

# The Chief Cornerstone and Us as Stones

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As you are aware, I am bringing sermons from First Peter every Sunday morning. We are now in the second chapter. I spoke last week on laying aside all malice and guile and hypocrisies and envies and evil speaking. As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby. Then he continues without pause: 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, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. I think those three verses will be enough for the morning. Beginning with, if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Now, what he has to say, the following, rests upon the, 'if ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' One great error that we make in coming to the Bible is to assume that because a thing is true, it's true of us. If it is in the Bible, it is true. But the error is to assume that it is true of us. It is not necessarily always so, even that which follows the truth of God, Peter conditions upon the little word "if" and says, if ye have tasted, then what I say from here on, is applicable to you. But if you have not tasted, then you should go back and taste before you go any further.

Now, this is required of us to be called New Testament Christians at all, that we have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come. That we have tasted that the Lord is gracious. And I want that word "tasted" to mean what it means in the Bible and not what it means when we mean we experiment. We mean that we test a thing by putting it to the tongue as a woman tests her cooking. They used to. I don't know whether they still do, but they used to test their soup with a little spoon, taste of it, to see if it was salty enough and was all right. I suppose that's ordinary.

But that's never what the Bible means, to test the thing to see if it's all right, with no intention maybe of eating it; maybe never going on to eat it at all, but at least knowing what it's like. Now, that is not what the Bible means. We have only to look it up in its original and find that the word taste here means experienced, lived through. To in order that a thing may be real to us, and everlastingly ours, it must be experienced. It must be lived through.

Now that same word "tasted" that Peter uses here, the precise word is used about our Savior in the book of Hebrews. It says that Jesus was made a little lower than the angels, that He, by the grace of God should taste death for every man. Now those who teach the tasting doctrine ought to give this

some attention here. If the word taste in the New Testament means tested with the tongue to see if we like it or not, then that's all Jesus did with death. For the same word is used that He tasted death for every man.

So, you see, my brethren, the word taste here does not mean experiment--try it by a touch--but it means experienced, gone through, encountered, past into and through. And that's exactly what happened to our Lord when He died on the cross. He did not experiment with death and see whether He liked it, taste it to see whether He dared go on. But He threw Himself recklessly out and gave Himself to die; and experienced death in the fullest sense of that word.

Now these believers had experienced, and they had experienced not the grace of God only, but that the Lord was gracious. I do not want to split hairs. I never was much of a hair splitter. But where there is a difference, we ought to note that difference and distinguish things that differ in the language of Paul. And here I do know the difference. He does not say, if so be that you have tasted of the grace of God. But He says, if so be that you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. There is a difference between testing or tasting or even experiencing the Word of God or the grace of God and experiencing the gracious God.

There is a difference there, my brethren. We never should separate a gift from the source of the gift. We never should say, I have forgiveness. We should say, God has forgiven. We never should say I have eternal life. We should say God has given me eternal life. And Christ is my life.

The point there is that God does not divorce Himself from His gifts. He gives Himself in whatever He gives. If a man has been forgiven, what has happened to him is that God, the forgiving God, has touched him and thus forgiven him. But it is God that matters more than the forgiveness. If a man has eternal life, it is that he might know Jesus Christ, God the Father and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent. That word "know" is experienced there again.

So that we must be very careful that we do not divorce God's gifts from God Himself. I think that is what's wrong with this in our day. We have the gifts of God, but we forget the God of the gifts. There's a difference between noble, strong, vigorous and satisfying spiritual experience and the other kind of spiritual experience, which takes the gifts of God but forgets the Giver.

An example of that, a most ignoble example, is found in the gospels where 10 lepers came to Jesus and were healed of their leprosy. Now, they did receive healing and they were delivered. The old spots went away. The old sores disappeared. The old symptoms were gone. They were 10 healthy men, and with this new gift of health, they all started away. And nine of them kept right on going, satisfied with the gift of health, but the 10th one happened to remember that he had received a gift from the Giver and his eyes went from the gift to the Giver. And he came back humbly and thanked

the Lord Jesus. And Christ said sadly, where are the nine? The others were satisfied with the gift, but one came back to get better acquainted with the Giver.

It was Campbell Morgan that said, we ought never in our gospel preaching to offer men peace. We ought never in our gospel preaching to offer men repose from their conscience. We ought never to offer them anything short of life. And I repeat, that we should never divorce any gift we offer to men, we never should divorce it from the Giver. We should hold it for the Giver as we sing. So that, he did not say, ye have tasted the grace of God, though they had. But he said, you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. And that's quite something else again.

