

1 Peter 2:4-10 (Part I)

Introduction

After all the “indicative” (how things *are*; 1:3-12) and then the five imperatives (the way things ought to be and must be in light of how things are; 1:13-2:3), we come now to the concluding finale of this opening section in Peter’s letter.

Last week, Peter ended with a quotation from Psalm 34: “Therefore, having put off all malice and all deceit and hypocrisies and envies and all slanders like newborn infants, crave the spiritual, pure milk, that by it you may grow to salvation—**if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.**” In Psalm 34 “the **Lord**” is Yahweh – He is God, the Creator of the world and Israel’s Redeemer. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament that Peter used, “*Yahweh*” was translated with the Greek word “*kurios*” (“Lord”). So “*kurios*” became the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew “*Yahweh*.” That’s really important for us to understand because it helps us to see throughout the whole New Testament the full and true deity of our “**LORD** Jesus Christ.”

So Peter quotes these words from Psalm 34: “If indeed you have tasted that the Lord (*kurios*) is good.” But if the psalmist is explicitly referring to Yahweh, the **only** Creator and Savior, then who is the “Lord” to whom Peter is referring when he quotes this passage in the New Testament? Listen to these additional verses, which we also find in **Psalm 34** (verses 4-5):

- **Psalm 34:4–5 (LXX; 33:4-5)** — I sought **the Lord** [Heb. *Yahweh*; Gr. *kurios*] diligently, and he hearkened to me, and delivered me from all my sojournings. **Come to him [Yahweh]**,¹ and be enlightened: and your faces shall not by any means be ashamed.

So now let’s come back to Peter and see how he transitions into our passage this morning: “Like newborn infants, crave the spiritual, pure milk, that by it you may grow to salvation—**if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.**”

I. 1 Peter 2:4a — Coming to him...²

Do you see how Peter is still echoing Psalm 34? In Psalm 34, the people are exhorted to **come to Yahweh** and to taste and see that **Yahweh** is good. But who is the “Lord,” in Peter, to whom we have all come and of whose goodness we have all tasted?

II. 1 Peter 2:4 — Coming **to him**, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and honored...

In Psalm 34, the people **come** to Yahweh and **taste** and see that Yahweh is good. In Peter, we have **come**, now, to our **Lord Jesus Christ** and **tasted** His goodness. How can Peter do this? How can he make this transfer? **Only if** in coming to the person of the Lord Jesus, we are truly coming to the Lord God. **Only if** in tasting the goodness of the person of our Lord Jesus, we are truly tasting all the goodness of all the fullness of God Himself. And so what I hope you’ll see is

¹ *proselthate pros auton (proserchomai pros autos)*

² *pros on proserchomenoi (pros hos proserchomai)*

that especially throughout the New Testament epistles and letters, whenever Jesus is called “Lord” this is a simple, and yet a powerful testimony to His full deity – to the reality that **in Him**, we have come to see and to know **the Father**. (Jn. 14:6-9; Heb. 1:1-3) To truly confess Jesus as **Lord**—as **our Lord**—is, every time, to confess Him as our God – the one who makes the Father known, and the one who is worthy of all our worship. (cf. Jn. 1:1-4, 18; 20:28)

How is it that we have **come** to Jesus, and are **still** continuously coming to Him to taste of His goodness and be nourished on the spiritual, pure milk? The answer is so very, very simple – it’s faith. Faith in Him – in who He is and all that He has done – is the **means** by which we come to Him and feed on Him and are nourished by the spiritual, pure milk. So having invited all of us to ask ourselves this question: “**Have I** tasted the goodness of the Lord?” Peter continues by assuming that we **have**—all of us—tasted of His goodness. And now it’s very important to Peter that we remember something in particular **about** this Jesus **to whom** we have come.

He is “a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and honored.” Long before Peter ever lived, the “stone” was recognized by the Jews as a symbol in the Old Testament Scriptures for the coming Messiah. This wasn’t just **any** stone; it was specifically the cut and shaped stone that was the very first stone laid in the foundation of a building. It was probably the stone laid at the corner so that all the rest of the foundation and all the structure built on top of it would be aligned with and oriented around that first stone – the “cornerstone.” So now Peter takes this original messianic symbol of the stone, and since Jesus **is** the Messiah, and since Jesus has been raised from death to **life**, Peter identifies **Jesus** not **only** as the stone, but also as a stone that is **living** – He is a living stone.

