

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Mr. Arthur Goodwin

Precious Things in 1 Peter: The Precious Stone - 1 Peter 2:4-7

Some years ago I was privileged to lead a party of Christians on a visit to Israel and in the company were an American and his wife. I got to know them very well and indeed later visited them in their home in Chesapeake, Virginia. The husband was a dabbler in diamonds, which in America are known as rocks, and when I was with him he showed me some of his stock. During our tour it was the custom of his wife to pick up a stone from many of the various places that we visited, for instance the tomb of Lazarus, the garden of Gethsemane and the bed of the River Jordan. When she returned to America she would use these stones in her Sunday school class and I have wondered how many stories these stones have told. I remember her husband commenting that if his wife picked up many more stones her luggage would be so heavy that the plane would not take off. The subject of our meditation this morning is rocks and stones or perhaps more specifically the rock and the stone. The chief passage of scripture for consideration is 1 Peter 2:1-9 and I think that it would help if I read it to you.

This is what it says, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

When I read the first three verses of this passage my mind immediately went to the beginning of 3 John where John expresses the desire that Gaius would prosper and be in health, even as his soul prospered. Peter in our passage speaks of basic necessities if our soul is to prosper. Firstly, we must lay aside all malice, guile, hypocrisies, envies and evil speakings; that is all those characteristics that were prevalent in our old life; in short, of that which pertains to the flesh and the old nature. That is the negative side, the positive is that we should desire the sincere or pure milk of the word. The word translated desire indicates a 'deep desire' or 'a longing for' and we are to desire it as new born babes. I think that there may be a twofold application to this exhortation; firstly those of us who are babes, that is those who are young in the faith should have a very real desire to know more of the Word of God. Just as milk is necessary for the growth of a baby so the word of God is necessary for the growth of the soul. Secondly, it may refer to the avidity that should be shown in our consumption. You who are parents, and indeed I suspect most of my listeners this morning, are well aware of the way in which the new born babe feeds, whether it be at the mother's breast or at the feeding bottle - there is almost the semblance of an attack rather than a leisurely feed. Such should be our enthusiasm for reading and imbibing the Word of God. But whatever interpretation we put upon this analogy of Peter the objective is the same, "that ye may grow thereby". Perhaps I may insert an addendum here by referring my listeners to Hebrews 2:12-14 where he will learn that milk is not a permanent diet for the believer, but that he needs to progress to meat or solid food. Here then is the basic diet for the believer who wishes to prosper in his soul - to feed heartily upon the Word of God.

If we have an appetite for the word of God it is because we have been converted and have come to the Lord Jesus Christ and it is to this One that the apostle now directs our attention, but here presents him as the living stone. Our Lord is presented in Scripture in many ways, for instance we read of Him as the door, the vine, the shepherd and in more than one passage He is referred to as a stone or a rock. Even in the Old Testament He is thus presented, as in Exodus 17:6 where we read of Moses striking the rock to bring water for the Israelites to drink and we know from 1 Corinthians 10:4 that the rock referred to is Christ. There the rock was smitten, and no doubt this would present a picture of Christ being smitten for our salvation, but more particularly it refers to Christ smitten that the Holy Spirit, the water of life, might flow as John 7:38-39 teaches us. Then in Genesis 49:24 we read of him as the shepherd, the stone of Israel.

When the Lord Jesus presented himself to the Jewish nation as their Messiah they failed to recognise him. In fact he was, to them, a stumbling stone and a rock of offence as verse eight of our passage and 1 Corinthians 1:23 tells us. And so he was rejected or disallowed and instead of being crowned as their King he was crucified with two malefactors. As the prophet Isaiah predicted there was no beauty in him: He was worth but 30 pieces of silver. To the Gentiles He is again a stone but in a very different way. The Times of the Gentiles began with the reign of Nebuchadnezzar the great Babylonian monarch who overran Jerusalem and subjected the Jewish nation to slavery. In Daniel chapter 2 we read of the dream which this King had and which was interpreted to him by Daniel the prophet. In it he saw a great image depicting four world powers the last of which was the Roman Empire, an Empire which though brought into decline towards the end of the 5th century will be revived at the end of this present age. In his dream Nebuchadnezzar saw a great stone cut without hands strike the base of the image, the part that depicted Rome, completely destroying it and the stone itself then becoming a great mountain. A mountain in scripture is often used as a figure for a kingdom, and here we have a prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ coming in all his power, subduing all his enemies and establishing his kingdom here in this world. Here He is the stone not smitten but smiting. Nebuchadnezzar's dream tells us when the Times of the Gentiles began and how it will end.

In this passage Peter brings the Lord before us as what He is to the Church and in it describes Him as a living stone, chosen of God and precious, a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, the head of the corner. What a stone! I cannot help but feel that whilst Peter was penning these words he must have thought of his first meeting with the Lord. You will remember that he was brought to the Saviour by his brother Andrew, and it seems as though the Lord immediately claimed him for Himself and gave him a new name, "Thou art Simon, the son of Jonah; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone". The word used here means a little stone, or a piece of rock. Also, of the incident recorded in Matthew chapter 16 when Peter answered the Lord in response to His question "But whom say ye that I am?" with the wonderful confession "Thou art the Christ the son of the living God". The Lord responded to Peter's majestic words by saying "blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, who is in heaven", and then added "thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church", and the word here means a massive rock. The Church would not be built upon the little stone, Peter, but on that great rock, Christ the Son of God. Please note that at this stage the church is still future and that the Lord himself would be the builder. The Church is presented in Scripture in three different ways, the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ and the House of God, and it is the latter to which Peter is referring in this passage. It has always been God's desire to dwell amongst his people and in the early days of Israel Moses constructed a Tabernacle, literally a large tent which was set up in the midst of the camp of the people, and in which God dwelt. Later when the Kingdom was established Solomon was permitted to build a house or as it became known the Temple.

