

Have you ever been ridiculed for being a Christian? Have you ever been called names, even in jest, for being a Christian? Have you ever been discriminated against for being a Christian? Have you ever been denied employment or a promotion at work for being a Christian? It is happening here in the United States, in corporations and college campuses, for example those who believe in Intelligent Design are denied tenure regardless of their qualifications.

Generally however, one of the blessings that we have living in the United States is that most people allow you to believe what you want and to practice what you believe or don't believe. Unless you get wacky like the polygamists and abuse children, most people leave everyone alone.

However, there are many places around the world where being a Christian leads to persecution, discrimination and in extreme cases, is a death sentence. You can think especially of Muslim countries and even Israel.

As we continue our study of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter we are reminded that persecution of Christians is nothing new. Turn with me to 1 Peter 2:4-8 (READ).

As you might remember, Peter has told the pilgrims of the dispersion, that is those who had to leave their homelands because of their faith in Christ, ... all the blessings of their salvation, along with many other things, and I would refer you to previous sermons for the details.

Last week we saw that what we believe has its foundation in the Word of God – the enduring Word of God. It is God's Word that foretold the work and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is God's Word that tells us how to live. Again, as I have said, we live in a world created by God and He has been gracious enough to give us an instruction manual on how to live in the world that He has created, but also tells us how to live in the world to come – and indeed, how to get there through the Lord Jesus Christ.

As Peter continues, and remember who he is addressing and the problems that they might be going through, he reminds them of their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. And he tells them four things about him, and we will look at them in the order of our passage – we see that Christ is the living stone (v. 4), the corner stone (v. 6), the rejected stone (v. 7), and the stumbling stone (v. 8).

That Christ is a living stone is a reference to Isaiah 28:16: *"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily."*

Christ is the foundation on which the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is built. We sing *"The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord."* The Roman Catholic Church says that Peter is the Rock ... the Stone, but it is really the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the living stone ... it is only Christ that can give life — eternal life.

We read in John 1:4: *"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."* And we read in 1 Corinthians 15:45 in comparing Jesus to Adam: *"And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit."*

We remember the words of our Savior in Matthew 7:24-25: *"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the*

*floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.”*

In our Savior’s dialogue with Peter which we read in Matthew 16:15-18: *“He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”*

The “rock” that Jesus was talking about is who he is – *the Christ, the Son of the living God*. As the Christ, he is the Messiah ... the Savior. He is, as we read on 1 Peter 2:6 *“the chief cornerstone.”* The cornerstone was a large stone on which the building rested. In many cases it was placed there with a solemn ceremony befitting its importance.

The Apostle Paul, in describing the Christians at Ephesus says this in Ephesians 2:19-20: *“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone...,”*

Our faith is built on the person and work of Jesus Christ. As Isaiah says it is a *sure foundation*.

But it is this sure foundation that was rejected by men, as we read in verses 4 & 7. We all know that the Lord Jesus Christ was rejected by men – and as we have seen before this was a fulfillment of prophecy.

As John tells us in John 1:11: *“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”* Jesus told them exactly what was going to happen. In Matthew 17:22-23 we read: *“Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, “and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up.” And they were exceedingly sorrowful.”*

In Matthew 20, our Savior tells his disciples – Matthew 20:18-19: *“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.”*

Notice though, that even though Jesus was rejected by man, he was chosen by God, as we read in verse 4.

And the last thing that we see is that Christ is *“a stumbling stone and a rock of offense.”* (Verse 8). Again, this is a fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecy from Isaiah 8:14: *“He will be as a sanctuary, But a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense To both the houses of Israel, As a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.”*

As I have said on a number of occasions – it is the person and work of Jesus Christ that separates Christianity from all other religions and faiths in the world. Only Christianity has a Savior. I have said before that you can talk about religion in general, but as soon as you mention Christ, the red flags go up. It causes people to stumble. It is, as our passage says, an offense to them.

So this is who Jesus is. But what does all this mean for us? Obviously we understand that Jesus is the foundation of our faith and that as he was rejected, we might be rejected also. However, consider carefully how

Peter describes the pilgrims – and remember, what he says to them is applicable to us also. Look at how he describes Christians in 1 Peter 2:5: “*you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*”

By our faith we are united with Christ as “*living stones*”. Our life proceeds from him who is the *living stone*. But the church of Jesus Christ is composed of people – remember, it is not a building. And here we see that those people are called “*living stones*”. And it is these “*living stones*” that have built this *spiritual house* that we know as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But he also calls us – Christians – something very interesting – he says that we are *a holy priesthood* ... Quiet simply, every believer in Christ as Savior and Lord is a priest. We are “priests” in the sense that all Christians have equal and immediate access to God. We can come to Him directly — by ourselves.

Under the Old Covenant, there were priests. These were the individuals that God had ordained to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people. They were, in a real sense, the middle-men between God and the people of God. It was the priests that offered the sacrifices on behalf of the people and it was the priests that made intercession to God on behalf of the people.

But now, we have Christ — who is our High Priest — who offered the one final and perfect sacrifice for the sins of his people. There are no more sacrifices ... and hence there is no more need for priests in the Old Testament sense. We, as Christians, have direct, equal and immediate access to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Again, how did Jesus teach us to pray: “*Our Father ...*” – direct access. Hebrews 4:14-16 says: “*Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*” This is the privilege that we have as Christians.

And why do you think we call our Prayer Book “*The Book of Common Prayer*?” It is because it is for all the people. Yes, I know that there are parts that ordained clergy are responsible for and can exclusively do – such as Holy Communion, Baptism, etc. But in general, the Book of Common Prayer is composed in such a way to take you from your Baptism until you enter heaven!

There are scripture lessons for every single day of the year. There are prayers of all types, including Morning and Evening Prayer and Morning and Evening Family Prayer, both of which I have encouraged you to do on your own. There is the Litany, which offers prayers for just about every situation in life. There is also the Creeds and the Articles of Religion that state what we believe.

As Peter concludes this section, in words that we will look at in detail next week – listen to what he says in 1 Peter 2:9-10 (READ). Powerful words in describing who we are ... and the words that God used to describe His people in the Old Testament.

The point of all this is that our faith which has its foundation on the Lord Jesus Christ – *the living stone* – has result in those of us who have faith as living stones who are part of the great spiritual house, know as the church and as such we are a holy priesthood able to come to God any time we want. Praise be to God!