

“Jesus, Rock of Ages” (10)

A certain church held a Sunday service patterned after those in colonial America. The preacher was dressed in a long coat and knickers, and the congregation was divided by gender: men on the left side of the aisle and women on the right. At collection time, the preacher announced that this, too, would be done in the old way. He asked the "head of the household" to come forward and place the money on the altar. The men instantly rose. To the amusement of the entire congregation, many of them crossed the aisle to get money from their wives.

In a world which is filled with so many different viewpoints on religious matters, it's not surprising that many Christians get confused and caught up among it all and end up divided over issues that really should be no issue at all. And if there were ever a man who was born in the religious world for the purpose of division, it was certainly Jesus the Christ.

You see loved ones Jesus was destined to have different effects on different people. And in 1 Peter 2:4-10, the apostle Peter is going to show us today that for some people He would be the cause of their rising and for other people He would be their down fall.

Peter is going to show us that to some Jesus serves as our concern stone and for others Jesus is their stumbling block. 1 Peter 2:4 “Come to the Lord, the living stone rejected by people as worthless but chosen by God as valuable.” Peter says that Jesus Christ is the living stone which was rejected by men.

John 1:10+11 “The Word was in the world, and though God made the world through him, yet the world did not recognize him. He came to his own country, but his own people did not receive him.” You see instead of seeing Jesus as their Saviour, they rejected Him to the point where they crucified Him. Even though He was chosen by God and considered to be precious, they rejected Him. But God knew that was going to happen, that's why the Psalmist says in Psalm 118:22 “The stone which the builders rejected as worthless turned out to be the most important of all”.

But exactly what do we mean when talk about the cornerstone? One dictionary says, “The cornerstone (or foundation stone) concept is derived from the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation, important since all other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire structure.” In other words the cornerstone is the most important stone in the whole building because everything else is build in and around it.

And what Peter is saying this morning loved ones is that Jesus Christ is the cornerstone not of a physical building but of a spiritual one. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of a great spiritual house or temple. 1 Peter 2:5+6 “Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, where you will serve as holy priests to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ. For the scripture says, "I chose a valuable stone, which I am placing as the cornerstone in Zion; and whoever believes in him will never be disappointed."

It never ceases to amaze me when Christians forget who they are. We are a privileged people loved ones, because none of us have got a right to worship God, we're permitted to offer acceptable worship only by the grace of God. And it really discourages people when the children of God deliberately reject this privilege and stay away from the public assembly God has ordained for His glory and our good.

Consider briefly the significance of worship:

It is obedience to a divine command.

It is a means of nourishing the spirit.

It assists in achieving spiritual growth.

It encourages others in their spiritual development.

It shows the world where my priorities are.

It is one means of expressing my love for God.

It is an avenue God has provided by which I can praise His name.

It is the offering of spiritual sacrifices.

It is a way of showing my thanksgiving to God for all He has done for me.

It is a period of communion with God with the world shut out entirely.

It is an experience that should make the heart of every Christian glad!

And loved ones if regular attendance is becoming a concern for you, then you need to know that your Father in heaven is looking for you. You can be many things as a Christian but a Christian who doesn't meet regularly with their brethren cannot be a strong Christian. Because it's upon Jesus Christ our cornerstone which we all are being built up.

Paul tells us the same thing over in 1 Corinthians 3:9-11 "For we are partners working together for God, and you are God's field. You are also God's building. Using the gift that God gave me, I did the work of an expert builder and laid the foundation, and someone else is building on it. But each of you must be careful how you build. For God has already placed Jesus Christ as the one and only foundation, and no other foundation can be laid".

And if you read on 1 Corinthians 3:16+17 "Surely you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you! God will destroy anyone who destroys God's temple. For God's temple is holy, and you yourselves are his temple".

An engineer who was responsible for building great factories said that all such construction is now planned with the machines that are to be housed in the factory in mind. The walls and floors of the buildings are constructed so that a machine can be built into the very foundation and structure of the building, rather than set in as an afterthought.

