*Living Stones*

1 Peter 2:4-8

12/11/22

 For the thoughtful Christian, Christmas elevates our meditation on the miracle of God becoming man. Thinking on these things requires us to move beyond the events of the nativity to why He came and what He accomplished. We must think on how the OT pictured and prophesied His coming, how Jesus fulfilled these prophecies in the gospels, and how the results of His life and ministry are explained in the rest of the NT. The baby in the manger points us to everything related to Christ being Immanuel, God with us.

 Our text today draws us to these truths. By quoting from Isaiah, Peter teaches us how Jesus fulfills the OT picture of the Messiah. As we look at this text, we see three threads woven together. First and foremost, we are pointed to Christ, described here as a living stone, rejected by men but precious to God. Then we see the two responses of men to Christ. For those who believe, Jesus is a precious stone from whom they receive life and upon whom their lives are built. For those who reject Christ, He is a source of stumbling and cause for offense.

 We are going to consider these truths over two weeks. This week we want to focus on how the text describes Christ. Next week, we will look at the two responses men have towards Him. We will illustrate both responses from the Christmas narrative as shepherds and wisemen, receive Him while Herod and the religious establishment were troubled by and opposed to Him.

 Peter uses an interesting metaphor, or word picture, to describe Jesus. He defines Him as a *living stone*. The quotations in vs. 7, 8, & 9 add the element of the stone functioning as a cornerstone. In ancient construction, large buildings like temples, were built on foundations made from cut stones. A large stone would be set where one of the corners of the building would be. It had to be perfectly level and square because it was the reference point from which every other stone was laid. A cornerstone functioned like a foundation does for us. Get the foundation right, and the rest of the house can be built with quality. Get the foundation wrong, and it affects are seen throughout the rest of the building.

 By calling Christ the cornerstone, Peter is saying that Jesus is the foundation upon which our faith is built. Remove Christ’s death and resurrection as payment for sin, and Christianity becomes a hollow, lifeless message devoid of transforming power. There is a reason we sing *in Christ alone my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song. This cornerstone, this solid ground, here in the power of Christ I stand.* Peter has repeatedly pointed us to Jesus’ sinless life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection as the means of our salvation. This is the foundation for everything we believe. As brother Dean regularly says, *it is all about Jesus.*

 Now, this stone is described as *living*. This is what we call a mixed metaphor, which the Bible uses often. Revelation describes Jesus as the lion of Judah standing as a lamb who was slain. So is He a lion or a lamb? The answer is both and neither. He is neither a literal lion, nor a literal lamb. These metaphors communicate who He is, not what He is. This is how the concept of a living stone works too. Our Savior is not an inanimate object. He is living, vibrant, and active in His people. From this stone we receive life and light, reconciliation with God, and transformation of life. By coming to Him, we become living stones too, added to the edifice of God’s people. Like our Savior, Christianity is not cold, lifeless rote religion. We are living and dynamic spiritual beings, changed by and conformed to the cornerstone we rest on.

 So the living stone of this text is Christ. The text tells us three important truths about Him. First, He is a stone of infinite value. We see this initially in vs. 4, where it is choice and precious in the sight of God. By choice, Peter means supreme in quality. Jesus is *very God of very God*. He is of one substance and nature with the Father, infinite in being and value. His perfection translates into His ministry as Savior. His righteousness is infinite, making Him a legitimate substitute, not for a handful of guilty sinners, but for every sinner ever conceived in the womb. The quality of His sacrifice ended any further need for sacrifice. His death was a once-for-all-sacrifice that accomplished all God’s redemptive work. He is a choice Savior.

 He is also precious. This speaks to His infinite worth. John’s gospel tells us that Jesus possesses the fulness of God’s glory. No one comes close to approaching Him in power, might, grace, love, knowledge, sovereignty, or anything else. His worth is intrinsic to who He is and remains unaffected by the world. We can neither increase His value by our actions; nor can we diminish it by the same. He infinite value enables Him to save an infinite number of sinners from an infinite debt of sin. There is no way to measure His worth.

 Jesus is these things *in the sight of God*, reminding us that what really matters is not how others see Christ, or even how we see Him, but how God views Christ.Jesus is choice and precious in the sight of God. The Father’s delight is in His Son. He acts for the glory of the Son, just as the Son acts for the glory of the Father. Our acceptance by God is rooted in His delight in His Son. Yes, God’s favor rests on His people, but it comes through our union with Christ.

 The terms choice and precious repeat throughout the text. In vs. 6, He is a choice stone and a precious corner stone. In vs. 7, His precious value is *for you who believe.* So not only is Christ precious to the Father, but He also has infinite worth to His people. Having tasted of the kindness of God in salvation, Christ should be the delight of our hearts, the focus of our lives, and the object of our affections. Rightly we sing, *all that thrills my soul is Jesus, He is more than life to me; and the fairest of ten thousand, in my blessed Lord I see.*

 Second, Christ is the fulfillment of God’s salvation promises. Vs. 6 quotes Isaiah 28:16. In that passage, Isaiah describes what was for him the the future ministry of the Messiah. That text speaks of how people have made a covenant with death by choosing falsehood over God’s truth. Yet they could escape the covenant with death through belief in the cornerstone God would lay in Zion. By quoting this promise, Peter teaches us that Jesus is the cornerstone laid by God. It was His substitutionary death and glorious resurrection that broke our covenant with death.

