

Living Stones—1 Peter 2:4-8

In Peter's first epistle, he was exhorting his audience to grow spiritually in chapter 2. He used several metaphors to accomplish this. First, he urged them to have a desire for God's Word that could be likened to a baby's desire for its mother's milk. As a baby grows physically through constantly imbibing its mother's milk, so a Christian grows spiritually by studying, dwelling on, and applying God's Word. Extending the "birth" metaphor that he began in ch.1:3 concerning our spiritual birth through Christ, this is a consistent way to move from our position before the Lord to the application of living lives worthy of our Savior. We should hunger and thirst for the Word of God which the Holy Spirit will use to change us from within. The "pure milk of the word" is that divinely given nourishment supplied by the Gospel. In 1 Peter 2:3, he says "since you have tasted the kindness of the Lord". He means that since they have the blessings that come with salvation, why stop there, keep going towards maturity.

Building Up the Family of God

The second metaphor Peter employs is the image of the stones that it takes to build a good building. In v.4, Jesus is portrayed as a "living stone", the most valuable cornerstone that a good building must have. This stone has been rejected by the human race as a whole, but we see Him as "choice" and "precious" in the sight of God. He is the basis that God has provided for our salvation, and thus the foundation for us to build our spiritual building upon. We who believe in Jesus as our cornerstone are being built up as a spiritual house upon Him. Peter says we offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. By this he means that we sacrifice our lives (our buildings) to be a part of His building.

Old Testament Support

Peter goes on to quote Isaiah 28:16 as a prophecy of the Messiah being sent by God into the world to be the cornerstone of people's lives. Everyone who would accept Him as their Savior and the foundation of their lives would not be disappointed. In the first part of Isaiah 28, the prophet makes clear that Israel had sinned terribly, and it was not hidden from God. Therefore judgment was coming in the form of Assyrian conquerors. Nevertheless, God would not forget His people, and He would send a stone, "a costly cornerstone for the foundation" of God's spiritual building that He would build. By this, he meant that God would send His Son into the world to be the cornerstone of the atonement for their sins. Then Peter quoted Psalm 118:22 in order to draw a sharp contrast between believers and nonbelievers. Christ is our precious foundation, but unbelievers have "rejected Him as their cornerstone". Unbelievers stumble or trip over Him to their own condemnation. All who do not receive Jesus as their Savior will one day face Him as their judge. Now we have a choice of having Jesus Christ as our advocate, or rejecting Him, and end up facing Him as our judge.

Don't just take Peter's word for it, Jesus also quoted from Psalm 118:22 after telling a parable to the religious leaders who had rejected Him in Matt.21:33-46. The parable was

a short fictitious story about a vineyard that had been rented out by a landlord. When harvest time came, the landlord expected payment that was due, but the vine growers not only refused to pay, but they beat and killed the servants he sent to collect. After another group of servants met the same fate, the landlord sent his son to collect, thinking they would respect him. Instead, they killed the son and conspired to own the vineyard themselves. If you know the history of Israel it's not hard to see that in the story the landlord represents God, the vine growers are Israel, the servants are the prophets, and the son is Jesus. At first the religious leaders did not understand this so Jesus asked them a question designed to make them indict themselves, "what will he do to those vine-growers?" Immediately the religious leaders said, "He will bring those wretches to an end, and rent it to other vine-growers who will pay Him what's due."

Then Jesus quoted from Ps. 118:22 about Israel rejecting the chief cornerstone. In Matt.21:43-44, Jesus told the chief priests and Pharisees that the kingdom of God would be taken away from them and given to a nation producing the fruit expected of it. Peter was using this same idea in 1 Peter 2 to express that the nation that Jesus was speaking of would be the church.

Therefore, in 1 Peter 2:9-10, he addresses the church saying, "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for God's own possession." Remember that Peter was Jewish and that quotation was originally given to Israel in Deuteronomy by Moses, and later to Israel by Isaiah; but now according to Jesus' prophecy and Peter's letter, it was being applied to the church. Peter went on to say in v.10 that the church, being made up of predominantly Gentiles by the time he wrote this letter, were once not a people of God, but now had received mercy and had become the people of God. Peter's purpose in sharing this with his audience was to say that the proper response to such privilege and mercy is the practice of holiness, and to aspire to spiritual growth.

Shall We Build on it or Trip Over it?

As people live, they encounter Jesus with two possible results. The stone in their way is either the foundation for a new spiritual life, or it is a stone they stumble over. The stone divides believers from disbelievers, it means life or death. Will you reside in God's house as a member of His family, or reject His house to build your own? This seems like such an obvious answer, but the vast majority reject Him—Why?

They examined Jesus as people do today, but He does not fit their preconceived idea of what the Messiah needed to be like. The easiest example of this was Christ's hometown of Nazareth. Jesus stood up in the synagogue and read from Messianic prophecy, and then announced that it was fulfilled in Him. The people grumbled saying that they knew this guy, He is the son of Joseph, and we know his brothers--why he is just a carpenter! They grabbed Him and tried to throw Him over the hill to kill Him (Luke 4:29). People want a handsome, powerful looking conqueror who comes in on a golden chariot, and then gives them all the selfish things they want. People are not interested in a humble servant whose message involved convicting them of their sin and their need to repent. Therefore, the vast majority was disappointed in Jesus and His message. Arrogant leaders

who typically inhabit positions of authority definitely don't appreciate a guy like Jesus admonishing them and correcting every religious tradition that they revere. Even Jesus' closest disciples were most interested in what was in it for them. Peter actually asked this question of Jesus in Matt. 19:27. Peter expected material rewards here and now, but Jesus replied that his rewards would be many times as much as he gave up, but it would be in heaven. Now, if anyone desired to follow Him, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Jesus' example as a suffering servant. This is not appealing to the majority.

Privileges in 1 Peter 2:9-10

Thirty some odd years later when Peter wrote his letters to the churches, he did not look at the cost and duty of following Christ but at the privileges:

1. Believers are separated to Christ as a "holy nation". We have a special relationship with him to serve Him and glorify Him.
2. Possession of Christ means that He has purchased us with His blood. By redeeming us, He desires to also give us new life as we grow spiritually under His direction.
3. The illumination we have in Christ is the ability to understand God's Word and His purposes. The world is in darkness, and cannot see the truth, thus truth is relative to them; but we have been "called out of darkness into His marvelous light"
4. Mercy and compassion from Christ has been received by the church. Although we are not more deserving than anyone else, we have received mercy through Christ's work on the cross.
5. We get to proclaim Christ. There is no higher privilege that God has given than to be a spokesperson for Christ. For God to choose undeserving sinners to speak for Him is off the charts amazing.

Therefore let's do put all the garbage of the world aside like Peter commanded in ch.2:1. Stuff like malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, and slander should have no place with us. Let us get into the Word of God, and approach Jesus as "living stones" that desire to be a part of the wonderful spiritual building that He is erecting.

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