

Who He Is

1 Peter 2:4-8

4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like 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. 6 For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." 7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," 8 and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.
(1 Peter 2:4-8 (ESV))

This passage deals with two very distinct, but at the same time very interwoven doctrines of scripture. It deals first with who the Lord Jesus is and then who we are to be in Him, "who He is", and "who we are to be".

For today, though we will study a lot about us, I want us to especially fix our thoughts and our worship upon the person of Christ and "who He is". And next week, the Lord willing, we will fix our thoughts on who you and I are to be "in Him" and the relationship we are to have with Him.

May I remind us, that being by nature, self-focused and self-centered beings, it seems always to be the inclination of our hearts to jump first to this second part, the "who we are" and think first about what God can do for us. And that is not an altogether wrong thing to do. As we are faced with the difficulties and the fears of daily life, and not knowing of any person or any other source of help that can fix our troubles, God is the one who can fix those otherwise "unfixable" things of life. So in that sense, that is exactly what we are supposed to do, to think first about what God can do for us. "He is an ever-present help in times of need". (Psalm 46:1)

As I ponder on these things about why someone, especially unbelievers who know very little about God or perhaps do not know Him at all would still reach toward such an unknown source for help, my mind goes first to the verse in Ecclesiastes 3, where we are told that God "puts eternity into the hearts of men". (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Thankfully, God does not just deposit us upon this earth and then leave us to get by on our own. He puts special provisions within our souls, thoughts and answers that may not come to the surface until we need them.

Being ever-filled with mercy and grace, it seems that God's first level of help is in the form of "hope". It is not often that people who do not know Christ are calling out to Him because they have "faith", because for them, "faith" has not yet been developed within their hearts. It is then mostly "hope" that provokes them to cry out for God to help.

"Hope" is a strange but very needful phenomenon that God has put within our souls. I confess that, even after all my years of knowing God and learning of His ways, the gracious gift of "hope" still remains a mystery to me.

Thankfully, every soul created on the earth has at least some measure of it. It probably again relates to those words in Ecclesiastes 3, where we are told that God "puts eternity within the hearts of men". (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Whatever God's purpose in giving each of us "hope", I am so very thankful for it. It is at least a beginning point to which our hearts can reach when the natural realm holds no answers for help.

And as we search these scriptures, we find that "hope" is the beginning step of "faith", that essential connection that God has set into place in our relationship with Him. "Hope", though fledgling it may be especially with infant believers, is a resident part and is intricately intertwined within our faith. Listen to the definition of "faith" given in Hebrews 11, and note here how faith and hope are interwoven together.

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.
(Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV))

These words tell us that we first "hope" for the "unseen" answers we need. Then as "faith" begins to develop within our hearts, the "unseen hope" becomes "substance", "real".

Quite often the answer, the "substance" we receive is not exactly as we had "hoped for" and we get confused and we miss out on realizing what God is doing for us. But given time, He opens our minds to His ways and we begin to see that His gracious hand has been at work every step of the way.

And then as we continue more and more to see His hand and to ask Him for even more and more of His help, "faith" develops and the words of Hebrews 11:6 become our confidence.

6 . . . without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
(Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV))

Did you note the first requirement of faith given here? It is to “believe that He is”, that “God is”, that “Jesus Christ is”. In other words, our “hope” and our “faith” is not in some mystical concept such as “fate” or “destiny” or “luck”, but rather in a real person.

I know that we have spoken often about this, but may I remind us of what we said. We asked, how often is it that we hear someone say as they buy a raffle ticket, or as they are about to compete in a contest, “I sure hope I get lucky and win”. And then someone else responds, “Well, you have an excellent chance at it”.

What have those people said? What is “luck”? And what is “chance”. Those are nothing more than whimsical and fanciful words, a vague appeal to some “unknown” and “powerless” figment of their imaginations, like speaking out into the air, hoping that the molecules will somehow form and produce an answer to their need.

And how useful or how effective are those figments of our imaginations when our circumstances are so very serious and so very real, our marriage is about to collapse or our house is about to be repossessed? Do we just hope that we will have the “chance” to get “lucky” and all those devastating circumstances will just wisp away into the air and disappear?

Folks, all we have to do is listen to the conversations all around us each day and we will hear these very words repeated over and over again, people saying, I hope this and I hope that, but having no idea who or what might answer their hoping. Unfortunately, all such banterings are foolishness, and not worth the breath used to say them.

