

Sermon 9: 1 Peter 2:4-10: Who we are in Christ

OUTLINE

Who Christ is
Who we are

INTRODUCTION

There is a story of a man who had an only son, he loved his son dearly, but his son was in very poor health. The father was a rich man and had a faithful butler look after his son. The father was also a collector of rare and expensive works of art. His son died and not to long after he died too. And he wrote in his will that all the family should get together and hear the reading of the will and to see who will get the rare and expensive works of art he had collected. But he had written in his will that before any of the major art works were sold, there was a sketch of his son, on a piece of paper that was to be the first item to given away was a picture of his beloved son. So the lawyer asked if anyone would like to have this rough sketch of the son. There was no one in the family that was interested in that little sketch except one man, the faithful butler who had tended to the son as if he were his own. The family despised and rejected that little sketch but to him it was precious, and he asked for it. It was then that the proceedings was brought to an end to the surprise of all the family, and the lawyer revealed that it was written in the will that whoever took the little rejected picture of the son, who was so loved by the father, that that person would get everything.

This is what Peter is trying to say to his hearers, although Christ is despised and rejected by man, it is in Christ that they receive every benefit. It is in the rejected Christ that we become the very people of God and all the benefits that go with that. Being hated and rejected does not define the truth about Christ or ourselves. As we come to this portion we need to remind ourselves once again that the people Peter is writing to are being persecuted for their faith in Christ. They did not live in an age, like the age we are in where Christianity is socially respectable, and held by many celebrities. In their day Christianity was a minority religion not a major world religion as it is today, and so people would pour out scorn upon it, pushing pressure on the church. Well, Peter now writes about the irony that the rejected one is the one that matters, and it is in this one that we are thoroughly blessed and privileged. Peter does two things in this portion, he looks at Christ and gives us various descriptions of Christ, that we will be looking at; and he looks at the Church and gives various descriptions of what the Church is. This portion is rich in it's reminders of who our savior is and our new identities because he has saved us. these will be our two points, who Christ is and who we are.

Who Christ is

Peter's name means rock, but he does not see himself as the most important rock, he sees Christ as the most important rock, and as he describes this Christ to his hearers he calls him three kinds of stones, all of which are spoken of in the OT. He is the Living Stone; the Cornerstone; and the Stumbling Stone or the Rock of offence.

V4, 'As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious.' The Living Stone is probably a reference to the

resurrection, for Christ is the Rock, and he is alive, risen from the dead now able to give life to others. Now let me ask you, here are a group of people who are being persecuted and potentially killed for their faith, of what relevance is it that Peter reminds them of Christ as the Living Stone? Well I would say that if I were about to be killed for my faith a reminder that Jesus is the conqueror over death would be very helpful. This can be helpful to us as we face death, or face the death of a Christian loved one. The life that is built on the Living Stone will not be overcome by the flood of death.

Next Peter refers to Christ as the Cornerstone. V6-7, '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.'

Peter has OT prophecies that he quotes in order to impress this upon his readers, Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22. Now what do you do when you come across a quote from the OT, do you look up the reference and examine the context? I want to encourage you to do that, to look at the margin, or the footnote and see which text is being quoted, and then go to it and read that whole chapter to see if you can get a sense of what it is saying. Lets do that now with these texts.

In Isaiah 28, the prophet is addressing the princes of Jerusalem, instead of trusting in God but because they have made a covenant with Egypt that they will be safe from Assyria, Isaiah calls them fools and tells them that the only place of safety is upon the tested and precious cornerstone that he will put in place. They can trust in their own provisions or the foundation that God is laying for Zion's future. Peter is telling us that Christ is the only true place of safety. That man can arrogantly assume that they are safe, but the only safe place from judgment, Satan, sin and death is the Cornerstone.

Next is Ps. 118:22. Psalm 118 is a Psalm written in the days of Nehemiah. You will remember that Israel lay in ruins at the hands of the Babylonians, but now the people had returned from exile after 70 years in Babylonia, and was being rebuilt. The stone the builders rejected was the nation of Israel, the great nation builders of the world despised this little nation, but it is through Israel that God brought the savior, Israel was rejected by men, but pivotal in God's plan. Christ takes these words about Israel and applies them to himself in the parable of the tenants, Matt. 21:42. He is the one that everyone thinks is useless and so he is despised, but in truth he is most important part. He is the cornerstone, the word capstone is incorrect, it is literally 'head of the corner'. And so it is with people today, they think they know the value of Christ, they think they have safely categorized him, and feel other things to be more important. He is the cornerstone. The cornerstone was the most important stone in ancient building. It was the most labor filled part of the building, because it had to be put at the foundation in the corner, and it would be a plumbline for the two walls being built from it. If the cornerstone was out, the whole wall would be out. This is the part that Christ plays in our lives. If we do not have Christ we do not have a cornerstone. We can build, but what we build will be skew, and faulty.

Peter reminds us that there are only two responses to Christ accept Him or reject Him v7, those who trust in Him are saved but those who reject Him, to them He will become the stumbling stone and the rock of offence. The rock they should have built upon will crush them in the final judgement.

Finally there is Isaiah 8:14, 1 Pet. 2:8, 'and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." This is a wonderful quote for in Isaiah 8 the stone is God himself, on the one hand the Lord is a sanctuary for the faithful, but on the other he is a rock that causes unfaithful men to fall and be broken. The Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus is not God, but here as in many other places the NT applies verses that are speaking about Jehovah directly to Christ. But the main emphasis in this title is to remind the wicked that there will be a judgment, that if you reject Christ then he will become the stumbling block to you, which will crush you (Matt 21:44).

