

1 Peter 2:1-10

The Living Stone and a Chosen People

Read the bible passage from 1 Peter 2:1-10.

In Chapter 1, of 1 Peter, the author has shown the wonder of God's salvation through Jesus Christ. He then exhorts God's people to strive for moral purity – '... to be holy in all you do ...' (1:15) Now he wants to show the status that Christians have as God's holy people and to encourage us to live with that awareness. This way of living is to be modelled on Jesus Christ.

Peter chooses to use an analogy of the construction of a building – which we understand to be the 'church' – in which Jesus is the foundation and cornerstone. Jesus' followers become the stones that form the rest of the building.

A 'cornerstone' is the stone that sets the levels for the rest of the building and ties it together. It is the stone that determines the design and orientation of the building. To think of Jesus as our cornerstone can be helpful. Take a moment to reflect on how this might be so and answer the following question before reading on:



1. What does it mean to you to think of Jesus as the cornerstone of your life?

My response is that it encourages us to always look to Jesus as the foundation, the leveller and the one who exemplifies what the church, and the individual Christians (the stones) should be like in the way we live – our attitudes, way of thinking, outlook, orientation, behaviour ... etc. I personally have tried to live by the maxim of asking myself, "How would Jesus respond, think or act in this situation?"

But then Peter's analogy (like all analogies) breaks down because he tells us that believers have become 'living stones'. This may appear to be a rather odd image. We usually think of stones as being inanimate (i.e. lifeless, inorganic and non-living). Certainly, the stones in the stone church on the hill are not living. Take a moment to reflect:

2. What is it that makes the stone living?
3. What is it that makes us 'living stones'?

The answers to these two questions can be found in Jesus; and also, in the qualities of God that led to his action of providing salvation through Jesus. Perhaps we might sum it up by saying that it's the qualities of being personal and life-giving.

This is important to understand, because if we don't, then our religion can become a dry parody of a spiritual life – a religion of 'dos and don'ts' whereby we are having to constantly strive to meet some level of behaviour - and constantly fall short. Peter says that such a way of understanding Jesus as the cornerstone who sets an unachievable level of perfection in how we live can even be the reason why some people reject Jesus.

So, Peter's analogy of the construction of a building can be helpful, but it can also be a hindrance.

4. Before reading on, take a moment to reflect on how it may be a hindrance.

Peter states in verse 8 that those who reject Jesus instead of trusting in him 'stumble because they disobey the word'. What does Peter mean by this? We get some clues from Peter's earlier injunctions to 'be self-controlled' (1:13) to 'purify yourselves by obedience' (1:22) and to 'rid yourselves' (2:1). It seems to place a high importance upon our actions – on what we do.

In my experience, if we focus only on verse 8 and these injunctions, it can place an overemphasis on our own actions and lead us to think that our salvation is dependant upon what we do and how we live. We begin to think that we have to earn God's approval and our salvation.

5. Have you, in the past, or do you still sometimes feel that you have to earn God's love?
6. Have you ever found that even those things that are meant to be life giving, such as worship, prayer and discipleship have become burdensome?

If your answer was "Yes" to either of these questions, you are not alone. I suggest that it is easy to fall into this way of thinking – a striving to earn God's approval. It seems to be a natural part of the human mind to desire approval.

In my moments of deeper introspection, I think that most of my achievements in life have been driven by a desire to earn approval from my father – i.e. my earthly father – even my striving after he had died. I think that many, if not most (maybe even all) men are driven by this desire for approval from their human father. Naturally, I cannot speak for women in this regard, but I wonder if we all share similar motivations here – a desire for approval from our biological father and/or mother? This, I suggest can lead us to think that we must win the approval of our Father in Heaven as well.

To avoid this, we must reflect further on Peter's statement that we are 'living stones'. We recall that 'living stones' have the qualities of being personal and life-giving, just as God's action through Jesus is personal and life giving. Peter tells us more about being 'living stones' in verse 10 where he tells us that we are now God's people who have received mercy.

7. In addition to being personal and life-giving, what other qualities of God led to his action of providing salvation through Jesus?

Perhaps your answer will have included words like, love, mercy and compassion. These are all qualities that we see in the way that Jesus lived his life.

This is the cornerstone upon which we are to build our life.

When we strive to achieve some grand achievement or concept of what we should be like, we fail to see the sacred unfolding of our lives in daily simple quiet, humble acts of service, love and kindness. Even the simplest act of love, mercy and compassion can have a profound impact upon the lives of others, even if we personally are not aware of that impact.

I am reminded of the idea known as ‘The Butterfly Effect’ which indicates that a small change can make much bigger changes happen; one small incident can have a big impact on the future. The term comes from an analogy where a butterfly flaps its wings somewhere in the world and a tornado occurs somewhere else in the world. Like the butterfly, we live in a delicate web of relationships and decisions that affect the whole of humanity. This is the significance and sacredness of our own life.



God’s gift of grace is not dependent upon our behaviour. We cannot change how God views us or behaves towards us by our behaviour. We just need to grasp, in more than just an intellectual way, the love and grace that God has freely offered to us. And the way to do this is to draw near to Jesus, the cornerstone of our life, and build our life upon his love, mercy and compassion.

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