

Construction Zone Ahead

I Peter 2:4-8

In High School one of my most favorite and fun classes was taken in my senior year. It was a building trades class where we built a house and whether or not you consider it coincidental to my occupation, we built the parsonage for a local church. We dug the footings, poured the foundation, erected the framework, made the trusses, wired, plumbed, insulated, framed windows, built stairs, sided, dry walled, painted, shingled, built kitchen cabinets, hung doors – the whole nine yards. It's been 40 years since it was built. It did not end up looking like a Picasso masterpiece or picture out of a Dr. Seuss book.

In Ephesians 2:10 we read “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

In Philippians 1:6 Paul writes “being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

In our text today we find that Peter is going to talk about a construction project being built from a strong, secure cornerstone. We read about in I Peter 2:4-8 where I invite you to turn this morning.

Let’s consider three points:

The formation

The foundation

The fall

I. THE FORMATION – vs. 4-5

We begin with our response.

A. Our Response – v. 4

Right away we see in the verse that there is an

assumed invitation – “As you come to Him, the living Stone...” This living Stone we come to is Jesus Christ, which has been established in chapter 1 where we read in verse 2 “who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ an sprinkling by His blood.”

Then in verse 3 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

And in verses 18-19 we find that our salvation is in the precious blood of Christ.

It is Christ who is referred to in our text as the One we come to – this living Stone. In chapter 1 we are introduced to the living hope and the living Word and here we are introduced to the living Stone.

Peter knew who the living Stone was and it was not him. In Matthew 16 where we read about Peter’s confession of Jesus being the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus responded by referring to him not as Simon, but as Peter and concluded that on this rock the church would be built. Jesus uses two different words to in this text. The choice of words determines on whom the church is built.

Peter is petros in the Greek and means pebble or little stone.

Rock in the Greek is petra and refers to an immovable stone or rock.

It is clear from the context that Christ is the one on whom the church is being built. He is the immovable stone.

Peter knew who the living Stone was. It was Christ. He is the one his audience had come to, but what Peter refers to here in this text is not coming to Christ in the initial act of salvation where they had placed their trust in Him for that free gift promised through His death for sin, His burial and His

resurrection. The tense used by Peter indicates this act of coming to Him to be a personal, continuous or habitual approach. Peter is not suggesting that every day we need to renew our trust in Christ for salvation, but rather that this approach is an ongoing time of intimate, abiding fellowship between the believer and the Lord.

There are two groups of people noted in this verse. The first is in reference to those who have come to Christ. They are ones who have RECEIVED Him as Savior.

1. Those who have received Him

Again we read in those opening words about a group who has accepted an invitation to come into an abiding relationship. They are the ones from the previous verse who have tasted His salvation and found that the Lord is good. They are the ones who have come to Him weary and burdened to find rest in Him. They have taken His yoke and found Him to be gentle and humble. They are the ones who have found rest for their souls through faith in Him for salvation.

(Matthew 11:28-29)

In John 6:35 we read the words of Jesus who declared "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty."

The people in this opening phrase had come to Him initially for salvation and are now given an invitation to come and experience an ongoing intimate and abiding fellowship with the One through whom they have found salvation.

But notice that Peter identifies another group. They are the antithesis of the first group. Instead of receiving Christ through whom they can experience salvation they have REJECTED Him.

2. Those who have rejected Him

The KJV uses the word "disallow". It is a word that means to disapprove or to reject as the result of examination.

There is a story that says the great sculptor Michelangelo bought a discarded piece of marble that had been rejected by another sculptor. It bore the marks of the sculptor's imperfection and yet Michelangelo took it and fashioned from it his masterpiece David.

Go down the lumber aisle at Home Depot and you may find someone pulling a board out of the stack and placing one end on the floor with the other end in his hand. He will put that end up to his eyeball and scan down the length of the board to determine if it is straight. He is examining if the board will pass the test. If it's warped he will set it aside rejecting it.

In effect that's what the people did with Jesus. They held Him up for examination to see if He met their standard. To them He didn't measure up. Even though He fit all the Old Testament prophecies they rejected Him. Even though His miracles and teachings substantiated His claim to be the Messiah, they disapproved of Him.

The religious leaders rejected Him.

The Jews rejected Him.

Judas Iscariot he rejected Him.