This is the way the Lord builds believers into Christ. Paul says in Ephesians 2:19-22 that "We are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, and in Him all the building is fitly framed together, so that it grows into a holy temple in the Lord"

In other words, Jesus Christ is not the cornerstone of a physical building but of a spiritual one, His people, His church, you and I are a part of that spiritual house. Jesus being the cornerstone is not an afterthought loved ones; everything else is being built in and around Him. And like we have seen time and time again through Peter's letter so far, we are truly blessed but with those blessings come great responsibility. He reminds us as this spiritual house is built upon the Christ; we need to fulfil certain responsibilities.

First of all he said that 1 Peter 2:5+6 "Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, where you will serve as holy priests to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ. For the scripture says, "I chose a valuable stone, which I am placing as the cornerstone in Zion; and whoever believes in him will never be disappointed."

Peter reminds us that we are to serve as a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices to God. And so the first thing we need to offer God is our very bodies. Paul says in Romans 12:1+2 "I therefore urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercies, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices that are holy and pleasing to God, for this is the reasonable way for you to worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but continually be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may be able to determine what God's will is-what is proper, pleasing, and perfect".

The second thing we need to offer God is our praise. The Hebrew writer says in Hebrews 13:15 "Therefore, through him let us always bring God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name".

The third thing we need to offer God is our good works. The Hebrew writer again says in Hebrews 13:16 "Do not neglect to do good and to be generous, for God is pleased with such sacrifices".

The fourth thing we need to offer God is our very lives. Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:6-8 "For I am already being poured out as an offering, and the time for my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have completed the race. I have kept the faith. The victor's crown of righteousness is now waiting for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who eagerly wait for his appearing". In other words we truly are a blessed people who serve and worship God in a very special serving way.

Do you know why I think one of the reasons our pews are so empty? I think it's because we've forgotten who we are and just how special we are. There may be no name more common in the English language than the name Bill Smith. In a seminary class, one professor related an event that happened his first day in college. His teacher professed an uncanny command of the English language. It seemed that he always pulled out the most appropriate word for the occasion.

On this, the first day of school, he was calling the roll. After recognizing each student he made some pertinent comment about his name--its history, meaning, or some historically related story. Finally, he came to **Bill Smith**. He said with a pause and in a reflective tone, "**Bill Smith . . . that is a common name.**" Stirred from within, **Bill** arose from his seat and said in a loving but firm tone, "**Sir, Bill Smith may be frequent but not common.**"

I wonder how many of us have lived under that teacher's philosophy. I wonder how many of us think that there is nothing special about ourselves; and we have concluded that we are common, everyday, ordinary. Well for those of you who think that way, you need to listen very carefully to what Peter says next about you.

1 Peter 2:9+10 "But you are the chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation, God's own people, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvellous light. At one time you were not God's people, but now you are his people; at one time you did not know God's mercy, but now you have received his mercy".

Peter says just in case you forget who you are, let me remind you. He says let me remind you that **you are a chosen person**. He says let me remind you that **you are a royal priest**. He says let me remind you that **you are a member of a holy nation**. He says let me remind you that **you are a person that belongs to God**.

Now you might be thinking to yourself 'ok I understand who I am but I still don't understand your point.' Let me put it simply; you are what Israel as a nation was supposed to be in the first place. Let me explain, a race or chosen people are a people that have been bound together through common origin. A nation is a group of people who have been bound together through common law.

You see loved ones Israel of old was supposed to be an object lesson. **Exodus 19:5+6 "Now, if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own people. The whole earth is mine, but you will be my chosen people, a people dedicated to me alone, and you will serve me as priests."**

The Israelites were supposed to be a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. They were supposed to bring the world back to God by acting as mediators between the world and God, but they messed up. When Moses was up the mountain the people remained below and ended up building a golden calf under Aaron's instructions, they messed up.

And Moses stood where Aaron should have stood and asked the question, **who is on the Lord's side** and only the tribe of Levi came forward. **Exodus 32:29 "Moses said to the Levites, "Today you have consecrated yourselves as priests in the service of the Lord by killing your sons and brothers, so the Lord has given you his blessing."** And so instead of all the Israelites being priests and mediators between God and the world. The tribe of Levi was chosen to mediate between the Israelites and God.

