

Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE
EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

The Living Stone 1 Peter 2:4-8 (691)

1 Peter 2:4-10, and coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For this is contained in Scripture: "Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed." ⁷ This precious value, then, is for you who believe. But for those who disbelieve, "The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone," ⁸ and, "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. ⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

I want to begin this morning with two questions the answers to which require a little review. First, Why did Peter write this piece of correspondence? Peter himself explains the purpose of this letter in **5:12**, *through Silvanus, our faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!* The people to whom Peter was writing were suffering

under local harassment and sporadic persecution. For them, as it often is for us, life was hard. John N. D. Kelly says, "This letter ... presents itself as a message of encouragement from the Apostle Peter to Christian communities in Asia Minor which are bewildered by the cruel treatment and persecution to which they are being subjected" (*The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, p. 1). Clearly 1 Peter was written to encourage these struggling believers, to call them to confidence in the power of God, to help them find meaning in their sufferings, to urge them to stay together in mutual support, and to renew their hope. Indeed, hope is the overall theme of 1 Peter. I think the central message of the book is something like this: *The lively hope* (confident expectation) *of salvation* (gospel promises) sustains *the believer* (in both faith and godliness) *in times of suffering* (trial, hardship, difficulties met with in the path of obedience).

Here's the second question: How is Peter's letter is organized? 1 Peter is most often divided into three major sections: **1:3 – 2:10**, **2:11 – 4:11**, and **4:12 – 5:11**. 2:4-10 is the final unit of the first major section. In these verses, Peter reminds us of our status, our identity, our privileged standing as the people of God, God's temple, His kingdom and priesthood. And his point is this: "The status of Christians depends upon the status of Christ, for we are joined to Him" (Clowney, p. 83).

The topic of election [was introduced] in the opening verse of the letter ... but it is now clear that God's election of the Christian community (**2:9**) depends entirely on His prior election of Christ (**2:4, 6; cf. 1:20**). Christ is the elect and precious living stone and because we are joined to Him by faith we are also elect and precious living stones, a people for God's own possession. If the church is elect and precious to God because we are joined to Christ who is elect and

precious to God, then it is also true that as the elect and precious Christ was rejected by men so will be the people identified with him (see Achtemeier, pp. 152-153). Likewise, as the elect and precious Christ is ultimately triumphant then those joined to Him will also be victorious. In other words our fortunes are wrapped up in His. “The status of Christians depends upon the status of Christ, for we are joined to Him”

Smarty Jones, winner of the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness, ran in the Belmont Stakes yesterday in a bid to win the Triple Crown. He was edged out by Birdstone in the last quarter mile. In Saturday’s paper sports writer Randy Galloway in his article, “Weight of a Crown”, said this: “An entire sport, the sport of thoroughbred racing, will climb aboard Smarty Jones for a mile-and-a-half ride ... Smarty Jones will step on the track in the late afternoon with 126 pounds and Stewie Elliot on his back. When the bell rings, and the gate flings open, all of horse racing will be aboard. An entire sport rides with Smarty Jones.” What he was suggesting was that in some sense the future and status of the sport of thoroughbred racing were tied to the performance of that single, magnificent horse.

Beloved, the status of Christians depends upon the status of Christ, for we are joined to Him. The structure of the passage itself confirms this. Peter makes his point about Christ being the living stone in verses 4 and 5. In verses 6-8 he establishes and extends this metaphor using a chain of verses introduced by an unusual expression, *For this is contained (or set) in Scripture*. The Scriptures cited are **Isaiah 28:16**, **Psalms 118:22**, and **Isaiah 8:14**. The Jews in the synagogue used this method of instruction – emphasizing the point of a lesson by the reiteration of supporting Scripture (see Hillyer, p. 66).

It is worth noting that Peter arranges his material chiastically. He cites these Old Testament verses in the reverse order of the topics in v. 4.

- A coming to Him as to a living stone (4a)
- B rejected by men (4b)
- C choice and precious (4c)
- D you also, as living stones (5)
- C' a choice stone, a precious cornerstone (6) ... **Is. 28:16**
- B' the builders rejected (7) ... **Ps. 118:22**
- A' a stone of stumbling (8) ... **Is. 8:14**

In a chiasm the emphasis is on the center element. The main focus then is that as Christ is the living stone we, in Him, are also living stones being built up into the house, the temple of God. The status of Christians depends upon the status of Christ, for we are joined to Him. Now we turn to our text.

1 Peter 2:4, and coming to [Christ]. To *come* to Christ means to draw near to Him by faith. We come to Him when we rest upon Christ as He is offered to us in the gospel. Let me add that men and women are continually coming to Christ. Even today there will be those in every part of the world who hear the gospel message and believe to the salvation of their souls.