The rich young ruler rejected Him.

Today the likes of Bill Nye, the Science Guy, Richard Dawkins, Steven Hawking, Carl Sagan, and Neil de Grasse Tyson, just to name a few, have rejected Christ, the One referred to in our text as the "living Stone". He is living because He has life in Himself. He is living because He is personal. He is living because He also gives life to others.

Though many have rejected Him, God has not. God chose Him to be the living Stone. God has said that this living Stone is precious, of inestimable value,

of immeasurable worth. He is the One of whom God said “this is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

What is your response to this living Stone? Have you received Him or rejected Him?

For those coming to this living Stone we find then our responsibility.

B. Our Responsibility – v. 5

We draw our life as little living stones from Christ who is the original living Stone. That we are living stones implies personal, spiritual growth. Individually we are each the Temple of God (I Corinthians 6:19-20). Collectively we make up the body of Christ.

The first responsibility is that we are built into a spiritual house.

1. We are built into a spiritual house

The tense here is that this process of being built is ongoing. The idea is especially clear in Philippians 1:6 where we see that God continues to work in us until the day of Christ’s appearing or at such point we may pass away.

It’s also evident in I John 3:2-3 where I like to paraphrase the verse by saying ‘I’m not what I was and neither am I yet what I’m going to be.’

As long as we are breathing God isn’t finished with us making us into the person, the spiritual house He wants us to become, to help us grow in His likeness, in His character. Again, referring back to Philippians 1:6 Paul had confidence that what God started He would finish in us.

While God is the one doing the work, we have responsibility to willingly allow Him through His Spirit to wield the hammer to make us into the

spiritual house that is His design for us.

I Corinthians 3:1 says we are God’s temple and that His Spirit lives in us. God no longer requires a physical temple in which to dwell as He did under the Old Testament. What Christ did changed all that and according to Ephesians 2 (19-22) we, as those living stones, are built and joined together to become a holy temple where God lives by His Spirit.

And each time someone trusts Christ as Savior another stone is added. Collectively we make up the church, not a physical building, but a living body comprised of believers all over the world past – beginning at Pentecost, present, and future believers sharing in the common faith of Jesus Christ as Savior.

Are you allowing God to build you up into a spiritual house?

Let’s keep in mind that the nature of this temple, this house is spiritual and so bears another responsibility.

2. We become a sacred priesthood

We see in our text, verse 5 that we are to be a “holy priesthood”.

Under the Old Testament law only men from the tribe of Levi were to be priests and those men had certain functions or responsibilities to perform. It began with their own personal holiness. They had certain rituals to perform to prepare them for their duties.

There were specific ways in which they had to bathe or wash, certain ways in which they were to get dressed, certain clothes they were to wear, certain things they were to avoid. Neglecting even one of them would disqualify them for service until they went through those steps.

In the wilderness and until the permanent temple was built in Jerusalem, they had certain duties to perform. Some carried the framework of the tabernacle, some carried the coverings, some carried the utensils, some made the incense or oil that was burned and some helped with the animal sacrifices. That all changed when the temple was erected by King Solomon. Many of those duties were no longer required. New responsibilities were given for care of the temple including singing and instrumental music. Whether those duties were performed in the tabernacle or the temple each person was required to fulfill the law in regard to personal holiness.

The role Peter is calling is not for a certain class of people or certain skill set. It's not just for the pastor or for the deacons of a church or even for teachers. It is a call to each of us for personal holiness as God's priests. We are to reflect the holiness of God as we learned in 1:15-16 to be holy because He is holy. Just as the Old Testament priests served God in the temple, so we as living stones and holy priests serve God in His temple.

Before the crucifixion only the priests could enter the holy place and serve. Only the High Priest could enter the holy of holies and then only once a year. But all that changed when Christ was crucified and the veil that separated the holy place from the holy of holies was torn in two making access to God now possible for everyone who believes in Christ. Hebrews tells us that Christ was the High Priest who went into the holy of holies with Himself as the sacrifice making it possible for everyone to have access to God. Where the priests served as the representative of the people to God, now we can go directly, boldly into His presence because the blood of our High priest, Jesus Christ, has made it possible.

