

May 7th, 2023.

Fifth Sunday of Easter

1 Peter 2:4-10 Pastor Prieue

Theme: The living Stone builds living stones 1) into his spiritual house, his treasured possession 2) to be his priesthood

A Christian pastor named A.W. Tozer once said, **“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”**¹ I suppose he’s got a point. How much money is in my bank account, whether I had a date to prom, or my golf score, my college degree, my career title, my list of accomplishments, are all not the most important thing about me. In fact, when I’m dead and gone, none of those things will amount to a hill of beans. But on the day I die, the one thing about me that will actually matter for me is, “What I think about God?”

“So what do you think about God?” It’s really a question that sums a person up pretty quickly. If a guy says, “I’m not so sure he’s up there, but if he is, he should be fired. I mean, ‘Look around.’ For being the big man upstairs with almighty power, he’s certainly not doing much with it.” Such a person reveals that he’d rather not have God at all, and certainly he doesn’t love him. So a person’s thoughts about God reveal where their relationship with him is at, whether they hate him or love him or don’t think anything about him at all.

Today our text from 1 Peter 2:4-10 lays before us the two categories of thoughts about God that all reactions and responses to God fall into: belief or unbelief. This is one of those areas where the Bible absolutely insists on things being black and white, right and wrong, true or false. What did Jesus say in our Gospel lesson? **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.”** (John 14:6). It’s through him or it’s not all. There’s no other option. And we as servants and students of the Word must treat it that way as well.

So what’s the first reaction, the first category for people’s thoughts about God? The Apostle Peter writes, **“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans...”** (**1 Peter 2:4**). There it is! The first response is rejection. It’s unbelief. The imagery that Peter is going to use to describe these reactions has to do with stones and builders and foundations, imagery that he quotes from a few places in the Old Testament, like Isaiah and the Psalms.

Imagine builders who have prepared a flat foundation and now they’re ready to lay the very first stone, the cornerstone. It can’t be just any stone, it has to be precisely the right one, a stone with perfect right angles, like we might think of on a carpenter’s square. It also has to be

¹“Tozer vs. Lewis; What’s the Most Important Thing about Us?” Justin Taylor. *Thegospelcoalition.org* June 4, 2016

one that will stand the test of time under the weight of the corner of the wall. The sturdiness of the whole building will depend on this very first selection. Pick the wrong stone and the building will rise up out of whack, with bad angles and leaning walls and the whole building will easily crumble. The cornerstone was critical to the success of the building. It was far more important than just decorative like it often is today, with the date founded and a nice slogan and maybe a time capsule in it.

So the builders are scanning their options for this very first stone, the cornerstone, and as they search, they set their eyes upon the living Stone. It's different than all the rest, because it simply is the most perfect Stone this world has ever known. Its strong and solid, it's straight and true. Of all the stones on earth, this is the very Stone God chose for the purpose of founding a majestic building the likes of which no one has ever seen. The builders go to move it, but instead of bringing it to the corner, to the place it was destined to be, they cast it aside, the living Stone into the reject pile. Not what they were looking for! And they dispose of it thinking it will be the last time they encounter that Stone.

Whether it was because the living Stone was too straight and true, too perfect, and they couldn't bear the thought of having to align everything in their building to such a perfect standard or else they simply thought it was too good to be true, and that it couldn't possibly deliver what it promised to be, either way they rejected it. They didn't want the living Stone and they got rid of it!

What will happen to such nearsighted and foolish builders? What will happen to those who look at God and his perfect Son Jesus, the living Stone, and refuse to be conformed to the likeness of his Son? What will happen to those who make an enduring choice that they would rather scrap God's blueprint for their life, their identity, their relationships, their sexuality, and start building and painting outside the lines? Even more fundamental and foundational than that, what will happen to those who come to Jesus the living Stone and think better of a life without him than a life with him, and so cast him aside to the reject pile? What will happen to you if you do this?

Your building will crumble. The rains will come and the winds will beat against your walls and the flaws will be exposed and everything will fall with a great crash. And as you go running away in the dark from that pile of rubble, make no mistake, you'll encounter the living Stone once again. It will be the stone lying outside that in your panicked frenzy, you won't see and you will trip over and fall flat on your face. Peter says the cornerstone the builders rejected has become **“a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”** Then he explains, **“They stumble because they disobey the message, which is also what they were destined for.”**

Now don't get the wrong idea from that last phrase. God is not predestining people for unbelief or condemnation, though there's people like the Calvinists who believe that. What Peter is saying is that the consequence for disobeying the message will clearly follow. If you reject the message, you're destined for stumbling, in the same way that when you speed, you will get pulled over and get a ticket. The government has not predestined some people to get speeding tickets as if they were causing you to speed, but the government has predetermined that penalty for those who get pulled over for speeding is a speeding ticket. So the penalty for rejecting the message is stumbling over the living Stone and being destroyed.