And coming to Him as to a living stone. Now, the stone metaphor dominates verses 4-8. The Old Testament writers spoke of God under the imagery of a rock or *stone* (**Deut. 32:4; Ps. 19:14**). Here that metaphor is applied to Christ. Here Christ is referred to as a *living stone*. "In the building technique from which the figure is drawn, the cornerstone of the foundation would be the first stone to be put in place. Since both the angle of the walls and the level of the stone courses would be extended from it, it was required that the cornerstone be square and true" (Clowney, p. 84). Its value rested in the precision with which it was

crafted. Indeed, the Greek word used here, *lithos*, means “a dressed stone suitable for a building” (Achtmeier, p. 154). The phrase is used only here in biblical literature, and surely refers to the fact that God set His cornerstone in place by raising Jesus from the dead.

And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God. He was *rejected by men*, “a reaction foretold long ago in **Psalm 118:22**” (Hillyer, p. 61). “The term *rejected* implies that the builders examined the stone and set it aside as a reject, unfit for the future building of the nation” (Davids, p. 85). I. M. Pei was the architect on the Meyerson Symphony Hall in Dallas. That wonderful building contains 22,000 blocks of Indiana limestone. Pei actually visited the quarry to see the stone being cut. His was the prerogative to personally reject any individual block of stone that did not meet his standards for the building. Why would Pei have rejected a block of stone? Maybe its color was not right or consistent. Maybe it was cracked or split? Maybe it had been cut wrong by the quarriers.

Christ was rejected by men as being unfit in some way. Rejected as being nothing more than a man. **Matthew 13:55, 57a**, “*Is this not the carpenter’s son?*” ... *And they took offense at Him.* Rejected as possessing no compelling physical appearance (**Is. 53:2**). Rejected as God’s appointed Mediator (**Acts 2:22-23, 36**). “*Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God... you nailed to a cross.*” Rejected as God’s Lamb to be sacrificed for the sins of men. Rejected as the One given all authority in heaven and earth. **Luke 19:14**, “*We do not want this man to reign over us.*” Rejected as One unworthy of faith and worship. **Acts 4:12**, “*And there is salvation in no one else.*”

O, my friend, “salvation is in no other; there is no other Son of God, no other atoning cross, no other resurrection life. Peter’s message begins and ends in the purpose of God; God has set in place his chosen cornerstone; God has determined, as well, the rejection and doom of the builders” (Clowney, p. 85). Your reasons for rejecting Christ shall in no wise change the facts.

And the fact is that Jesus is *choice and precious in the sight of God*. “The last word concerning Jesus Christ is not a human verdict but one in accordance with the divine will and purpose” (Hillyer, p. 61). Jesus suits the eternal plans and infinitely wise purposes of God.

How is it that we should *come to Him* when other men *reject Him (2:4)*? How is it that we should *believe in Him (2:6, 7)* when others *disbelieve (2:7)*? How is it that we should *obey Jesus Christ (1:2)* while others are *disobedient to the word (2:8)*? I suggest to you that the answer rests in the very first verse of Peter’s letter. We are what we are; we enjoy the status we do all because of the electing grace of God. Indeed, we are those *who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father (1:1-2a)*. Praise God for His great mercy!

Remember, as we are *in Christ* His fortunes are ours; His status is ours. Our status depends upon His status. As He is the *living stone* so too are we in Him. “As Christ is precious to the Father, so are we made precious (2:7)” (Clowney, p. 87). The status of Christians depends upon the status of Christ, for we are joined to Him.

1 Peter 2:5, you also, as living stones. I’ll bet you don’t think of yourself in these terms very often do you? I’m a *living stone*! “We are living stones, and we are part of a growing house. God’s architecture is biological. His house grows as

new stones are added, but also as the stones in place are perfected. The living stones, as Paul says, grow into a holy temple of the Lord" (Clowney, p. 87). Indeed, we *are being built up as a spiritual house*. We, as individual stones, are all being put together, *built up*, cemented together, laid end to end, one on top of the other, into a *spiritual house*. This spiritual house is, of course, the church.

Where is Peter going with all of this? Remember, these Christians are being assaulted, assailed. He wants them to know that the edifice that God is building and of which they are a part is eternal and impregnable. This fact will be a comfort and encouragement to them and to those Christians today who are suffering.

"This house is to be no ordinary dwelling but a temple" (Hillyer, p. 62). "To speak of a growing temple of living stones stretches an Old Testament figure to convey New Testament reality. The figure of the tabernacle/temple pictured the presence of God among His people. God's tent was pitched in the center of Israel's wilderness camp. In the land of promise God made the temple at Jerusalem his dwelling. God was there, among his people; they belonged to Him, and He to them. When Jesus, the Word, *became flesh and [dwelt] among us*, the symbol became reality. The God of glory came to dwell with us ... The true temple is Christ's body. We are united to Christ. As living stones we are joined to the cornerstone. In this way the church is the true house of God" (Clowney, pp. 87-88).

