it. They cannot escape Him. All men are forced to embrace Him as the cornerstone of their lives or reject Him by calling Him anything else.

But Peter goes on. To this “stumbling”; this ruin; this destruction; all who will reject Christ have been appointed.

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. (2:8b – ESV)

I actually prefer the NKJV on this part of verse 8. *They stumble, being disobedient to the Word, to which they were also appointed.*

The only concrete verb in the sentence is the verb “stumble” (προσκοπέουσιν), which is modified by “disobey”. The point then is that “those who do not believe” (v. 7) have been appointed to the place that disobedience to the Gospel always leads; complete and utter ruin. Their destiny of destruction is just as sure as the destiny of God’s people to eternal life. Just as God had planned to call out a people for His own possession, so did He plan to punish the people who would refuse to take refuge in Him.

This is what Paul teaches in Romans 9.

What if God, desiring to make his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory... (Romans 9:22-23 – ESV)

I believe Paul is teaching there, not that God makes people simply to destroy them, but that He works in the hearts of unbelievers to ensure that their Judgment is well deserved, as He did with Pharaoh.

The idea is the same in Proverbs 16:4.

The Lord has made (or prepared) everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble. (Proverbs 16:4 – ESV)

The point in all of these verses is that the Lord is just as active in the life of the unbeliever as He is in the life of the believer, though in a very different way. In the life of the believer He is preparing Him for the day he steps into eternity with God, whereas for the unbeliever who will persist in unbelief until the end of His life, God is preparing Him in a very real sense for the day he faces eternal judgment, so that as he is tormented and punished for the rest of eternity, he will have no one to blame but himself. That is a fearful thought, but it is one that comes directly from Scripture.

Let’s close with some discussion and prayer.

1. Question for Discussion: Keeping in mind that Peter’s goal here is the encouragement of his readers, how would you say that these verses contribute to that goal? How does this passage encourage you, if at all? If it does not, how does it make you feel?
2. Matter for Prayer: The unbelievers in our life are in very clear danger of eternal destruction. Let’s pray for them, and that the Lord would spur us on to share the Gospel with them, and that they would be saved.