Shedding light on those who reject Christ Peter writes, 'They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.' Here we see the NT teaching of the sovereignty of God in faith and unbelief. And we also see that this unbelief is not forced upon the unbeliever but is a culpable unbelief which is described as obedience. In other words this verse upholds the double emphasis of man's responsibility and God's sovereignty in these matters.

These OT quotes with their contexts where the people of God were tempted to flee to other saviours instead of God now applied to Christ are great encouragements to continue to trust when we face similar enemies.

Who we are

V5, '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.' V9-10, '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. 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.' This is a rich and layered description of the Christian Church. We see an overlap of ideas as the church is described in terms of being the new temple and the new Israel. You will notice that we are the stones, the priests, and the living sacrifices stacking up temple metaphors as the new benefits we have in Christ. You will also notice a litany of descriptions of these converted Gentiles that were used of Israel in the OT. We can see by this that any idea of a future literal temple is not the fulfillment of any temple prophecies in the OT, the church is. And the church is likewise the eschatological Israel that is inheriting the various promises of the OT. Lets run through these descriptions which reinforce our new identity in Christ and our duties.

The first description Peter has for us is that as believers we are 'living stones' v5. Believers as stones in a new temple is also found in 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Eph. 2:19-22. Peter calls us living stones just as Christ is a living stone, because we now have the same never dying life in us. But also to remind us that just as Christ was "rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him", you too if you are a believer although you may be rejected by men, you are precious to God. This is a comforting thought especially for the believers that received Peter's original letter, for they were being mistreated by the world, they needed the comfort of knowing that Jesus who was precious was allowed to endure suffering, just as they were. We can be tempted to think that we are cast off by God because of the pain we experience, but to be reminded that the most loved one was allowed to endure trials and pains, insults and torture, we rest content that God's love and our pain are not contradictory. To suffer does not deny that we are chosen and precious.

But living stones like living sacrifices feel the pain of God's working in their lives. Because it is God's goal to build us all together into a spiritual house where his praises can be declared (2:5), all of rough edges will have to be chiseled away. Our identity as stones demands our being with one another. God may have to apply the ten pound hammer at times to the really stubborn areas of our hearts, there may be large chunks of ourselves, that we feel to be a part of us, that he has to remove; and through it all we feel the pain of God shaping us. In order for us to be able to 'fit in' with each other in this spiritual temple God is building us into, we will all have to be chiseled at on all sides. We come into the kingdom with many irregularities and peculiarities, some of us even though Christians for a while have allowed new calcifications like barnacles to build up on the smooth surface God intends in our lives. Do you view yourself as a living stone, one who is to be worked upon in order to fit in with others? Are you allowing the hammer and the chisel of God's word to work on you, or are you refusing to change and becoming hard to the Master's hand?

The next rich picture Peter has for us is that we are a Priesthood, v5 and 9. Not only are we the temple, not only are we the offering, we are also the priests, and Peter saturates this portion with this idea. In verse 4, he uses words which were the technical terms for priests that were approaching God in service in the temple, "As you come to him". Then he calls us a 'holy' priesthood, a 'royal' priesthood, and speaks of our offering spiritual, and not actual sacrifices which are acceptable only through Christ.

Peter stresses what offerings we make as believers, 'spiritual sacrifices', sacrifices of praise and worship (2:5,9). We do not offer any sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins, for Jesus has already done that, but now we pour out our gratitude for what God has done for us. Are you a good priest in this manner? Do you give the sacrifices of love, worship, and obedience? Peter tells us that we belong to God for this purpose (2:9). And let me stress that our 'spiritual sacrifices' are made acceptable through Jesus Christ, that is what Peter says in 2:4. You may feel that your love is unworthy of a God so gracious, but he has beautified our gift by bringing it through Christ. So God delights in our love, even though it is imperfect, he accepts our praise even though it falls short of the mark. Hopefully you feel that your devotion is poor, and if you are one who gives poor yet sincere worship, it comes to God through Christ and delights and refreshes his heart. Listen to these verses from the Song of Songs, "You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!", (ESV) (Song 4:9-10).

Now this idea of the Priesthood of believers is a very important one, not only because we recognize that we can each enter the presence of God for ourselves; but it also means that each one of us is a minister and has a part to play in the temple of God, which is the Church. This means that the ministry of the Church is not only the Pastor and the Deacons responsibility. Everyone who is a Christian is a priest and has a part to play. You may not be called to fulfill an official position but every single believer is called to be active. God has given every believer a spiritual gift which is what they are now supposed to use in serving the Lord. Do you realize that you are a priest, a minister that is called to an active role in the Church? Are you active in serving in Church? If your gift is to teach you can get involved in teaching in the Church, Sunday school, youth

group, etc. Are you gifted with computers this too can be used in the Church. Cooking can be used, being a friendly person to welcome strangers and befriend young converts can be used. Anything can be used but first we need to have a certain mindset that we should be involved. Well here is the picture to get you into that mindset, you are a priest, a minister, a servant of God. You don't need to be employed by the Church to serve God, because every Christian is a priest. God has promoted and empowered every believer, ministry lies in the hands of the many not the few.

This is how Peter tries to encourage his readers, they are being persecuted and discouraged, so he reminds them of who Christ is, the Living Cornerstone who the unbeliever will stumble over. And it is in Christ that they are now the precious living stones being built up and fitted to be a temple and a priesthood that God uses to glorify his name. They are chosen, they are royalty, they are the people of God. The world rejects this savior, but he is the one in whom we receive all things and to whom we are eternally grateful for the salvation and benefits we have in him.