But what’s the point of this picture here in Peter? What’s the point of this contrast between the stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and honored? Peter words this in order to make the contrast as stark as he possibly can. Literally: “By **men rejected**, before **God chosen and honored**.”³ Could there be two more opposite evaluations? Could there be two assessments any more opposed to each other? And so we wonder: What must the outcome be of this disagreement—this irreconcilable conflict—between God’s evaluation of Jesus on the one hand, and man’s evaluation on the other?

Before our question can be answered, Peter takes what might at first feel like an unexpected turn. “Coming **to him**, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and honored...”

III. 1 Peter 2:5 — ...**you yourselves as living stones** are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

When I came to this part of the passage in my study, I actually laughed out loud at the surprise of it, and at the joy and the wonder of it. I love Peter’s attention-getting “You yourselves...” We could translate like this: “Coming to Him... **even YOU**,⁴ **as living stones** are being built up as a spiritual house...” So from the living stone that He is, we move now to the living stones that we

³ The Greek formula here is “*men... de...*” Perhaps an English equivalent might be, “On the one hand... on the other hand...” As the “*men*” is left untranslated by the ESV, we could also leave the “*de*” (“but”) untranslated in order to further bring out the contrasting parallelism in the Greek.

⁴ *kai autoi*

are. Only, if Jesus is the living stone because of His resurrection life, how can we also be living stones who are still subject to death and corruption? As we come to him and feed on the spiritual, pure milk, and taste of His goodness, His resurrection life is imparted to us so that we actually **have** right now and **possess within us** eternal **life**. And this eternal life is the guarantee of our future resurrection life. So it's through our union with Christ, *the* living stone, that we ourselves have also become **living** stones!

We're not living stones all scattered about separately on the ground, but living stones all placed together in perfect alignment with the cornerstone and being built up by God as a spiritual house. In the Old Testament, the temple in Jerusalem is God's "house,"⁵ and that's what Peter is thinking of here. (cf. Ps. 5:7; 26:8; 36:8; etc.) Only, now, the house is a "**spiritual**" house. A **spiritual** house is a house that's built by the Holy **Spirit** and a house where the Holy **Spirit** Himself lives and resides. In the Old Testament, the prophet Ezekiel saw a vision of the glory of God **leaving** the temple. (Ezek. 10:18-19; 11:22-23) That's why the Old Testament temple couldn't truly be called a "spiritual house," because it was a house that would ultimately be abandoned by God; it wasn't suited for the Spirit of God to dwell there permanently. But the prophet Ezekiel also foresaw a day when the glory of God would return to a new temple, and from this new and infinitely more wonderful temple the power and the glory of God's presence would never, ever depart. (Ezek. 43:1-7) This new temple that Ezekiel saw in his vision was still a temple built with inanimate stones, but he knew—and all the people of God knew—that it was only the symbol of some far greater and deeper reality. One day, when Jesus was walking **in the temple**, He said to the Jews:

➤ John 2:19 — Destroy **this temple**, and in three days I will raise it up.

Do you see what Jesus was saying? Jesus saw in His own resurrection as a "living stone" the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies of a rebuilt temple – a temple where God would reside permanently among His people forever, and ever, and ever. (Jn. 2:20-22) And now, through our union **with Christ, we ourselves** as living stones are being built up into the fulfillment of all the **Old Testament prophecies** of a rebuilt end-times temple from which the glorious power and presence of the Lord will never, ever, ever again depart. Even right here in this room, we have a small microcosm of this **spiritual** house – a house fit to be the everlasting dwelling of the **Spirit** of God. What Peter believes we need is a stronger sense of our identity – not as separate individuals, but as the church – as the people of God. Can you think of any good reason **why** this should be so important?