Do you see what I'm getting at loved ones? We are what Israel as a nation was supposed to be in the first place. We are now the chosen people, we are now the royal priest, we are now the holy nation, and we are now a people that belong to God. And what we need to remember is that it is Christians today who now have the responsibility of being mediators between the world and God like it was supposed to be at the start. We've got the job of trying to reconcile the world to God.

You remember in Matthew 21 where Jesus shares the parable of the wicked tenants? Near the very end of the parable he says this, in **verse 43 "For this reason I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and will be given to a nation producing the fruits of it".** **What nation is He taking the kingdom away from and who is He giving it to?** He's taking it away from the Jewish nation, they messed up and He has now given to His church.

That's why Paul says in **Galatians 3:26-29** that all Christians are the seed of Abraham. That's why he goes on to say in **Galatians 6:16** that all Christians are now the Israel of God. And just like the Israel of old who were responsible for proclaiming the praises of God, we too have the same task.

1 Peter 2:9+10 "But you are the chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation, God's own people, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvellous light. At one time you were not God's people, but now you are his people; at one time you did not know God's mercy, but now you have received his mercy".

Peter says we have been called out of darkness into His marvellous light by His grace. By His grace we who were not a people, are now the people of God. By His grace we who didn't know of God's mercy have now obtained mercy.

The question is; are we going to mess up like the Israel of old did? Are we going to worship the idols which our society has made? Are we going to proclaim the good news to those in our world or are we just going to focus on our jobs, our cars, or our money? Are we going to let the world know that they can get to know God and what He wants through our lives or are we going to focus on our trials and temptations? Are we going to show the world that we are His children or are we just going to live our lives however we wish?

You see loved ones Jesus Christ is not only the cornerstone of His church, He is also the rock upon we build our lives. Now we know that the permanence of any building depends upon three things: the materials used, wisdom exercised in its construction, and its foundation. Inferior materials, though skilfully assembled, cannot stand for long against the elements of nature. Nor will superior materials, if carelessly put together, be able to stand. A combination of sound materials and wise direction in assembling is necessary if the building is to endure; also it is very important that it be built upon a solid foundation.

The same truths apply to the building of a life. One must choose his materials carefully and work them into the structure of their life wisely. They must be positive that it is built on a good foundation.

In the **Sermon on the Mount**, Jesus challenges each one of us to build for eternity. Jesus urges men to cast aside such material as selfishness, hypocrisy, lust, and hatred. These can only lead to failure and ruin. Christ prescribes the materials that will stand throughout time and eternity. He stresses humility, meekness, righteousness, mercy, and purity. The quality of this material has been tested and tried through the centuries.

Matthew 7:24-27 "So then, anyone who hears these words of mine and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain poured down, the rivers flooded over, and the wind blew hard against that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on rock. "But anyone who hears these words of mine and does not obey them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain poured down, the rivers flooded over, the wind blew hard against that house, and it fell. And what a terrible fall that was!"

Jesus says by following His teachings, we are able to establish our lives on solid ground. And when we build on His word and obey His every word, then we as Christians can withstand the storms of life. So loved ones in more ways than one, Jesus is truly a cornerstone to those who believe in Him and follow Him.

But what about those who do not believe in Jesus, what about those who do not make Him the cornerstone of their lives? Well Peter says to those who don't believe, Jesus is a stumbling stone. **1 Peter 2:7+8** "This stone is of great value for you that believe; but for those who do not believe: "The stone which the builders rejected as worthless turned out to be the most important of all." And another scripture says, "This is the stone that will make people stumble, the rock that will make them fall." They stumbled because they did not believe in the word; such was God's will for them".

Among the treasures of the **Museum in Constantinople** there is one which outdistances them all in intense though painful interest. In one of the main halls there lies a block of stone some three feet square. Black with age and without carving of any kind, the incautious visitor might well pass it with but a careless and uninterested glance. When carefully examined, however, it is found to have some words engraved upon it by which it is possible to identify it. Here then, as the inscription disclosed, is the very stone set up in the **Temple of Jerusalem**, between the **Gentile** and the **Jewish** court, warning the **Gentiles** that if they dared to pass into the sacred place they would instantly be put to death. That stone, therefore, lying thus in the **Museum of Antiquities**, stands for all the exclusiveness and intolerance which blighted the ancient world.