If, at your leisure, you would like to turn to 1 Kings chapters 7 and 8 you will get some idea of the magnificence of that building. Sadly because of the sin of the people it was destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar, but later Zerubbabel was given permission by King Cyrus to return to Jerusalem to rebuild it, and when Herod the Great became King of Israel he greatly enlarged that building. It was this temple that stood in Jerusalem when the Lord appeared. The prophet Ezekiel had had a vision of the glory of the temple and he records in chapter 10 and verse 18 of his prophecy, "Then the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house", and it is this stage of events that had arrived when the Lord was present. The glory had departed and consequently the Lord has to say, as stated in Matthew 24:38, "behold, your House - not God's house - is left unto you desolate". This is made apparent by the very fact that their Messiah, their long awaited Messiah was now among them and had been summarily rejected. The stone of Genesis 49:24 had become the rock of offence, the stumbling stone, the one who was disallowed. But God's design will not be thwarted. Christ himself will build Him a house, not a house of stone and cedars but, as verse five of our passage describes it, a spiritual house and the stones for its building will be living stones.

In verse six the Holy Spirit through Peter applies the prophecy of Isaiah 28.16 to the conditions prevailing at the time of his writing. There we read "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation". What the nation of Israel lost by its rejection of the Christ, God will now make good in this new building, the Church, now to be His house. The stone, disallowed by men, has become the living stone and indeed is the chief cornerstone of the new house. Henceforth, as Stephen preached to the Jews prior to his being stoned, "the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands". The apostle Paul who is, of course, the chief exponent on the doctrine of the Church tells us in Ephesians 2:20 that whilst our Lord is the chief cornerstone, the foundation stone is the apostles and prophets. I am not an architect but I am given to understand that it refers to a large stone set in the foundations of a building which binds two walls together. If this is a right interpretation it could well refer to the fact that the Jew and Gentile are now being brought together in one company that is the Church of the living God. The Lord had said "I will build my Church", He is supreme in its construction but He worked through the apostles and prophets by their preaching and teaching. It is into this edifice that you and I, as living stones are being built.

And this is the One to whom we have come. He may have been rejected by man but to God he is the elect one and the One who is precious to Him. Have you ever thought of the divine relationship between the Father and the Son? We have it referred to throughout the Bible both in type and reality. For instance, consider Abraham and Isaac. God's command to Abraham was "take now thy son, thine only son whom thou lovest". Isaac, as you know, is taken and

offered as a sacrifice upon mount Moriah and He thus becomes a wonderful type of our Lord Jesus Christ in his sacrificial work. Here we have a father ready to give as a sacrifice his beloved son. Does not this incident in the life of Abraham clearly point to the love of God, as the Father, for His Son. Further, you may take your Bible and turn to Proverbs chapter eight and read from verse 22 to the end of the chapter. Here the Holy Spirit is referring to wisdom but such are the words and phrases that He uses that the spiritual mind must interpret it, not merely as a personification of an attribute of God but, as a reference to the Eternal Son. This passage begins "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was." Then in verse 30 it says "Then I was by him, as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him." Surely such an expression must refer to the love of God the Father for his son. Twice in the New Testament we have God the Father speaking from heaven and testifying of the Lord Jesus, using the words "This is my beloved son"; once as He came up out of the Jordan after having been baptised and once upon the mount of transfiguration when all His glory was revealed to his disciples. Then in the epistle to the Colossians Paul refers to him as "the Son of His - that is the Father's - love". In John 14:6 the Lord himself gives but one reason why the Father loves him for He says there "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again". Finally, if this contention needed any further proof, we quote John 1:18 "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son who is in at the bosom of the Father, He hath declared him" The bosom is the place of affection and according to this verse it is the eternal dwelling place of the Son. And so in verse six of our passage this morning we read that the stone that God has laid is precious to Him.

But when we come to verse 7 we read that he is also precious to the believer. There is a hymn that perhaps you might know which is addressed to the Father and commences with this verse;

*Father how precious unto Thee
Is Thy beloved Son,
In whom Thou dost perfection see,
Thy holy, blessed One!*

And the last verse reads,

*He, preciousness itself to Thee,
To us is precious too;
We every beauty in Him see,
And Thine own glory view.*

We referred at the beginning of our talk this morning to diamonds, and we all know how they are esteemed not only for their brilliance but for their worth. They are indeed of great value in the estimation of the world and it is in this sense that Peter uses the term precious in these verses. The word in verse 7 is different from that used in verse 6 but it still has the sense of value and can be translated "preciousness". WE Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* comments "it is the honour and inestimable value of Christ as appropriated by believers, who are joined, as living stones, to the Cornerstone".

We Christians have a tremendous treasure stored up for us in heaven the worth of which we have little idea, but surely the most valuable part of our inheritance is our blessed Lord Himself. Consider him, who He is! His greatness as the Eternal Son of God. What he has done for us. He left the glory to come to this earth as man, with the specific object before Him of offering Himself as the sacrifice for our sins that we might be delivered from the power of Satan and translated into his kingdom. This meant Him becoming sin for us, assuming the position as our Substitute; the just One being made sin for us the unjust ones and bearing the awful wrath of a Holy God that should have fallen upon us. All this and much, much more. The more we meditate upon our Saviour the more precious He becomes. And so it becomes our joy to enter into the privilege of our holy priesthood to offer up sacrifices of praise and worship to both the Father and Son (See verse 5), and then further to this, as Royal priests to show forth the excellencies of him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light (see verse 9).

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