

May 14, 2017

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” Amen.

I Peter 2:4-10

An artist was asked to paint a picture of a decaying church. To the astonishment of many, instead of putting on the canvass an old tottering ruin, the artist painted a stately edifice of modern grandeur. Through the open portals could be seen the richly carved pulpit, the magnificent organ, and the beautiful stained glass windows. When the cornerstone was laid it bore the inscription, “We preach Christ crucified.” But the cornerstone was not visible to anyone who gazed at the church. Bushes, creeping vines, and flowers covered the inscription and drew the attention of those who would enter the beautiful building. As invisible as the message of Christ crucified was to the outside of that church, so invisible was the proclamation of that message from its pulpit. In reality, the church had no foundation. It will collapse.

But you and I are not here to talk about the architectural structure or the aesthetics of this or any other church building. We are here to look at the foundation upon which we are building our lives. How well are we taking care of the foundation God has laid in our hearts? God has made us human temples built on a “living” stone. That stone is Christ. Are we building our lives on Christ? Or, are we laying a different foundation – that is patterned after selfish goals and ambitions? Because when all is said and done, it doesn’t matter much what we look like on the outside. What matters is the foundation that is holding us up.

Today we will explore this thought:

“Christ is the Living Stone”

1. a precious foundation
2. a powerful force

Christ is “chosen by God and precious to him.” That is reason enough to convince us that he is a solid foundation upon which to build our lives. Before Jesus became man God said about him, “Here is my Servant whom I uphold, my Chosen One in whom I delight.” God had chosen his own Son to carry out his plan to save all people from the consequences of their sins. Jesus had been God’s choice from eternity. That is why Christ is such a precious cornerstone. He is God’s one and only Son. At his baptism God said about Jesus, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” God gave us his dearest treasure when he sent Jesus here to save us from our sins.

Christ is a precious foundation for us because our lives are built on him! God chose us and set us down “like living stones” upon Christ. He did that when he sent the Holy Spirit through his Word to work faith in our stone cold hearts. He brought us to believe in Jesus so that we are now a part of his spiritual house.

Peter wrote, “you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” We live in the house of God by faith in Jesus Christ! We are living stones built on Christ the Living Stone, our precious foundation!

But we can easily take our home for granted! If we don’t take care of our home it will deteriorate. The same is true of our faith in Christ! Notice that Peter reminds us how to take care of our spiritual house. He tells us that we are a holy priesthood! That means we are supposed to

be people offering spiritual sacrifices! Spiritual sacrifices are lives lived in humble service to one another. Spiritual sacrifices are giving to God the best we have to offer rather than the leftovers – the best of our time, the best of our abilities, the best of our wealth. Spiritual sacrifices are thankful responses to the blessings God has showered on us in Christ.

Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, Peter reminds us that living a life of faith is certainly worth it! Jesus is so very precious to us! He has given us hope when we had none! He has given us peace when we lived with guilt. He has given us eternal life by his resurrection from the dead! The forgiveness of sins is the most precious gift God has given us. It is no wonder why Peter then would write, “Now to you who believe, this stone is precious.” You live in God’s house because of Jesus. Surely Jesus is precious!

The use of a stone to describe a Christ seems strange, doesn’t it? Is there anything that appears more lifeless than a stone? Is there anything that changes less than a stone? At the same time is there anything more stable? Is there anything more permanent? Jesus was dead on Good Friday. Buried in his own rock bound grave, he raised his stone cold dead body to life! Jesus will do the same for you. Now he remains the same to all eternity, your Savior and your God ... a precious foundation and a powerful force in your life.

He is a force the unbelieving world has got to reckon with. Listen to St. Peter: “But to those who do not believe, ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone, and, a Stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’ They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for.” I don’t think there is a single heathen person who hasn’t heard of Jesus. They just want nothing to do with him. They will be crushed by him on judgment day because they rejected the only way of salvation known to man – the way described in our gospel lesson today when Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me.” Or, they will stumble over him. God’s plan of salvation is just too easy for them. They stumble over the fact that human reason must be subject to God’s Word – not master over it. They stumble because they want to think they can earn God’s favor in one way or another. God judges us on the basis of Christ alone! The Living Stone is a powerful force to reckon with. People either believe in Jesus alone for salvation or face “what they are destined for.” Not because Jesus hasn’t loved them or paid for their sins. Not because Jesus hasn’t wanted them to believe. They were not willing! Christ is a powerful force. Don’t think you can get along without him. You and I need him completely and only him.

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.” Jesus makes you a force to be reckoned with. You are chosen, just like the name Israel means. You are chosen by God for salvation from eternity so that you might accomplish the work God has given his church to do.

God had told his Old Testament believers that they would be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” They failed to live up to God’s expectations. But not you! The Living Stone will make you a powerful force. While Jesus is the great High Priest who offered the perfect sacrifice for all sins when he offered himself, he has made you a priest too. Not to offer sacrifices for sin, but to approach God’s throne of grace without a mediator because Jesus Christ is at the right hand of God and intercedes on your behalf.

Besides that you are a holy priesthood to offer “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” The writer to the Hebrews says, “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name.” St. Paul compels us to “offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – which is your

spiritual worship.” Christ , the living stone, is a powerful force at work within you through his Word. He compels you to live your life to God’s glory with grateful hearts.

You are a holy nation because Christ’s perfect life has been credited to you. His righteousness has become your own. You are a people belonging to God. You are his. He bought you with his own blood and adopted you into his family. You are a powerful force because you are connected to God himself!

You can “declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” We have a purpose for living. We are here to tell other people what God has done for us. We are here to invite others to build their lives on Jesus Christ.

We didn’t belong to Christ by birth. We were objects of wrath to God. But we have received his mercy when the Holy Spirit called us to faith. We have a ministry to carry out. Each of you has a pulpit from which we can tell others what Jesus Christ has done for us. You have become a brick in God’s church. God’s church is growing as each living stone is grafted into Christ by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Churches like people look a lot alike from the outside. But there is only one church that will weather the storms of sin and unbelief. There is only one church that will be standing on judgment day. It is the church that is built on the Living Stone, Jesus Christ. It is the invisible church, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints. You are a member of that church by the grace of God. In Christ you have a precious foundation and a powerful force at work for you and within you.

On Mother’s day we think of the home our mother’s made for us. They did their best to make it a happy home – a Christian home. Still sorrow and sadness filled our homes at one time or another. The house that God built is free of sorrow and sadness. It is the house that stands on Christ. It is a precious home. It is a powerful home. By faith in Christ, God’s house is your house! Amen.