But now Peter moves on and the picture suddenly changes. We're not only a spiritual house, we're also the holy priesthood that actually dwells **in** that house with God, always offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Just like with the stones, Peter's emphasis is on all of us together forming a holy priesthood. So even at home, as I offer up spiritual sacrifices to God, I can only do this as a stone **IN the building** and as a member **OF the priesthood**. That's where my identity is – not just a living stone, but a stone **in the building**; not just a priest, but a member **of the priesthood**.

⁵ LXX, *oikos*

Just like Aaron and his sons in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple, we've been consecrated by God and set apart for the privilege of worshiping and serving in His spiritual, end-times temple. (cf. Lev. 8-11) And what are the **spiritual** sacrifices that we offer up to God? They're all the works of love and obedience that the Holy **Spirit** is every day enabling and empowering in our lives. (cf. 1 Pet. 1:13-2:3)

Finally, just like **we** are living stones only through our union with Jesus who's been raised from the dead, so also our spiritual sacrifices are completely and fully acceptable to God only in and **through** our union with Jesus who offered Himself up as the once-for-all, final blood sacrifice on the cross. In other words, all of this glorious new identity that we have as living stones in a spiritual house and a holy priesthood offering up spiritual sacrifices is all the result of us "**coming to Jesus.**" And so now we've come back full circle to where we started, and Peter has us right where he wants us. Now we remember that this Jesus to whom we have come and in whom we have found such a glorious identity is not **just** "a living stone," but a living stone "**rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and honored.**" Peter makes sure that we're confronted again with this tension by quoting from three different passages in the Old Testament.

IV. 1 Peter 2:6 — For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and honored,⁶ and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." So this honor⁷ is for you who believe...

Peter's quoting from Isaiah 28. Judah is being threatened by a foreign invasion, but the king and all of Judah's leaders think they have everything under control. So all the while that they're worshiping idols and rebelling against God, they're sending messengers to Egypt to make alliances and treaties. They're planning and working and scheming to save themselves by all their own best efforts, and they've fully convinced themselves that they'll succeed. But then, into all their planning and all their boastful self-confidence comes this word from the Lord:

➤ **Isaiah 28:14-16** — Hear the word of the LORD, you scoffers, who rule this people in Jerusalem! Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement, when the overwhelming whip passes through it will not come to us, for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter"; therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation. Whoever believes will not be in haste."

The leaders in Jerusalem thought they were building a structure that would stand strong and secure against every threat. But God says that **He** is the one who has laid the **only true foundation** in Zion. And He promises that whoever will believe in this foundation that He has laid—whoever will come to this tested and precious cornerstone and take refuge there—will never be "in haste." In other words, whoever believes will not have to live his life in frenzied and vain efforts to secure his own safety and wellbeing; instead, he'll be able to rest quietly and confidently in the assurance of God's salvation.

⁶ Gr. *entimos*

⁷ Gr. *time*

Peter sees this passage fulfilled in Jesus so when he quotes it he adds the words, “in Him”: “For it stands in Scripture: ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and honored, and whoever believes **in him** will not be put to shame.’” And then he concludes with his own commentary, speaking directly to us: “So this honor is for you who believe...”⁸ What is this honor that’s reserved for us who believe? It’s the opposite of the “shame” that we’ll never have to experience because our confidence and trust in the stone that God has laid in Zion will never be disappointed. But do you know what else this honor is? It’s the **very same honor** that God has bestowed on Jesus Himself as the living cornerstone “chosen **and honored.**” If we’ve come to Jesus and believed in Him—if because of our union with the living stone we ourselves have also become living stones—then we now share with Him in His chosen and honored status in the sight of God. In Christ we, too, are **chosen and honored by God** – a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. But this wonderful truth now also **requires** another unavoidable truth. “So this honor is for you who believe,” Peter says...

V. 1 Peter 2:7–8 — ...but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

If, in coming to Jesus and believing in Him, we are now—**with Him**—chosen and honored by God, then we must also be—**with Him**—**rejected** by men. It’s this rejection by men that Peter’s readers were experiencing, and so now we begin to see what Peter’s agenda in these verses has been all along. He’s working “overtime” to prepare us for this rejection, so we can see this rejection and this social alienation always in the light of God’s salvation. On the one hand, to be rejected **by men** is **always** the flip side of our chosen and honored status **before God**. But now, on the other hand, Peter wants us to consider carefully and remember the destiny of those who don’t believe – those by whom we are being rejected.

