

BUILDING THE HOUSE

I Peter 2:2-10

Intro

Unlike many of the letters that are sent out under various apostles names in order to garner greater acceptance, the letter that we know as I Peter is, most likely, from the mind, if not the pen, of the apostle Simon Peter. It was sent while he was in Rome around the year 64 ce, just prior to his death. The purpose for the correspondence is to provide encouragement, from one of the prominent leaders of the church, to the people of the church. The reason that Peter feels that they need this sort of support is because a new level of persecution has dawned on the horizon and appears to be unavoidable. Most commentators believe that Peter is referencing the persecution that is about to be levied by the Roman emperor Nero.

In order to steel the resolve of his audience, he reminds them, albeit not so subtlety, that the truth that they have found in the Word of God is a truth that endures all things, including death.

Essentially, Peter is laying out the real possibility that although their faith may cost them their earthly life, that this is not a time to doubt the validity of their beliefs or to break under the societal pressure that is continuing to mount.

Why?

Because the promise of eternal life through the resurrected son of God is real.

However, beyond this call to lean on their faith and the truth that is found in it, he asks them to recognize how they have been changed since the Holy Spirit reached out and allowed them to place their belief in Jesus Christ. He states that they have become connected to each other (and to all Christians for that matter). So now, as they grow in the spiritual milk of Jesus example, they are able to become “like living stones”, built upon the cornerstone of Christ. It is upon that foundation that they are able to obtain footing that will not slip away. The scripture reads this way.

I Peter 2:2-10

² Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴ Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and ⁵ like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in scripture:

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

⁷ To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner,” ⁸ and “A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order

that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

¹⁰ 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.

"Building the House"

As most of you know, I am, by no means, a builder in the construction sense. I can haul and dig stuff real well but in terms of knowing how to actually build something, I am at a loss.

However, as limited as my knowledge may be in this area, even I know that before you begin to put up the walls, let alone the roof, you need to have a foundation that is firm. You need to have a foundation that will not flex under the freezing of winter, the wetness brought on by the thaw of spring, or the dryness that can occur in the heat of summer. If the foundation is strong, then the prospects of the building being fashioned upon it lasting for the long haul are so much greater.

This is what Peter is trying to get across in verses 6-8 of the passage that we were able to hear this morning.

Although in his case, he is obviously speaking of a house of faith, a house that we have come to know as the church.

All three of the scriptural references (taken from Isaiah 28, Psalm 118, and Isaiah 8 respectively) all of them point to the fact that Jesus is that sort of strong foundation that allows ones faith to be secure. Even though Jesus was rejected by his religious contemporaries, he still became "the very head of the corner" of the church. Even though Jesus was "a stone that makes [the religious elite] stumble", he has become "a cornerstone chosen and precious" to God the Father and all those who place their faith in him. This foundation is so sure that Peter quotes Isaiah who says, "whoever believes in him, will not be put to shame". This is the sort of foundation that is being laid. It will not move; it will not wear away; it will provide the sort of footings that a firm building can be built upon for lifetimes to come.

The thing is, and this is getting back to the building analogy, you can have an incredible foundation in place, and still have a building that is falling down around you. The reason that this is the case is because while it may be faster and cheaper to use materials that are not exactly up to snuff, the long term prospect of that facility is not as good as those that have been built with the sort of supplies that cost a bit more, that take a little longer to produce, that are sure to be able to hold up for a longer period of time under a variety of environmental influences.

I heard how true this understanding was from an acquaintance I had several years ago who grew up firmly ensconced in what we refer to as tornado alley. As all of us know, whether it be from pictures or actual experience, tornados are one of nature's most violent actions and have no problems destroying homes within only a few short seconds. She spoke of once such twister that blew through her town.

Thankfully, no one was killed, but many of the homes were, seemingly, completely destroyed.

In her opinion, there were many builders who tried to find the shortest path to completion and weren't real worried about creating a house that was shored up in all the ways that it should be. This meant that even if the home was not in the direct path of the tornado, it still disintegrated.

The amazing thing was, the foundations that were laid under these houses were so strong, secure, and well done, that the owners were actually able to rebuild on the same foundation.

The house was gone, the foundation still remained.

If the builders would have taken the time and the money to use materials that were of better quality, then the owners would have been repairing and not rebuilding upon that sure foundation.

This reality of using the proper and necessary materials is also explored in the verses that we heard as Peter states, “let yourselves be built into a spiritual house”.

