



The Right Foundations 1 Peter 2:4-10

1 Peter 2:4 Come to the Lord, the living stone rejected by people as worthless but chosen by God as valuable. 5 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. 6 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." 7 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." 8 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. 9 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. 10 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.

Many years ago we owned a Victorian house in Tottenham. During the time we were there we had a problem with the drains and I excavated down next to the house to find where the drains were. To my amazement I discovered that the foundations of the house were only a few inches deep and made up of broken tiles. However impressive the building, there was little holding it up. Apparently it's common for buildings of that era to have few foundations and it's not unusual to see houses like that being underpinned. Without proper foundations, buildings often don't stand – they have no integrity.

One of the pictures of church we have from this passage and from our study this morning is that of a building – specifically a temple. As I've pointed out in previous weeks, purpose-built church buildings did not appear as such until the 4th century, although Christians did have special meeting places before that time, they usually met in homes.

The church building was therefore not bricks and mortar, but people. That's why I like the people as church diagram we use as a church logo. Let me remind you of what Peter said: *1 Peter 2:4 Come to the Lord, the living stone rejected by people as worthless but chosen by God as valuable. 5 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. 6 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."*

We worship in a temple and that temple is made up of living stones, with Christ as the foundation stone – the cornerstone. We are living stones. The church is people and what the world sees of Jesus is us. It's a challenge isn't it. If all they end up with is a picture of church that's a building or an organisation, then they're not seeing Jesus. Is that because they aren't looking properly, or because we're not reflecting our Lord.

Last year we visited the church of the Sagrada Família in Barcelona. It is a weird building designed by the Spanish architect Gaudi and I must say, it's all pretty gaudy. It's used as a church but it is still not finished even after a century of construction. But it's still usable as a place of worship – it functions – and of course it's still being added to. We are already *the chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation* – we have already been made that in Christ – that's done, that's past. But there is a present tense too in what God is making us in Christ. The temple is a work in progress – we have to come as living stones and allow God to shape us into the building. And until Jesus returns, we are a work in progress. If we are a holy nation, then we must live and act like a holy people.

The phrase *he chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation* is interesting. It's used of Israel in Exodus 19:

3 Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.

We don't normally associate this idea with Israel, but these are words that applied to Israel and are now applied to the church. Israel was meant to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. They were set apart by God for a reason – to be a light to the nations and draw the nations to God. They failed – but they didn't fail because in Christ, the son of God, son of David – the nations are saved.

How this all applies now to the church is that in Christ we are grafted in to God's holy nation and the disobedient of Israel have been grafted out. And in Christ what has changed is that the church is the representation of God's chosen people, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. And how things are done have been changed too. The Jews had a building in which God dwelt and the nation was drawn to it. Now God dwells in His temple – not a temple of stone but of flesh – people. It's a temple that God is building for Himself with Christ as the cornerstone.

I find it an irony that the Jews' most holy place today is the western wall of the temple – the foundations – because there is no temple structure. All I can say is, wrong foundations, wrong temple – they are commanded to make Jesus the temple cornerstone and build on Him. And of course, they find that whole concept a stumbling block. I'll get back to that in a minute.

So we are a temple built on the foundations of Christ. As I said last time, we can apply to the local church everything that applies to the church universal. Which brings me back to the foundations of my old house. It doesn't matter how fine the house may look, if the foundations are faulty, something will fail sooner or later. How well we stand together and hold together as a local church depends how established we are on the foundations.

That's why it is so important that we are around the Lord's table this evening. The problem is with church is that it is easy to replace "church – the people" with "church – the organisation." Down the ages people have done this and they have ended up serving buildings and supporting organisation and forgotten the foundations. What gets built then becomes faulty. Yet this picture Peter gives us is one where the cornerstone is the most part important structure – the whole thing collapses without the cornerstone. And Jesus is that cornerstone.

What is the purpose of the cornerstone:

- holds everything up – we are dependent on Him. *7 This stone is of great value for you that believe* When I was a young Christian I remember the verses that the church had painted on the wall. *Unto you who therefore believe, He is precious* 1 Peter 2:7 in the AV. I used to ponder those words as a young Christian, wondering why they didn't put something better there. Now I've been a Christian a long time, I know why they were there because as you grow in the faith, those words become truer by the day! He is our cornerstone – without Him all fails.
- defines what the structure is like. Jews who don't know Jesus (and others for that matter) find Him a stumbling block because they cannot accept His deity, they cannot accept His authority and they can't accept that because they will not accept that His salvation is available to all who will believe. They stumble on Him. Yet who He is defines the church – His love, His grace, His mercy.

The Lord's Table reminds us of our dependence on Jesus *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.* We are only church because we have received mercy according to God's love and grace towards us.

Church that's built on Jesus and always remains connected to the cornerstone grow and thrive. And what characterises such churches? They find Jesus precious – they worship, they pray, they desire holiness, they seek to do His will. And churches that don't?

Well think on all those churches that have closed over the years. What characterises them? Usually they are too busy with their buildings, they are too busy protecting their organisation and ever “their” beliefs. Then look at their worship life and then their prayer life, then look at their relationships. Like my house in Tottenham, whatever they did looked impressive, but ultimately it didn’t have any integrity because the foundations were all wrong. Buildings like that have problems and may fall. For those churches their structure will have said it all – was Jesus precious to them – almost certainly not.

Then reflect on it for our own church. We can see the danger signals. But when we find Jesus precious, we get our priorities right. That’s why communion is so important because it reminds us that the cornerstone of our faith and our church is Jesus Christ, who suffered, who died and who rose again and is our exalted Lord.

Let’s remember that, ask God to make Him more and more precious to us and keep our priorities right in His church here at Maidstone Road.

*Preached by Mark Reid
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