And we *are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood (2:5)*. "The imagery shifts around in this verse, from Christ as the stone and men as the builders to Christians as stones and part of the building to Christians as priests

servicing *in* the building, but the shifts are natural so long as you remember that this language is living metaphor and not fixed theological description” (Davids, p. 86).

“The Israelites approached God through a special priesthood, composed only of Levites. Now all Christians, claims Peter, are that holy priesthood. Peter is taking over the language of **Exodus 19:6**, *You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*. Levites offered up material sacrifices; Christian sacrifices are purely spiritual. “The letter to the Hebrews argues that the perfect and conclusive sacrifice of Jesus Christ has rendered the Old Testament sacrificial system obsolete. There are still sacrifices for Christians to make. We offer up to God the sacrifice of praise (**Heb. 13:15**). We offer up prayers to God (**Rev. 5:8**). We consecrate ourselves to Him (**Rom. 12:1; Phil. 2:17**). Deeds of benevolence and kindness; generosity in giving are all spiritual sacrifices that we offer to God (**Rom. 15:27; Heb. 13:16; II Cor. 9:12; Phil. 4:18**). Such sacrifices are acceptable to God, not on account of any merit in the one who offers them, but because we make them *through Jesus Christ*, that is, on the grounds of his perfect sacrifice and in response to the prompting of his Spirit, i.e. in his name” (Hillyer, p. 62).

1 Peter 2:6, *For this is contained in Scripture: “Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed.”* Beloved, every man must encounter the stone – it lies in their path. This encounter can have but one of two results. The stone in his way is either a foundation stone to which a man can commit himself without any concern over being let down or put to shame or suffer loss in the end. Remember how these brothers and sisters are being treated – *slandered (2:12, 3:16), intimidated (3:14), reviled (3:16, 4:14)*, and

maligned (4:4). Theirs will be a final and complete triumph over their mocking assailants, their tormentors on the last day (Kelly, p. 93).

1 Peter 2:7b-8, *But for those who disbelieve, "The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone," and, "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.*

Others will trip right over the stone that is Christ. And this is set down in Scripture. What a sight that shall be for the builders. Christ the abandoned and crucified Stone elevated to glory. His faithful servants whom they sought to humiliate lifted up with Him. The stumbling referred to here is the "failure to believe the word, which, in light of **1:23-25**, can only mean the gospel" (Davids, p. 90).

"Sadly, many people reject Jesus. Psalm 118 gives us a picture of builders who reject a stone. They look at it and they say it is not good enough. It does not suit their purposes. This is how men treat the Lord Jesus Christ. He does not measure up to their standards. He does not meet their need. He is an impediment in their pursuit of their own way. Because of this, they reject Christ as being irrelevant to them, and what they want out of life. However, the amazing thing is that God has chosen the one whom men rejected and elevated Him to be the capstone, or cornerstone. How sad it is that people stumble at the Lord Jesus Christ! He is the foundation stone and yet, instead of seeing that he is the basis for the whole of life and eternity, they trip over him and fall to their eternal destruction and separation from God.

Not only is this disastrous fortune *set in Scripture (2:6)* it is also *appointed* by God. Yes, just as **Acts 13:48** says, *and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed*, Peter affirms that the destruction suffered by others is theirs by divine appointment. Admittedly this opens up the issue of God's predestination of individuals to heaven or hell, but Peter's emphasis is not on the hidden, eternal counsels of God at this point. His emphasis is on the contrast of those who *believe (2:7)* and those who *disbelieve (2:7)* - those who are *disobedient to the word (2:8)*; those who reject the gospel of the grace of God in Christ. I don't know. Some here today may have heard the gospel but have never embraced Jesus as He is offered in it. My friend, don't stumble over the Stone. Don't trip over Him to eternal destruction. Rather, believe in Him that you might become part of that eternal house in which He is pleased to dwell.

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The overall **theme** of 1 Peter ... _____

The **central message** of 1 Peter ... *The lively hope* (confident expectation) of *salvation* (gospel promises) _____ *the believer* (in both faith and godliness) *in times of suffering* (trial, hardship, difficulties met with in the path of obedience).

How is Peter's letter is organized (1:3 – 2:10, 2:11 – 4:11, and 4:12 – 5:11)?

In these verses, Peter reminds us of our _____, our identity, our privileged standing as the people of God, God's temple, His kingdom and priesthood.

And his point is this:

The status of Christians depends upon the status of _____, for we are _____ to Him.

The topic of election

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The structure of the passage itself confirms this:

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