Our selfish praying, when we come to God with a long grocery list and petition God to do this and do this and do this and do this. And if God answers our prayers, then we cross it off and go on down to the next list, and so on we go. It seems to me that it's very saddening to the heart of God to be thus used as a convenience.

It seems to me that the Lord Jesus must be very heavy hearted, be times, when He finds His redeemed people more taken up with the redemption than they are with the Redeemer; his forgiven people more taken up with forgiveness than they are with the Forgiver, His living people with whom He has given life, more taken up with the life than they are with the Life Giver. We ought in our preaching and teaching and personal experience, to make a strong return to God himself, to the person of God. In fact, I am not sure but we could condense everything that we want into sentences beginning with God, or having God in it somewhere. God is. God is present. God loves. God's Word, that God's Holy Spirit, God's Messiah, everything belongs and begins and ends and continues with God.

Now, he said, if you have tasted and experienced that the Lord is gracious. Your experience has been with the gracious Lord unto whom coming. Now this was true of them as it's true of all real Christians everywhere. I give you four prepositions. I am not unmindful of the fact that I sometimes poke good-natured fun at the prepositional preaching. But I give you four prepositions, inconsistent or not, as you like.

You know what Emerson said about consistency. He said, It was the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. So, we'll throw it aside and point out for prepositions here. First, they came out and then they came away and then they came together, and then they came on to. Now, not in that order, probably, and they didn't do it together. They might have come one at a time or two at a time. But taken all together, these four things can be said about these Christians.

First of all, they came out of the world. We are now trying to take the world into the church, sanctify it, baptize it, anoint it, and try to hide its skulls and crossbones. I preached last night to a

Baptist Men's Fellowship on the North Side with 408 men were there, and I talked to them about coming out and separating ourselves from the world. Not this sermon, certainly. But I did introduce the idea there, and I repeat it to you now that there must be a coming out.

Israel had to come out of Egypt before she could come in to Palestine. Always Abraham had to come out before He could come in. And so, with everybody else, there must be a coming out. And any kind of Christianity, however orthodox it may sound, that does not major on the doctrine of coming out, that is, coming out of the world, is inadequate and imperfect.

And then after the word out, we have the word, away. They came away from the old life, whatever that old life might have been. To one person, it's one thing to another, it is another. But whatever it is, the old life, we come away from, when we come to Jesus Christ. To taste the good grace of God and that the Lord is gracious there must be a coming away from the old life.

And then naturally, there is a coming on to Christ. That after all is--it's what the gospel is--it's a coming unto Christ. And then there is the word, together, a coming together. That is, they're coming on to each other. As we gather unto Christ, naturally we gather unto each other. And the nearer we get to Christ naturally, the nearer we get to each other, so that the way to get Christians together is not to form some kind of a political united front. The way to get them together is to bring them close to Jesus Christ. Just as if we had something down here at the front of the church, some curio or missionary exhibit, and I wanted to get you all together, closer together even than you are now. And I invited you to come down and see it. Well, as you came onto it, you would come unto each other, and the closer you got to it, the closer you would be to each other until finally, shoulder would touch shoulder, and you'd be pushing close together to see this exhibit.

And so, when we come unto Christ, it's automatic that we come unto each other. That is what I have never been able to understand this, monkish erroritic, if I might. I don't know if there is such a word. There ought to be, and there is now. But this word that covers the idea of going off by yourself to be a Christian. There are people like that. They're antisocial, or rather unsocial in disposition, so they do not like the fellowship of the saints. I remind you, my friend, that if you have heard, Jesus is, you're surrounded by Jesus' people. And therefore, we ought to make the fellowship of the church the biggest thing in our lives.

And I'd like to say right here at the risk of hurting somebody, for that isn't too important after all. It may hurt a little, but it may do some good, that the important thing in the world today is the presence of an invisible spiritual entity called the church. And the Holy Ghost never works outside that entity. He works through that entity in some manner or other. That is why I'm a church man. I'm going to preach this week at a Bible school or Bible college, it is now. And I believe in them, of course. But I remember a Bible school president that once smiled good-naturedly and sort of kiddingly to me and he said, you're church minded. You're not school minded.

How could a minister of the church of Christ become school-minded? A school is simply an instrument with a temporary value which may for time serve a purpose. But it is not the school he said. I did not say on this school I will build my church. Or take the very many laymen's organizations. I do not say but what they have some value in the world. I believe they do. But remember, they get their value from the church. And if God works in them at all, He works through His church. It is the church, that group that comes together unto Him.