Hebrews 4:14-16

If He made it possible for us to come into God's presence without fear or apprehension then our

responsibility is to approach Him in holiness. Psalm 66:18 says that if we regard iniquity in our heart, He will not hear us, so come into His presence having cleansed yourself of sin. Christ has clothed us with His righteousness to make that possible, but we bear a responsibility to live in such a way that the practice of our holiness comes in line with our position of holiness. That's what we learn from I John 3:3. We are to purify ourselves from sin, which means that we are to turn from it. We do that by craving His Word and hiding it in our heart so that we won't sin against Him (Psalm 119:9, 11).

Just as the priest stood in the doorway of the tabernacle and was washed with water as a ceremonial gesture of his being cleansed to prepare him to serve, so we are cleansed by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5) and the confession of our sin which God faithfully forgives (I John 1:9). The blood of Jesus cleanses us from our sin (I John 2:1-2).

What can wash away my sin, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What can make me whole again, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

His blood makes me white as snow.

So the question remains: Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power, are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? Are your garments spotless? Are they white as snow? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

There are several parallels between the priesthood in the Old Testament and our becoming a holy priesthood.

- a. God chooses
- b. God cleanses (John 13:8; Titus 2:14; 3:5)
- c. God clothes for service
- d. God anoints for service
- e. God prepares for service
- f. God calls to obedience

Our responsibility as believers who come to the living Stone is to become a holy priesthood,

consecrated and separated to God ready to serve,
one who is fit to offer spiritual sacrifices.

3. We are to bestow spiritual sacrifices

Just what are spiritual sacrifices? The Bible gives us several examples. But notice first that it is qualified by the word “acceptable.” Through the prophets Isaiah and Micah God rebuked Israel for bringing sacrifices that weren’t acceptable. They were a stench to His nostrils. God doesn’t want the leftovers. He doesn’t want second best. He desires a heart that is consecrated and obedient to Him, one that is broken by sin. So the first acceptable sacrifice we offer to God is our life.

a. Our bodies offered to God are living sacrifices
Romans 12:1 “I beseech ye therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service (or act of worship).”

This is not merely a ritual or a symbolic gesture on our part, it is a total surrender of our body, heart, mind and will to God. It’s simply saying that all we are belongs to God.

My ambitions

My career

My education

My bank account

My hobbies

My life

Everything

At times we sing this hymn of commitment.

All to Jesus I surrender,

All to Him I freely give;

I will ever love and trust Him,

In His presence daily live.

I surrender all, I surrender all.

All to Thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

Such a sacrifice puts everything under God’s control. Are we willing to surrender ourselves as an acceptable sacrifice to God? Paul describes such a

sacrifice as a spiritual act of worship.

There is a second thing that we offer to God as an acceptable sacrifice.

b. Our praise and thanksgiving to God is a sacrifice

Psalm 50:14

Psalm 141:2

Hebrews 13:15-16

J.I. Packer writes “The heart given to God, makes the eyes, ears, tongue, hands, and everything else holy, as God’s special property... This makes a man delight to hear and speak of things that concern God and to think about Him often, to be holy in his secret thoughts and in all his ways. In everything we bring to God, every thanksgiving and every prayer we offer. He looks to see if our heart is coming with our offering; and if God does not see it, He does not care about the rest but throws it back again.”

Micah 6:6-8

Isaiah 1:10-18

Packer goes on to give this sobering challenge – “let us then give ourselves or nothing... The more he sacrifices, the more sanctified he becomes.”

When we consider the greatest sacrifice given by Christ, can we do no less for Him?

There is one more spiritual sacrifice we offer to God. It’s found in Romans 5:8 and it dovetails nicely with what I just said. It requires no commentary. It is, after all, the greatest commandment.

(John 13:34-35; Mark 12:30-31)

c. Our love to God is a living sacrifice

Romans 5:8

As a holy priesthood we are to offer to God acceptable spiritual sacrifices through Christ.

That is the formation of our spiritual house.
Now, moving quickly, consider the foundation.

II. THE FOUNDATION – vs. 6-7a

Peter gives us the first of three quotes in this passage that help understand our foundation. Quoting Isaiah 26:18, notice it is God who lays the foundation. It is the cornerstone.

