*Living Stones Pt. 2*

1 Peter 2:4-8

12/118/22

Last week we noted that there are three themes woven throughout this text. The dominate theme is Christ the living and precious cornerstone, which we focused on last week. This week we will examine the other two threads, which are the two responses people have to Christ. Having considered these, we will note how they both themes appear in the Christmas narrative. Finally, we will consider how we ought to respond to the Rock of Christ.

We ended last time thinking about how Christ is a source of division. This division is amplified by the differing responses people have to Him. The first response people have towards Christ is rejection. This is initially expressed in vs. 4, where the living stone is rejected by men but choice and precious to God. The theme is renewed in vs. 7-8, where Christ is described as a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.

Jewish tradition tells a story of how, when Solomon built the Temple, the quarry sent an exceedingly large stone to Jerusalem first. It was so large, the builders had no clue what to do with it, so they pushed it aside. As other stones began to arrive, the builders were frustrated because they needed the cornerstone to begin construction. They sent word to the quarry to send it immediately. But a message was sent back that they had already sent it. It was the stone the builders did not want. It is uncertain if these events are factual, but it gives a colorful background to the meaning of Christ being a rejected stone that became the very cornerstone.

At the core of people’s rejection of Christ is their refusal to believe they are irreparably broken by sin, justly condemned by God, and unable to do anything about it. Because they refuse to accept these truths, they do not want the kind of Savior Jesus came to be. So, they either openly reject Him, or reject Him by redefining who He is, what He taught, and what He accomplished. Our text defines this rejection in three ways.

First, they reject Christ because they are offended at Him. The purity of His life and the exclusivity of His claims offends people. Jesus offended His listeners in John 5 and 10 by claiming to be God. In John 6, He offended the crowds by teaching their need for His death to pay for their sin. Even many of His followers were offended on that occasion. Jesus offended the religious elite by exposing their sin. Jesus said *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through Me.* The exclusivity of that statement offends people because we want to have a role in our salvation. At the core of these offenses is the basic problem of sin: we want to be god, determining truth, captaining our fate, and demonstrating worth by our actions. Because Jesus exposes and corrects these base desires, people are offended at Him.

Second, people reject Christ because they have rejected the truth. Jesus is the Word made flesh, meaning He perfectly reveals the person and character of God. To reject the truth is to reject Christ; and to reject Christ is to reject truth. Sin entered the world because Adam and Eve rejected God’s word concerning the fruit. People have been rejecting the truth ever since. Now, most people will not state that in concrete terms. Most people will say that they want truth. But what they mean by that is that they want the constant reassurance that what they think is true. When God’s word sheds light on their wrong thinking, rather than conforming their lives to God’s word, they reject it as false.

Finally, the text says that rejecting Christ results in eternal doom. You see this at the end of vs. 8, where those who stumble over Christ were also appointed to this doom. People may think they are free to chart their own path in life, but God requires an accounting from each of us. He does not judge by the standards we make. He judges by His perfect righteousness. All who suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness will be condemned to a crisis in eternity as they are separated from God forever. The text says they were *appointed* to this doom.

Now, the Bible does not describe mankind’s rejection of Christ because it is a joyful thing to think about. It describes it so that 1) we will be convicted of our sin and turn to Christ for salvation, and 2) show us the glory of God’s salvation. The sinfulness of sin and lostness of people is the black backdrop against which the brilliant diamond of the gospel pops. The emphasis of the text is not on those who reject Christ, although that is a reality, but on those who believe. To this third theme we now turn our attention.

The text describes the Christian’s response to Christ three ways. First, they come to Christ. The Bible regularly uses this wordto invite belief in Christ. Believers come to Christ, the living stone, to receive life, to be forgiven of their sin, to be reconciled to God, to be given a new heart inclined towards God, to be justified in His sight, and so on. When unbelievers encounter the rock of Christ, they reject it. When believers encounter the rock of Christ, they build their lives on it. Salvation begins by coming to Christ.

Second, having come to the living stone for salvation, we become living stones ourselves. This is the focus of vs. 5. Having come to Christ, we become living stones that are being built up as a spiritual house. Here we have the temple illustration that rests in the background of this text. In the same way builders fit stones to the cornerstone, God molds His people to the cornerstone of Christ. As the master builder, He is building a spiritual house made up of His people. Each believer has an important place in the edifice He is building.

Not only do we become a living stone in the spiritual work God is doing, but we also become a holy priesthood. A priest is a minister of God who acts as a mediator. Priests go to God on behalf of the people, and they go to the people on behalf of God. In the OT, the priesthood was limited to Aaron and his descendants. But the in NT every believer is a priest to God.