Once again, and much like the foundation that we spoke of a few moments ago, Peter is referring to the sort of materials that are extremely strong and able to withstand the sort of environmental pounding that all building resources eventually have to face.

However, in this analogous state, the materials that are being referred to are the very believers of Jesus Christ.

The way that Peter says that these people, these supplies are strengthened accordingly is by feeding on spiritual milk. This nourishment, as Peter intended it, was learning what Jesus taught. As this was done, then the individual Christians would become more steadfast in their faith and less likely to waver under the persecutions that were about to make their presence known on the horizon of history. They would be able to hold off the environmental pounding that was coming.

How do we currently appreciate such an application? I think the areas that we have leaned upon over the last two and a half years (via the spiritual growth campaign of ‘10’) absolutely lead us in the correct direction. Reading the Bible, praying, gathering with others who are walking in the faith, being good stewards, and actively putting that faith into action all allow us to stand in stronger ways upon the foundation that we have been provided.

But are we actually partaking of that food?

This past week my family and I ventured up to the Mid-Hudson Valley in New York State to visit with my brother and sister-in-law. The reason for the visit was because we wanted to meet their first child, a little girl they named Cora.

First off, she’s just a little fluff of stuff. She was born at all of 6 lbs. 9 oz. so all of us are holding her and commenting on how light she is. Now mind you, our personal perspective is rather skewed as Austin was born at over 10 lbs., so we got used to holding a two month old right out the gate.

But regardless of the size that any of us started out at, as I am sitting there holding this little life in my arm, I couldn’t help but be reminded how her life will be molded and shaped by all of the various influences that she will encounter. Yes, she absolutely has the foundational DNA but how those genetics ultimately get put to use depend mightily upon all the lessons she is taught. Our mothers help to shape this. Our fathers help to shape this. Our families and friends and the communities of which we are a part all help to shape this. The foundation is there, but what is fashioned upon that foundation is still TBD.

As Christians, as people who have been led to profess a belief that Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead so that we might have the opportunity to live eternally, we believe that we have been blessed with an eternal foundation, a foundation that will remain...no matter what.

But what is being fashioned upon that foundation? What are we building upon this foundation of Christ that we have been blessed to have? Last week I asked the question in regard to lust for all things technological, are we in control of what information and entertainment is consumed or is the lust for more and more stimuli consuming us?

Well, this morning's passage expounds upon that question in regard to the totality of our lives. What are we consuming? To put it into the building motif that we have been chatting about her this morning, what has been built, both by us and by others, upon the foundation stones that are of God? Is what has been built strong (in regard to how the wisdom of God would view it)?

Now mind you, this is not asking what degree you have earned, how much money you have tucked away, or how influential you are in your particular social circle.

This is asking when someone gets sick, when tragedy strikes, or when uncertainty abounds, are you going to be able to hold up to the pounding that the world will invariably throw at you?

Now admittedly, the sorts of difficulties that we face today may not be like the trials that Peter was speaking of. In Peter's day, the test was that people may be killed by the societies of which they were a part if they did not relinquish their beliefs.

Our trials might not look like that, but they can feel just as withering.

Our foundation is strong: we are built upon the Lord.

But what are we building above it?

And think like a contractor: just because you may have a piece of your life that affects you negatively, does not mean that it can't be shored up, repaired, and ultimately made more secure. I have experienced more than enough ways to prove to me that there is always a way to repair those things that are broken. They may take a while to fix, and some new thinking might be required, but we can shore up, repair, and replace those areas of our life.

And that happens by partaking of that good spiritual milk because if we don't, the world will continue to work at us finding those weak spots and begin to break us down...and again, that is absolutely with a foundation that is strong. We must partake of the spiritual nourishment that is being offered...and encourage one another to build solidly upon the foundation that is the Almighty.

God has given us the foundation and all of the tools that we need to build the strongest house that could ever be built. So let's go, as a family of faith, and do everything that we can, to make the house that we have been blessed with in the church, the temples of God that we recognize ourselves to be as individual believers, become the strongest and most welcoming home that could ever be constructed.

After Sermon Prayer

God, as we have heard in the scripture this morning and as we have experienced in our own lives, You have called us together to become one people founded upon Your son, “the cornerstone chosen and precious”. However, in order that we might be able to support one another and ultimately stay united, we need to partake of the spiritual food so that we may grow in the assuredness of our faith. Help us to dive into Your Word, be in communication with You through prayer, and fulfill Your will through our service. As we do these things we, the church, will be able to become a home that is as strong as its foundation. In Jesus’ name. Amen.