

The cornerstone. A sermon preached on June 11, 2017
at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George BC
by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: PSALM 118:21-23
 I PETER 2:1-8
 MATTHEW 7:24-27

We return to Peter's first letter.

Remember. Peter's first audience is in the midst of fierce physical persecution for holding to their faith in the Risen Christ.

It was therefore important for them to know the basics about living daily the way of Jesus Christ.

They needed encouragement by the resources that were theirs in Christ.

It is the sort of encouragement we as God's people need today

For though the persecution we face in North

America as followers of Jesus is not physical,

The reality of the powers of consumerism,

Indifference,

Busyness and despair are all so real

Such things can make us focus on other things,

Listen too much and too stridently to the world's voices,

Be led to follow the world's ways.

So Peter begins chapter 2 by listing behaviors from which we are to rid ourselves.

In the NRSV – the version William read from and the version you have in your chair backs – an important word is omitted that is in every other modern translation I consulted.

The omitted word is ‘therefore’.

Peter has been speaking about the consequences of God’s grace in Jesus.

Chapter 2 – therefore – God’s action in Christ has consequences and implications.

The first few verses of chapter 2 tie in with 1:22 ‘**rid yourselves**’ – get rid of any attitude or hindrance that could threaten this love (1:22) for brothers and sisters in Christ.

The image Peter wishes to convey is that of removing one’s former life of sin being akin to taking off an old, heavy and now unnecessary and cumbersome garment.

The tense of ‘rid yourselves’ indicates this, to be a decisive act of ridding oneself of these things!

This is no random list Peter gives.

Rather these are sins that unless checked and dealt with will cause dissension and nastiness among believers.

Peter continues (vs.3) –as you readers live out your Christian life,

As you become more mature in the faith,

You will “taste” more and more of the Lord’s goodness.

And the more we taste the Lord’s goodness,

The more tasteLESS other worldly options will become.

What Peter and so many others in scripture remind us,
Call us to see – *do not fill your lives with cheap substitutes.*

Then Peter gives to his readers' one of the most powerful images of the centrality and power of Jesus Christ

Peter calls Jesus **a living stone – rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to him.**

Peter speaks in the language of an architect or builder,

And as we will see further, he makes use of the idea of a cornerstone.

Today, some buildings still include in the building of the structure – cornerstones.

In most cases though, cornerstones are decorative only

The cornerstone is often inscribed or has a plaque with the date construction started on the building. Usually, it has no real importance to the building beyond that!

However, until the middle of the last century, a cornerstone was the most important stone of the building.

When builders began laying bricks or stones, For a building, they would carefully select one very large stone – a stone they that they then carefully

worked and prepared – that would hold the strategic place in the construction of the foundation.

All the other stones would be set in reference to it.

This stone would be the stone that joined the beginning walls into a solid corner

It was therefore the stone that determined the position,

The structure,

And stability of the whole building.

THEREFORE the very first thing that a wise builder would do would be to select, Prepare and place the cornerstone.

Do you see the point Peter is making in comparing Jesus to the cornerstone?

His words here in his letter are not just made up – but are taken from Isaiah 28:16

The stone is not just some inanimate stone, securing a building,

Rather it is to and for us **chosen and precious**.

Peter is therefore asking his readers – then and now – Upon what are YOU building your life? What is your cornerstone?

Good and important to ask and answer question then and now!

And only you can answer it for yourselves.

Consider then for a moment – *what is the cornerstone of your life?*

What is the thing that anchors your life?

Many people build their lives on things like
 stuff and possessions of this world,
 Or success
 Or reputation or even power over others.

If you remember way back to our reflections on
 Ecclesiastes,
 We know the ultimate direction of such a life –
 vanity – all is vanity.

That though does not seem to prevent people
 from building their lives on such things!
 Some seek to build their lives on good health.
 Some build their whole lives on the pursuit of
 pleasure.

Others look to ‘spirituality’ and ‘religion’
 Or the teachings of various human philosophies
 Many just keep building without any thought of the
 foundation.

Sadly, many find very late that upon what they
 built their lives on, disappoints them in the end!!
 They had not wisely selected the right beginning
 point – the right cornerstone!

For God’s people especially, for all
 people – whether they choose to believe it or not--
 there is ONLY ONE RELIABLE cornerstone.
 God has made us to build our lives in the way He
 has ordained – and we are made by Him for no
 other way than his.

St. Augustine – 3rd century bishop of Hippo,
 Author of City of God and Confessions

*You have made us for yourself O Lord and our hearts are
restless until they rest in you.*

Using Isaiah 28 as a base, Peter goes one step further – He names what must be the foundation or cornerstone of our lives as followers of Jesus – Jesus Himself.

Not Jesus as an idea or a concept.