Both illustrations point to the role God’s people have in the ongoing work and worship of God. In the OT, the temple was the center of worship, and the priests were the facilitators of worship. Both entities were vital to the proper worship of God. Peter says that, in the same way the temple and the priesthood were the agents worship in the OT, God’s people are the agency of His worship in the NT. We are living stones in the spiritual house of God and holy priests for the purpose of offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

In the same way priests in the OT were responsible for offering sacrifices on the altar, today God’s people offer sacrifices acceptable to God. This does not mean physical sacrifices on an actual altar. Jesus’ sacrifice ended the need for that. Instead, we offer spiritual sacrifices. These sacrifices are things like 1) our acts of corporate worship; 2) acts of service; 3) the laying aside of sin and the pursuit of godliness; 4) the proclamation of the gospel to the lost; 5) any action done for God’s glory is rightly considered a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God. We were created to glorify God by imitating Him in everything we do. Salvation enables us to do this; therefore, the believer labors to render every part of their life as an acceptable sacrifice to God.

Before we move off this point, notice that these sacrifices are made acceptable to God *through Christ.* Apart from Christ, we can do nothing that pleases God. It is only when we abide in Christ, drawing spiritual life and sustenance from Him, that we can bear fruit that pleases God. We are entirely dependent on Christ for all things.

So believers come to Christ for salvation. Having come to Him, they become living stones built upon Him for God’s glory. Finally, believers adore Christ. We spoke of this some last week when we talked about how Christ is choice and precious in the sight of God. Vs. 6-7a teach us that believers view Christ in the same way. Those who believe in Him, vs. 6 says, will never be disappointed. Ps. 37:4 says *delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.* That does not mean, if we can figure out the formula of delighting in God, we can manipulate Him into giving us anything we want. It means that when our desire is for God, He will satisfy that desire with His presence. It is the same principle here. If we desire Christ over everything else, we will never be disappointed. God will satisfy that desire with the joy of His presence. Our problem is that we often desire things other than Christ, creating disappointments in life and our relationship with God. But if we have tasted of the kindness of God, we will desire it in ever-increasing measure. The more we desire it, the more we will pursue it. And the more we pursue it, the more intimacy we will have with God. All of this causes us to adore the Savior, whose precious value is for those who believe.

So this text points us to the glory and greatness of Christ, despised and rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God and all those who believe. Jesus’ greatness is on full display in the Christmas narrative. We see His glory displayed when His birth was announced by angels, marked by a star, and the cause of great praise in the heavenly hosts. The miracle of God becoming man was responded to by men. The shepherds abandoned their flocks and ran to Bethlehem to see the newborn King. Wisemen from the east tracked hundreds of miles seeking Him. Anna and Simeon rejoiced at His presence in the Temple. Not only did these people worship Him, but they also announced His arrival to everyone who would listen.

Yet this precious stone was not well received by all. Matthew’s gospel tells us that when Herod heard of the wisemen’s quest for the Christ, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with Him. The birth of the long-awaited Messiah should have caused great joy among the Jews. Instead, they were troubled. Bethlehem lay only 5 miles NW of Jerusalem. Yet no one could be bothered to make the short trip with the wisemen. Foreigners sought the king, while those who should have sought Him could not be bothered. And Herod himself attempted to murder the Messiah in a vain attempt to maintain his kingship. Christ’s appearance was a cause of stumbling and offense to most Jews because, although Jesus was the kind of Savior they needed, He was not the kind of savior they wanted. They stumbled over Him, to their own destruction.

These truths should cause us to consider our response to Christ. He is the precious stone laid in Zion. He is the only One who can be save us from the covenant we have made with death through our sin. Have you come to Him for salvation? Rejecting Him leads to eternal doom. But if you come to Him, He will cleanse you from sin, give you eternal life, and establish a relationship with you. Taste and see that the Lord is good. How blessed is he who hides in Him.

For those who have come to Christ, I leave you with two thoughts. First, I want to speak about those whom we love who have rejected Christ. Their rejection is a sorrow in your heart. Christmas, with all its extra family time, provides opportunity for the experience of that sorrow to increase. If you are hurting this Christmas season, consider the grace of our God. Isaiah said that Jesus bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. That includes the sorrow you feel right now. He invites you to cast your cares upon Him, for He cares for you. He knows your pain and will minister His grace into your circumstance. So lean on Him and do not give up hope. As long as there remains breath in the lungs of a person, there is opportunity for them to turn from their sin to Christ. We hope and pray this for all who are outside of Christ. May our hope and joy in Christ this Christmas season be a testimony to the world of the difference Christ makes in us.

Finally, may we spend this week and the rest of our lives adoring Christ for who He is and what He has done. May we lift our voices with Mary to say *the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name.* May His greatness captivate us, and His glory enchant us. Like the shepherds and the wisemen, may we seek Him out and adore Him when we find Him; may we also proclaim that the Savior has been born to anyone who will listen.