Today a cornerstone has only symbolic meaning. The date the building was erected may be etched in it or perhaps some quote. It serves mainly as a decorative emblem. But that wasn't the case in Jesus' day. The cornerstone had significance. Just as its name implies it was the corner stone of two walls that not only united the two walls together it was the stone that gave the building both its stability and its structure. All the measurements for the building were taken from that stone. The weight of the structure essentially rested on that one piece. It determined the design and the orientation of the building. It symbolizes for us that the design and orientation of the church rests solely on Christ who is our cornerstone. Without Him the church has no structure or stability. Without Him there is no foundation.

Notice in our text three things about Christ as the cornerstone.

- A. He Was Chosen
- B. He Was Precious
- C. He Was Trustworthy

Any old stone wouldn't serve as a suitable cornerstone the same with the cornerstone of the church. It had to be specifically chosen. Its importance to the overall structure of the building was of greatest value. On it the strength of the building rested. It had to be trustworthy to bear the rest of the building.

Those who trust in this cornerstone – Jesus Christ – will never be put to shame. This is future tense and means that there will never be a time we will be

humiliated or embarrassed because of Christ trusting in Him and it implies the promise of a future victory as we trust Him for our salvation. Psalm 125:1 “Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever.”

Psalm 46:1-2 “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. Though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.”

Jesus gives a very important illustration in Matthew 7:24-27 that begs us to ask the question on which foundation have we built our house.

Is it built on a rock so that when the storms of life assault us we remain unmoved or is it built on the sand so that when those same storm of life buffet us we break apart because there was no firm foundation?

We read in I Peter 5:10 these very encouraging words: “And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”

Those who have believed and placed their trust in this cornerstone will not be ashamed. He is a sure foundation. Many have committed themselves to this stone, but there are many who will be condemned by this stone. There is a stark contrast between those in verse 6 and 7 who trust or believe in Him and in those who reject Him. The latter will be put to shame. Instead of being their foundation, this stone will cause their fall.

III. THE FALL – vs. 7b-8

Peter once again returns to the Old Testament with the last two quotes. The first is from Psalm 118:22 and the second is from Isaiah 8:14.

Even though this cornerstone was rejected by many, it, referring to Christ, became the capstone. This is another analogy from ancient architecture. The capstone was the very top or center stone of an archway. It held the archway together.

The Gateway Arch in St. Louis stands 630 feet. If you watch the documentary of its construction you will learn that both columns of the arch were built at the same time with the center piece being put in last. From it the stability of the structure rests. As they were placing it in position, it required a precise fit and could not be more than 1/32 of an inch off.

Christ is the precise fit for what we need as our capstone but unfortunately many have rejected Him. Verse 8 says that this stone will cause men to stumble referring to their destruction. He is the stone that will make them fall.

A. They Will Stumble Over This Stone

They don't believe because they choose not to. Paul writing to the Corinthians says that the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness but to those who believe it is the power of God. (1:18)

You may remember that as Paul taught in Athens many of the philosophers thought he was out of his mind crazy for believing in something like the resurrection. Unbelief will bring their destruction.

Stumbling over Christ means this stone will lead to their condemnation. This verse does not mean that God has predestined some to punishment.

Stumbling is their own doing and have no one to blame but themselves. They consciously reject the very One who would be their foundation, their salvation instead of their condemnation. They will stumble over Him because of willful disobedience.

B. They Will Disobey This Stone

Back in chapter 1, verse 2 we saw that the believers scattered throughout Asia Minor had obeyed Christ

by turning to Him for salvation. Here they have disobeyed Christ and rejected His gift. They have chosen not to believe. Unbelief is the root of disobedience.

One author writes that "unbelievers fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah 8:14 where the stone God has established becomes the means of their falling." They will trip and fall to their own destruction and it will be their own fault. Rejecting this Stone by building on anything other than it will bring judgement.

Hebrews 9:27 "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, after that the judgment."

Revelation 20:11-15

Peter presents for us a contrast between two groups of people.

One receives the Word, the other rejects it.

One stands on the foundation of Christ, the other stumbles over it.

One is justified, the other is judged.

In which group do you find yourself?

There are only two foundations.

One leads to eternal life.

The other leads to eternal death.

Are you secure on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ or will you stumble and fall because of Him?

The next time you see a construction site ask yourself if you are allowing God to build you up into a spiritual house as a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God. Better yet, would you like to start today?