And whether they're red or yellow, black or white, whether they lived in the first century or the 20th, the coming together unto Christ makes the church. It's a called-out assembly. So, those four words, they came out of the world, they came away from the old life, they came unto Christ, and they came together relative to each other.

Now he says, you've come unto Christ as unto a living stone. Now, this is a frequent Bible passage or a Bible figure, this stone or rock as it's sometimes called. And it almost invariably, if not invariably, refers to a building. I think there may be a few places where David uses it as a great craggy rock where he hides. But for the most part, the figure has to do with a building. And because the Jews were a God-conscious people, their thought ran to a temple building. I should think somebody ought to write about this or talk about it, for the church, and make the people of God see that the Jewish nation, above all nations of the world, were a God-conscious nation.

America is not a God-conscious nation. We're a secular people. We have what the Bible calls a profane mind. And even those who may toss God a sop when making a political speech, to get the votes of the religious-minded people. If you probe in far enough, for the most part, you'll find that our leadership is composed of secular-minded people. I don't use the word in a wrong sense, but in the sense that Esau was secular-minded. This world was the the point of interest for the man. And that's all right, provided that we have another and higher interest. But Esau didn't have it, and the nation of America doesn't have it much.

But Israel had it. Israel, in fact, had nothing else. Have you forgotten that Israel had no civil laws at all? There was a day in England when she had two sets of laws, the ecclesiastical laws and the civil laws. Whether that's still true, I don't know. But they did for many centuries. And a man could be tried before the civil law and then turned loose and tried before the ecclesiastical law. The church could try a man for certain offenses and the civil law for certain other offenses.

And there were two kinds of officers, civil officers and ecclesiastical officers. And there were two worlds within, worlds mingling there, wheels within wheels. But not so in Israel. Israel had no civil officers. Israel had no civil law. Israel had no code, no code of jurisprudence. Israel had no statutes on her books, except those that were of God. The Bible was her code of law, and her priests and scribes were her officials, and her high priest, her leader and her king anointed of God was her

ruler. So that Israel was a sacred nation. A people who were God conscious more than any people that have ever lived in the world. And never has been a nation as a God-conscious as Israel, so that Israel's science was all God-founded.

We turn a telescope into the heavens now and we look at the stars. And we separate the stars from the God who made them, and we have astronomy. We dig in the rocks, and we have geology. And we monkey with the little flying, microscopic or sub microscopic matter, and we have physics. So we separate nature from God, but Israel never knew how to do that. God was everything. If an Israelite looked at a hill, it was God's Hill. If he looked at a tree, the tree clapped its hands. If he looked at it raining, it was God who sent the rains.

So, a Jew never complained. He said, it was miserable weather, isn't it? God sent that rain, and God was in everything. So that when a figure of speech occurred, it was a divine figure speech. And when they talked about a rock and a stone, they were talking about a building that was a temple building. Now, they had a temple building there, of course, but it was composed of dead stones, laid one upon another. They were hewn out, and then laid one upon another and joined to each other by cutting and mortaring.

And that was a dead temple. And God knew it was a dead temple. And the only living thing in it was the Shekinah that dwelt between the wings of the golden cherubim. The temple itself was a dead thing. And our Lord knew it. He pointed to its stones and said there will be a time when everything all that you see will fall to the ground and be no more, passed over; and they even plowed the place where the temple had been. That's because it was a dead temple.

But this new temple unto which we are come, this new temple is composed of living stones and is a living temple. And its cornerstone is Christ, and its stones are redeemed men and women who are alive by the gift of eternal life. He says, ye also are living stones.

Just a side here, not a part of the sermon, but just for your ecclesiastical education, I might point out that this King James Version, which is supposed to be always inerrant, makes a cute little mistake here. It says that ye are come unto Christ, the living stone, and you are lively stones. Now I wonder why the translators did that because in the Greek, it's exactly the same word. Both words mean living. But when the translators were translated in 340 some years ago, the word living and lively almost meant the same thing, but they don't now. Lively means, you know, what your boy is, hopping around, never in one place twice. Like the Irishman who was sent out to count the chickens. He came back and said there were 37 and one that he couldn't count. It traveled around too fast. And that's what the word lively means. It means moving about so rapidly you can't get it in one place long enough to count it.

But that word lively has lost its meaning. It doesn't mean what it meant back there. It says the same thing about the church member as it says about the head of the church, Jesus Christ. He is the Living Stone and the members that make up the great temple are also living stones. There is a plural and a singular, but there is no difference in the adjective itself.