 Isaiah’s prophecies give a full picture of Jesus’ Messianic ministry. Isaiah predicted His virgin birth, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection. He knew He would be rejected by men; but he also knew that this rejection would result in Christ saving all who believed. Every element of the gospel can be found in Isaiah. Of course, it is easier for us to see it than it was for his original audience. We know how Christ fulfilled God’s word. By quoting Isaiah, Peter wants us to see Jesus as the fulfilment of God’s salvation purposes. He is the choice stone and precious cornerstone laid in Zion. He has broken the covenant of death, giving life to all who believe.

 Finally, see how Jesus is a dividing stone. The text contains the parallel threads of belief and rejection. To believers, Christ is the source of life and love, of joy and peace, and of freedom from sin. Although Jesus was God’s gift of love to the world, he was still despised and rejected by men. His enemies hated Him so much that they murdered Him. This division over Christ remain to this day, for there are only two kinds of people: those who are God’s children and those who are God’s enemies. The Christian’s mission is to proclaim Christ to His enemies in hopes that they will turn from their sin and be reconciled to God. Some do, for which we praise God. Yet many continue in their rejection of Christ. He remains a source of stumbling for them.

 There are few things more reprehensible in our society today than contradicting their world view. In our society, we only affirm. We never correct. It hurts people’s feelings. This means that anyone who speaks truth about sin or takes holiness seriously will be called harsh, unloving, or downright bigoted. Sadly, many Christians mask their lack of holiness and excuse their gospel silence by joining the culture’s chorus of accusing these individuals of lacking grace. Yet Jesus is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. Jesus regularly offended his enemies; in fact, on one occasion, Jesus’ disciples confronted Jesus on the way his words offended the Pharisees. Yet Jesus was the fullness of grace and truth and the ultimate expression of God’s love. His enemies were so offended at Him that they plotted His murder through deception and bribery. How can these two things be compatible?

 The gospel is a message of peace; but the peace is not between the saved and the unsaved. It is between God and those on whom His favor rests. But for those who reject Jesus, He is a source of irritation and contempt. The bible says sinners hate God, even those who are not cognizant of it. This hatred is often expressed towards Christ’s people. Jesus described this in Mt. 10:34-36 – *Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.* This happens, not because Christians have done something wrong, but because people hate how the gospel exposes their sin. Rather than coming to Christ that He might deal with it, they attack the ministers of His grace to them. This is why Jesus told the disciples *if the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.* 2 Corinthians 2:15ff says *we are the fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life.* The Christian is the putrid smell of death to those who hate God; yet to those who are being saved, we are the sweet aroma of life. Christ is precious to the believer but reprehensible to those who reject Him.

As our culture openly wages war on the righteousness of God, we must realize that faithfulness to Christ will arouse the distain of the world. Anyone who speaks God’s truth into our context will be called hateful, oppressive, racist, and any other calami they can come up with. We are reaching the point where the government is using their authority to coerce us into their rebellion. Just this week, the supreme court heard oral arguments in a case between a web designer and the state of Colorado to determine whether the government can coerce this woman into creating web content that violates her faith. The attorney general of Colorado argued that she should be compelled to violate her conscience because her stance was hateful, bigoted, and causing damage to individuals in the LGBTQ community.

People hate God because they want to be god of their own lives. They reject Christ, not because they are opposed to love or forgiveness, but because they hate the concept that they are hopelessly broken, justifiably condemned, and incapable of making themselves acceptable to God. Because they do not want to face the evil of their own hearts, they slander those who love them enough to call them to faith in Christ. The is why God’s people are persecuted. They are simply expressing their rejection of Christ towards His representatives in the world.

As we close things off today, remember the context of this letter. Peter wrote to believers who were suffering for being faithful to Christ. He does not say they are failing as Christians because the world opposed them. Instead, he teaches them that it is a mark of their faithfulness to Christ. Furthermore, he instructs them to continue living their faith in the public sphere. They were to *keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

 Christ is a stumbling block and a rock of offense to the world. If we never feel the world’s rejection, we are probably misrepresenting Christ just as badly as the Christian whose sinful lifestyle or jerkish gospel presentation causes us to blush with shame. Yet the joy is that when we function as living stones in the temple that God is building, God will bear gospel fruit in people’s lives. The joy of seeing one sinner come to the Christ for salvation is worth a lifetime of rejection and ridicule from the world. So let us lift high the name of Jesus this Christmas season and proclaim that God became man in order to reconcile man to God.