Christ as He passed in and out must often have looked upon it and read its inscription with heavy heart. He came into the world for the very purpose of removing it, and all that it represented of exclusiveness, bitterness, inhumanity, and religious bigotry and pride.

So loved ones, either Jesus is the cornerstone, upon which we are being built as stones in His temple (**the church**) and upon which we are building our lives by following His teaching. Or He will be the stumbling stone over which we will meet our doom.

Now like I said at the start of this sermon, this shouldn't surprise us. After all God said this would happen when He spoke through His prophet Isaiah. Isaiah 8:13-15 "Remember that I, the Lord Almighty, am holy; I am the one you must fear. Because of my awesome holiness I am like a stone that people stumble over; I am like a trap that will catch the people of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel and the people of Jerusalem. Many will stumble; they will fall and be crushed. They will be caught in a trap."

We also need to remember that God said this was going to happen through Simeon when he presented Jesus in the temple as a newborn. Luke 2:34 "Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is chosen by God for the destruction and the salvation of many in Israel. He will be a sign from God which many people will speak against."

The apostle Paul himself understood that many a Jew wouldn't accept Jesus so he writes in Romans 9:30-33 "What can we say, then? Gentiles, who were not pursuing righteousness, have attained righteousness, a righteousness that comes through faith. But Israel, who did pursue the righteousness that is based on the law, did not arrive at that law. Why not? Because they did not pursue it on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on works. They stumbled over the stone that causes people to stumble. As it is written, "Look! I am placing a stone in Zion that people will stumble over and a large rock that will make them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be ashamed."

And over in 1 Corinthians 1:23 Paul writes "But we preach Christ crucified. He is a stumbling block to Jews and nonsense to gentiles." You see loved ones Jesus was a stumbling block to many of the Jews because they thought that they could attain righteousness by keeping the Law. They could not accept the need for a suffering Messiah to atone for their sins.

And in a similar way today Jesus is a stumbling stone for many people. Pride prevents them from accepting Jesus on His terms. They think that they can please God and go to heaven on the basis of their good deeds. And so because of pride and their unwillingness to do what He asks, they are unwilling to confess their sinfulness, and their need for Jesus Christ. They are unwilling to turn their lives over to Jesus, and to do His Will. And loved ones this is truly a sad situation for all those people, it's sad because of the consequences.

1 Peter 2:8 "A stone they stumble over and a rock they trip on." They keep on stumbling because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do". Loved ones if you're not a Christian this morning and you don't have Christ then you need to know that you will die in your sins. And those are not my thoughts or words; those are the very words of our Cornerstone and Rock Himself. John 8:24 "That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. For unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins."

And when a person dies in their sin then they too are going to be judged after death. Revelation 20:11-15 "Then I saw a large, white throne and the one who was sitting on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. I saw the dead, both unimportant and important, standing in front of the throne, and books were open. Another book was opened-the Book of Life. The dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to their works. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. (This is the second death-the lake of fire.) Anyone whose name was not found written in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire".

Now do you understand why this is so sad? Do you understand why it's so important to believe Jesus and obey His every word? You know loved ones we often sing "Jesus, Rock of Ages," for truly Jesus is like a rock. But what kind of rock is He to us?

If we are willing to believe and obey Jesus, He can be the cornerstone, upon which we can be added as part of His church, the spiritual temple. If we are willing to believe and obey Jesus, He can be the cornerstone, upon which can build our lives so as to have a full and meaningful life.

If you're not a Christian this morning but are willing to believe and obey Jesus then you too can become one of His chosen people, you too can become His royal priest, you too can become a part of His holy nation, and become a person that belongs to Him. But if we don't believe and continue to disobey His word, then by necessity Jesus will be our stumbling stone, over which we will fall, under which we will be broken and be ground to powder. Sadly there is no middle ground.