These scriptures tell us that there is a far better alternative, a far better source in which to place our hopes and our faith. And that source is the “real” person of Christ. He is “real”. And He can actually reach His hand into the circumstances of our lives and actually bring the objects of our hope and our faith into fruition.

But may I say very clearly, and this brings us back to the focus of our study here today about “who God is”, the answers to our hopes and our faith and our prayers are conditioned upon it all taking place within the boundaries of these words from Hebrews 11:6 that we read a few moments ago.

6 . . . without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He (God) is, and that He (God) is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV))

For us to “hope” that the answers to our pleas will become “substance” and our dilemmas be helped, we really do have to fully . . .

believe that He (Jesus Christ our God) is (is real and is the Great I Am), and that He (God) is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV))

So then, “Who is Jesus Christ, our God?” He is described in so many ways in these scriptures. In the passage here in 1 Peter, He is called a “Living Stone”, the possessor and the giver of eternal strength and power and eternal life. And He is here called the “Cornerstone”, the foundation on which all of the realms of God and the realms of men are built. As the commentator, Matthew Henry words it,

“Jesus Christ is the very foundation-stone of all our hopes and happiness. He communicates the true knowledge of God. (Matthew 11:27) By him we have access to the Father (John 14:6), and through him we are made partakers of all spiritual blessings, (Ephesians 1:3).

Listen again to our passage!

4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like 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. 6 For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” 7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” 8 and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

(1 Peter 2:4-8 (ESV))

As we are commanded in Hebrews 11:6, the first step that we must take is that we must believe that God “is”, that He “exists”, that He is not just some mystical figment of our thoughts, but is absolutely “real”.

Here, in this passage, we are given insight into two of the Persons of “Who God is”, God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ. The third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is not specifically mentioned in this particular passage but He is an integral part of all that is being spoken about here.

Because of the meager intellect and the obstinate propensity towards sinful attitudes that so many of us have, we often demand to “see” something before we accept it and believe that it is, that it “exists”. But God being “Spirit” and the Holy Spirit being “Spirit”, that will not, in this life, actually ever take place.

But God has been especially gracious to us in our demands that we be able to “see” Him before we believe that He really “exists”. God has given us Jesus, a living, moving, walking, talking Person, a historically proven Person, a Person proven beyond any other person in history to exist.

So then, Jesus undeniably “is”, He “exists”! The only controversy that mankind offers is, to “deny” and to “reject” “who He is”, that He truly is God. And that is part of what is being spoken about here in our passage.

7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” 8 and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. (1 Peter 2:7-8 (ESV))

These words remind me of the challenge given by God in Deuteronomy 30. Listen!
15 “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. 16 If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you . . .
19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life . . .
(Deuteronomy 30:15-19 (ESV))

The challenge to us is that Jesus Christ, our God and Savior, has come in the flesh to save us from our sins. And we are faced with a choice. Do we accept Him and have eternal life, or do we “stumble over” Him, “reject” Him and suffer eternal death.

Many deny the Lord Jesus and reject Him. But as they do, they do immediately “stumble”. Why do they stumble? I have no doubt that it is the invisible hand of the other members of the Trinity, guiding the feet of the unbelievers, intentionally causing them to stumble so that they will have to stop and consider their behavior and their need to make a choice.

This visible imagery of “stumbling” is helpful to my thoughts, the kind of event that no one can ignore or deny. The one who stumbles is often sprawling and is injured. The bystanders observing the “stumbling” can readily see the spectacle with all of its accompanying failures. And of course, God is seeing everything that is taking place, because “Nothing is hidden from the eyes of whom we have to give an account.”
(Hebrews 4:13)

And it is “who Jesus is” that that causes it all to take place. Here, He is confirmed to be one of two possibilities, He is either our Savior, or else He is our “stumbling block”.

We may not readily recognize that it is Christ over whom we are stumbling, but please understand, He is exactly who is behind it all, our stumbling and tripping and falling, in our marriages, in our work, in our finances. He is our loving Creator and the prospective Bridegroom to all who will believe. He wants every person to call out to Him. And when else are we more likely to cry out our pleas for help than in our times of trouble? And so then, He, the Lord Jesus, becomes both the “cause” of our stumbling and our “help” in our time of need.

And again, just because we can’t “see” His invisible hand, we cannot allow that to keep us from seeing Him and knowing that He “is” and that He is a “rewarder” of those who diligently turn and seek Him.

We’ll pick back up on these words next week, but for now, may we rest in the assurance that is given here in verse 5 of our text, that though it seems that all we do is stumble, time and time again, over Christ and His teachings, we

5 . . . like 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.