Now, Israel had a dead temple. And because Israel had a dead temple made of dead stone, she couldn't use a living stone when she found one. And for that reason, He was disallowed indeed of men. And Israel could not use Jesus Christ when He came. He was the headstone, the living headstone of a new kind of temple, not one more stone to go in the old temple, but the headstone of a new kind of temple. And they looked at that stone, and the builder shook their heads and said, He doesn't fit anywhere. We've got our temple. There it stands, stone upon stone, tear upon tear, stone upon stone, stone joined to stone. And it's got a top on it and it's there and it is set with beautiful jewels.

And they said, where does this man fit in? Jesus Christ could not fit into Israel. And so, Israel rejected Him and crucified Him because He wasn't shaped right. He was the stone that was to be, the Guiding Stone for the new temple to come. And He didn't fit into the old temple at all. But nevertheless, God says that He was chosen and precious. Look at this Stone. I think that it begins way back there when Jacob had that sleep in the wilderness. I will never know. I suppose until I die, and I am able to question Jacob himself, why he wanted a stone for a pillow. He took up of the stones of that place and set them for his pillows. I don't know why he would use a stone for a pillow, but he did.

And when he saw that vision, he waked out of his sleep and turn that stone over, stood it on end and anointed it and it was called Bethel, the house of God. Then when Israel had come out of Egypt and had gone into the wilderness and were traveling about those 40 years, that same stone says, the Holy Ghost followed them. If it was not exactly the same chunk of rock, it was at least the same symbol, the same figure following through.

So, one day, they were thirsty, and Moses smote the rock and they all drank out of that same rock, at least symbolically, upon which Jacob had laid his head, and which he anointed and called Bethel.

And then when our Lord came, he said that if you fall upon this rock, you shall be saved in a word to that effect, but if it falls upon you, you will be crushed to death. And that was the same stone. And he said, on this rock, I will build my church. And let men say that's Peter if they want to, but every figure, every type, every symbolism, every suggestion, every simile in the whole Bible indicates that that rock was none other than Jesus Christ Himself.

And then in Daniel, we read of the rock, or the stone that was cut out of the mountain without hands. That's the second coming of Jesus, when He comes back to put down communists and fascists and all the rest, and to rule in the earth. So, there is our Savior, the Rock.

Now, what is the function of the house which is built around this new rock? It contrasts, I've said, with the Old Testament temple, in that the Old Testament temple was made of stones that were dead, and the New Testament made of spiritual stones that are live. And the priests of the old temple, walked into the temple and performed the functions of their office. But the priests of the New Testament are the temple. There is the difference. We have a movable, portable temple, a temple made of living human beings, and every one of those human beings, a priest in his own right.

And we have a great high priest at the right hand of God. And this temple of which we are a part is a temple of priests so that we do not need to have anybody run interference for us when we go into the presence of God. We can come straight to Jesus Christ ourselves. They tell us poor misguided friends, that Jesus is too great and wonderful. We can't go to Him. But we can go to his mother, and she can go to Him. We don't have any pull with Jesus, but she has. And if we get to her and get her ear, she'll go and have a talk with Jesus and then it'll be all right. We don't need her, my brethren. She has performed her function, this lovely little Jewish lady. She brought into the world the man, Christ Jesus, and gave Him a body which was later offered as a sacrifice on Calvary. And she did her function when she brought Him up and fed Him at her breast and looked after Him and loved Him until He was a man. Then she passed out of the picture and Jesus Christ filled the horizon of believing men.

So, we are priests, and we need no other priest to help us. This temple is a shrine where God dwells. And in that temple, we offer not goats, not lambs, not doves, but spiritual sacrifices, says Peter; loving service and praise and song and worship. You know, the critics call us song singers. They called the old Scotch people, they said, a bunch of sam-singing Scotsman.

Oh, my brethren, those sam-singing Scotsman have made their mark in the world, I'm telling you. And our forebearers who walked the rugged shores of New England, and who stamped America with their noble character once, they were sam-singers too. They met in little groups, log buildings, dedicated to the worship, and there they sung songs and offered the fruits of their lips, praises unto God. But they didn't stop there, they shouldered their axe and went out and felled a forest and established cities and build a civilization the likes of which the world had never known, those psalm-singing Puritans.