Psalms 118 is a Psalm celebrating the return of the Davidic king to Jerusalem after a triumphant victory on the field of battle. So first we hear the king speaking as he rides up to the gates of Jerusalem at the head of the joyful procession.

➤ **Psalm 118:19–21** — Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

And then we hear the people within the city celebrate the return of their king:

➤ **Psalm 118:22–24** — The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Who are the builders that have rejected the stone? They’re all the unbelieving nations that have just been destroyed in battle. (cf. 118:10-12) But now Peter sees that these unbelieving nations are “fulfilled” today in **all** who reject **Jesus** and who refuse to **believe in Him**. They will all

⁸ For this translation, see Michaels (cf. most commentators)

ultimately be destroyed by that very *same* stone which has become the **cornerstone** for those who believe. (cf. Acts 4:10-12)

There's another Old Testament passage which makes this point even more clearly. In Isaiah chapter eight the people are once again facing threats of foreign invasion, but now instead of boastful self-confidence they're full of fear and dread. Once again there's political scheming and maneuvering and calls for alliances and treaties—while all the time a few faithful prophets are calling on the people to simply *believe* in the Lord and trust wholly in Him. So Isaiah says:

- Isaiah 8:11–15 — The LORD spoke thus to me...: “Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”

The *same* “stone” that will be for some a sanctuary and a place of refuge will be for all others who refuse to believe a stone that they stumble over so that they fall and are broken in pieces. (cf. Mat. 21:42-44) The stone never changes. It's only our response to the stone that determines how we will experience it. (cf. Oswalt comm. on Isa. 8:14-15) And once again, Peter sees that this “stone” in Isaiah is fulfilled today in Jesus. Today, the reason people stumble and perish is “because they disobey the word”—because they refuse to *come* in faith *to* Jesus, the living stone—and so in the end their experience of Jesus can only be negative – as a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling. What a horrible tragedy this is! And yet Peter says that “they stumble because they disobey the word, **as they were destined to do.**” Peter isn't teaching fatalism as though God forbids anyone from believing or as though we aren't morally responsible and accountable for our own choices. But neither is Peter just repeating himself and saying that those who disobey the word are “destined” to stumble and fall. What Peter wants us to see is that even the unbelief of men and their rejection **of Christ—and so also their rejection of us**—has been in some mysterious way appointed and determined by God – the God in whose sight we are chosen and honored with Christ.

Conclusion

The main message of Peter, here, is that it's the nature of our **response to Jesus** and the nature of our **relationship to Him** that determines our eternal destiny. Do we realize how radical that is, and how totally unacceptable that is in our pluralistic society? There's no gray area here. There's no neutral ground anywhere in the world. Jesus is the stone that ultimately lies in the path of every human being so that in the end we are all confronted by Him and must either come to Him for safety and refuge or else stumble over Him and be broken and perish forever. (cf. Davids) It's never Jesus who changes—He's the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8)—but only our response *to* Jesus that determines how we will experience Him.

Have you truly seen the ultimacy of Christ as *the key* to all human destiny – and to your own eternal future? (cf. Beare; quoted in Jobes) Have you **come** to Him in faith and trust so as never to be put to shame, or will you **stumble** over Him and be broken?

If we know these things, then how should we who *have* believed in Jesus respond to the rejection of men? **Shouldn't we rejoice?** (cf. Mat. 5:11-12) Shouldn't we see *in this rejection* the **ultimate sign** of our chosen and honored status with Christ in the sight of God. And shouldn't we see *in this rejection* the **ultimate proof and sign** of our final deliverance and salvation when Christ returns? And shouldn't we only grieve for those who reject us and pray that they, too, might experience Christ even as we have and be saved?

Yes, there will always be those who “stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do...”

➤ 1 Peter 2:9–10 — But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Brothers and sisters, you are chosen and honored in the sight of God; a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. And you are all of this only **because** you have come to Jesus and believed in Him. So, then, let us stand firm and unashamed and joyful in this faith in the midst of whatever rejection or opposition or alienation we may ever experience in this world.