Not nebulous and unknown Jesus – but Jesus the person

God in the flesh

Build your life (vs.5) with Him as the corner

And no matter *what you fear,*

What you face,

What suffering and dislocation you experience,

What disorientation you experience or may be experiencing,

He will hold onto you.

Look at the adjectives Peter uses to describe Jesus – the cornerstone.

First think ‘stone’ and what comes immediately to mind?

Something solid and unmovable,

Something strong and reliable

Something that does not change

Add to the noun STONE, the adjective ‘LIVING (vs.4)

And all of the descriptions we can think when we hear the word “stone” takes on an added dimension does it not?

First of all,

| He is living because he is a person

He never changes, but He himself is compassionate.

He loves those who come to him

Because he is a Person, He is personal.

We are able to enter into a relationship of love with this wonderfully unchanging stone.(Jesus)

Owing to his resurrection,--this Jesus is truly a ‘living’ stone.

Able to give life and hope and meaning and purpose and comfort and peace to those who are connected to him

In other words, He is able to transform the lives of those who are built upon Him

For that is what Peter is calling his readers then and now to do (vs.5)

And it is not just any old building we are called to build, to be part of,

It is a spiritual house (vs.5)

Together,

We are being built into something special – something holy,

And not just to look good,

Be smug, self-satisfied and judgmental of others.

Oh no, Peter is quite clear that this is NOT what being a living stone connected to the cornerstone of Jesus Christ is all about.

NO, as living stones we are to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

I wonder what Peter means by “spiritual sacrifices...”

Above all,

To offer these spiritual sacrifices we must continually be coming to Jesus.

We are not the cornerstone – HE is.

Just as in a Biblical image Jesus uses in John’s gospel – we are not the Vine – but only the branches!

I believe that to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ

Means among other things, we see worship and praise to God,

Not just limited to a set time, set day, set place

We allow ourselves to see everything we are able to do can be worship

I am not calling for some sort of pantheism,

But we take so much for granted

On my office door, there is an enlargement of a greeting card picturing two children looking into the lens of a camera

Their faces show curiosity and a sense of expectation

Above the picture are words from the American writer, E.B. White

Always be on the lookout for the presence of wonder."

The picture is the first thing I see as I key my office door and the last thing I see as I lock up.

It is a necessary perspective for me,

Particularly when those parish situations and personalities wear my patience.

Seeing that picture, I am reminded that God's grace is abundant

God's love is boundless

So, do not be ensnared into majoring in minors

Herb.

Offering spiritual sacrifices also involves living a life – the whole of life *with a sense of gracious thankfulness.*

How often do we concentrate on what we do not have,

What did not happen in our lives,

Rather than giving thanks for what we have.

Far too many of us spend inordinate amounts of energy and worry bead time on what might happen,

What did not happen and why!

All of us are in God's hands!!!!

God remains merciful, enduring and unchanging.

And God will never let us down

Others may, but Jesus – never!

Offering spiritual sacrifices –learn to trust

Jesus.

Trust today is not easy...

So many human agencies let us down,
Family fall short,
Peers forget,

But not Jesus..he is never going to let us
down.

What he promises will happen in his time.

Build your life, your trust on this, you will not lose
indefinitely

If though you turn your back and say – stuff and
nonsense – all this Jesus talk –

You will most certainly be like the man who built
his house on sand (from Matthew 7)

²⁶And everyone who hears these words of mine and does
not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his
house on sand. ²⁷The rain fell, and the floods came, and
the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and
great was its fall!' [Matt. 7:26-27)

Is such a promise meant to terrify or scare people
into belief in the Lordship of Christ?

No, any more than Peter's words are to arm twist
people into following Jesus.

Fear, threats and guilt have never been successful in
long term commitment to the Lordship of Jesus in
the whole of life.

Both Jesus and Peter and all writers of the scriptures are continually inviting us to look, to see, to come, to follow, this man and Saviour called Jesus

Will all who hear these words accept it immediately – no?

Peoples' reaction to the message of Jesus continues to be akin to what happened when the apostle Paul preached upon the resurrection of Jesus at a place in Athens called the Areopagus (Acts 17)

A place where the intellectual greats and wannabes gathered to hear and discuss new things

Paul preaches – the reaction?

³²When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, 'We will hear you again about this.' ³³At that point Paul left them. ³⁴But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them. [Acts 17:32-34]

Here in Peter's first letter, by way of encouragement to people in the midst of horrible physical persecution owing to their faith in the Risen Christ, Peter says – anchor yourself to the cornerstone – Jesus Christ

Draw from him

Make your life line up with His,

Build your life upon Him

They are words of encouragement and direction in every age – including this one.

For the answer that the implied questions of this passage of scripture are forever current

Is that upon which you are building your life, absolutely solid?

Is that upon which you are building your life, eternally reliable?

Is that upon which you are building your life — Jesus — the cornerstone, the living stone, the Rock?

Because if it is not, then truly, you have and are choosing poorly!!!

AMEN