God hears songs when they're sung in His name and for His glory. We're offering up psalms to our Lord, and songs and spiritual melodies in the Holy Ghost. And the critical, cynical world sees us come, close our eyes and talk to someone we can't see and say, what's it all about? We answer, this



is a temple of God, dedicated to the God of the temple. And we, the priests of the temple, sing these songs to God, the Unseen. And make our prayers to God, the Unseen. Though unseen, He is real, and though unseen, He is nigh, and we're not such fools as the world would make us out to be.

Now, I'm almost finished. He says that these praises and songs and spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God. He accepted the Cornerstone. He accepted the living stones which are gathered to the Cornerstone to make a temple for the Holy Ghost. And He accepts the service that is wrought in that temple and performed in that shrine.

So, you haven't wasted the morning, brethren. You haven't simply followed a custom, like mistletoe and wreaths at Christmas. You've done an act. You've performed an act that God accepts through Jesus Christ. If you've really prayed this morning. If you really sung a true song this morning. If you have made your gifts out of the love of God this morning, you'll go away and you have nothing to show for it, certainly. And the world laughs and says you have nothing to show for it.

But remember, not every precious thing shows the same time it's received. Remember, there is a time when the invisible things will be the only real things. And the visible world shall dissolve in smoke and pass away and God will roll them up as a garment, and as vestures, they shall be changed. But the invisible things of God from the creation which we have in Christ Jesus, will continue as real as heaven itself, forever and forever. Now, if this is true for you, he says, if so be that you have tasted, if so be that you have experienced that the Lord is gracious. I repeat, a thing may be true but not true of me.

So the most vital thing to settle, you religious-minded people, the most vital thing to settle, is not the trues of the Scriptures, for these have been established beyond peradventure, world without end. The Scriptures are already established by two immutable things, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and the down-coming of the Holy Ghost.

Everything hinges on Jesus Christ. The truth of the whole Word of God rests on the shoulders of Mary's holy Son. And if he failed us, the whole thing collapses round our ears. If He's who He said He was and rises from the dead, then He supports all the rest of the Bible itself. That's why I'm not afraid of modernists and critics and higher critics and fault finders and cynics. That's why I'm not worried about Jonah and the whale. I never spent five minutes in my life trying to decide whether a whale could swallow Jonah or not. God Almighty could make a whale that would swallow not only Jonah but the whole ship and Nineveh thrown in.

The point isn't whether Jonah was swallowed by a whale. The point is, what did Jesus Christ say about it? And he said, as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall

the Son of Man be three days in the bowels of the earth. He tied Himself up with the truth of the Jonah story. Therefore, the Jonah story is true because the Truth said it was.

So, your business is not to determine whether the Bible is true or not. The resurrection of Jesus Christ and His ascension to the right hand of God, and the down coming Holy Ghost, forever takes apologetics out of the hands of men and puts it in the hands of the Spirit. And we know the Bible is true, not by long, painful reasonings. We know it is true by a flash of inspiration from the Throne and from the Holy Ghost who brings the flash. So, your big problem isn't whether the Bible is true, brother. Your big problem is whether it's true in you. It isn't whether the Bible is true, but it's whether these things are true in me.

The old German poet said, though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born, if He's not born again in thee, thy heart is still forlorn. If I were a poet, I'd add some more stanzas and I think he did. Scheffler, I think he added some more. I think Scheffer added some more which I can't quote verbatim, but they run something like this, that if Christ die a 1000 times on a cross, if we do not accept and receive, He died in vain as far as we are concerned. And though the Bible be the very rock of God's Gibraltar, if it isn't true in us, it's vain as far as we're concerned.

So, what do we need to do today, brethren, is not to go home and overeat and sit around and look at television. What we need to do today would be to go home and eat modestly, and then some of us at least ought to go to our rooms, open our Bible, get down on our knees and say, O God, are these things true of me? You know, you can be an awfully nice person and still not be a true Christian.

I told my Swedish friends last night, my good Baptist friends; there were only four of us foreigners there that we knew of. Myself, a Scotsman, an Irishman, and another man, unidentified, I think, English. Outside of that they were all natives. But I told them that I like Swedes. They're all nice people. But you can be an awfully nice person and not be born again. You can be an awfully nice religious person and never have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Oh, my friends. Let's not waste this holy day. Let's search our own hearts. Let's see for ourselves if these things be so in us. We don't need to see if they be so. I repeat, a resurrected Savior and a down-coming Holy Ghost confirm forever the fact the Bible is true, but is it true in us? That's the big question. And I want you to take it home with you. Search yourself and ask, in the light of God's revealed truth, O God, I believe this, but is it true in me? If it isn't, it can be. Faith and repentance can make it real in your heart.