All of this fits under the category of unbelief, of rejection. And if, on a person's dying day, their thoughts about God amount to the rejection we've been talking about, then they will not escape the stumbling and the destruction that follows after. But so often *people's thoughts about God* are what they are because they've never ever grasped the truth of *what God's thoughts are about us*. It may still be true that our thoughts about God are the most important thing *about us*, but *God's thoughts about us* are the most important thing, period.

So what are God's thoughts about us? Let's talk about the value he puts on us, a value and an esteem we don't even put on ourselves. God thought that you were so valuable that he took his chosen and most special possession, the living Stone, the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and he gave it to you and for you. He laid Jesus down on the line for you to be your life, your security, your salvation. Peter quotes Isaiah here, **“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, (1 Peter 2:6).** He gave you the perfect Stone that will never falter under

the weight. You can build your entire life on it knowing that it won't crumble because he promises **“the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame. (1 Peter 2:6)**

When you realize that God thought so much of you, it changes the way we think of him. It endears us to him. It's one thing if somebody has a billion dollars, and they give you a hundred-dollar watch, well it's a nice gift, but maybe it didn't come with a big commitment from them. It's something much different when someone who doesn't have a lot gives up something valuable to them in order to give that gift. When you receive a gift like that and realize what the person had to give up in order to give it, it gives you all the more reason to treasure that gift for all that it's worth. So when we God gives us everything in Jesus, the living Stone, it's like a bride taking off her beloved diamond wedding ring and giving it to us. Our view about that stone changes, it becomes that same as God's view about his chosen and precious stone. **“Now to you who believe, this stone is precious!” (1 Peter 2:7).**

When our thoughts turn to Jesus the living Stone and we view him in faith as our treasure, as our precious possession, something miraculous happens. **The living Stone makes us into living stones.** Who ever heard of a living stone anyway? That's an oxymoron. A stone is like the most inanimate, “not-living” thing there is, but not in God's world where Jesus has rose from the dead. Now even the stones are alive. Now **“you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house...” (1 Peter 2:5).**

Peter's talking about the invisible church, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the building of all believers, his chosen and cherished possession, with Christ as its cornerstone. And in this building you don't get to stay as you started, crooked and jagged with all kinds of flaws, as if you'd ever want to. No, in this building you get to be conformed to the perfect righteousness and trueness of Christ as he builds you into his holy temple. And you get to hear words that maybe no one has ever said about you. **“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.” (1 Peter 2:9).** That's what God thinks about you and it's the most important thing on earth.

The next time the devil and your low self-esteem call you all kinds of names and try to pull you into the pit of despair, you read 'em that passage, drop the mic, and walk off the stage.

The names that God calls you are the only ones that matter—chosen, royal, his special possession.

Now the last thing we need to talk about is this word priesthood. Much like the priests in the Old Testaments, Peter says a royal priesthood does two things: 1) a priesthood offers spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. God does not want you offering any more animals sacrifices. Instead, he wants spiritual sacrifices, things you give up or give or do in your life for his sake as you offer your very selves back to him in thanks. 2) A priesthood declares the praises of the one who called you out of darkness. Like kid who can't stop telling everyone about the gift he got for Christmas, treasuring the gift we've been given means telling others about the God of grace who gave it, what we think about him, and more importantly what he thinks about us.

This summer Mount Olive is getting involved in a service project that gives you the opportunity to do both of those things, to serve and to share. It's called Miracle League of Fox Valley, a baseball league for kids with special needs. It happens on weeknights right over here at Appleton Memorial Park. The kids need buddies and volunteers to hang out with them on the field. Now, the last thing I want this to be is a sermon guilt trip, but if you thought to yourself, "I'd like to do something, but I've never know what to do or how," then jump on this opportunity, one tangible way to be a royal priest in your community. It's the kind of thing God built you to do. The living Stone builds living stones 1) into his spiritual house, his treasured possession 2) to be his holy priesthood. Amen.