

BUILDINGS

1 Peter 2:2-10

² *Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, ³ now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness.*

⁴ *You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor.*

⁵ *And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.*

⁶ *As the Scriptures say, "I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem, chosen for great honor, and anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." ⁷ Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him.*

But for those who reject him, "The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone." ⁸ And, "He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them.

⁹ *But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ "Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy." [NLT]*

What is your inheritance. Big sum of money? A house? Household knickknacks and curios? Or just memories? Many people make a fuss about what sort of inheritance they will receive. In this passage St Peter is writing about Jesus' inheritance.

But Jesus doesn't give us a building. We ARE the building! And Jesus himself is its cornerstone.

These are two very powerful images.

Undoubtedly, Peter was thinking of buildings like synagogues and other large public buildings.

Let's start with the image of the cornerstone. V4

The word used here can mean the keystone used in an arch. But the more likely meaning is of a building's corner foundation stone. Builders would clear a level space of ground, pack the dirt down as hard as possible. The first part of the building to be put down would be the cornerstone.

This was always a large stone made with very special care. The whole building – length, width and height – would be lined up to this stone.

So it was always a right-angled – rectangular – block of hard-wearing stone. (Right-angles were easy to make – just follow the 3-4-5 principle).

So we already have one very good image for the church from these words: it needs to be lined up according to its cornerstone, Jesus. It is Jesus who determines our direction in life – how we build our lives. Any other ideas will simply end up being shonky.

So, what do we learn from Jesus?

His life certainly taught us about forgiveness, self-giving love, compassion, care, truth, kindness, prayer. But most of all, Jesus' life shows us trust in God the Father. And that includes a passion for righteousness – to be right with God.

This goes right back to the beginning – to Adam and Eve, and the Fall – where humankind lost its right relationship with God. But in Jesus, it is restored. So, where Adam and Eve were God's creation, we are God's children!

But there's another matter about the cornerstone that is important. It was quite a common practice in the ancient pagan world of Palestine that human sacrifices – usually children – were part of the cornerstone laying ceremony. Archaeological digs have turned up many such remains.

This image could also be in St Peter's mind. Obviously Jews and Christians did not practice such a thing. But as old buildings were torn down, such things would have shown up.

Christ the cornerstone is also the sacrifice for his church. Without such a sacrifice, we have nothing.

It is a very powerful image. The church is splattered with the blood of Jesus!

No wonder non-Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, were offended by Christian teaching. Our very lives are based on a horrible death! As horrible as – in fact, worse than – the children sacrifices for old pagan buildings. *"He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall."*



The image above, showing a cornerstone, is from the ancient Roman city of Ostia. Here the cornerstones seemed to have also marked the property boundaries for the houses (called insulae).

And how true it is! Who would not be offended by all this talk of death and sacrifice that is so central to the Christian faith.

No wonder that some Christian denominations barely mention Jesus' sacrifice. They focus only on his resurrection.

Yet, what this sacrifice is about cannot be ignored. We must pay attention to it, and take it to heart. All that separates us from God, and causes troubles and division and conflicts and disasters and illnesses in our lives, is dealt with by Jesus' death on the cross.

If we are not willing to be marked with his death – namely with his blood (sprinkled in baptism, sipped in communion!) – then there is no way we can be marked with his life.

Dead to sin, alive in Christ. That is Jesus' way with us.

Let's move on.

The second image from this passage is that we are “living stones”. Quite likely, St Peter had a synagogue in mind when he wrote this.



The picture above is the rebuilt remains of a synagogue at Capernaum. These remains date from about 200 AD. Underneath them are most likely the remains of the synagogue that Jesus preached in. The layout of synagogues did not change much over the centuries around the time of Jesus.

What I want you to notice are the stone pillars.

Imagine walking into this building when it was newly built, with its beautiful sandstone pillars holding up the roof.

St Peter is using a similar image for the church.

We are the living stone pillars holding up the church's roof, with us built on the cornerstone called Jesus.

Imagine, then, non-Christians walking into the church. What do they see? They see us – living stones – ‘holding up the roof’, that is, worshipping God.

Are we a magnificent building? Or are we shabby and shonky?

When people walk into St John's church for the first time they are struck by the hints of Gothic design of the building. And for both St John's and Bethlehem, they may be made aware of the enormous effort members made in building their churches.

Are visitors equally impressed by the design of the congregation?

And are they aware of the efforts the members make into 'building each other up'?

St Peter is getting across to us the idea that we are the church that people experience. And if we are truly built on the cornerstone of Jesus, then people's experience will be a wonderful thing: *you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.*

Show others the goodness of God! What a wonderful image for this troubled world. With all the disasters going on at the moment, many people are asking if there is a good God at all!

But we are called to show others the goodness of God.

This actually brings us back to what St Peter began with: ² *Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment,* ³ *now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness.*

What St Peter has in mind is God's mercy to us revealed in Jesus' death and resurrection.

In our lives we sometimes face earthquakes, floods, diseases, and so on. And these are tough matters. But the biggest matter anyone could ever have to face or deal with is the state of one's relationship with God.

But God has already dealt with it: in Christ, on the cross.

Our trust in Christ means we have tasted God's goodness.

St Peter in particular tasted the goodness of God when Jesus reinstated him after the resurrection:

John 21:15-17 ¹⁵ *After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," Peter replied, "you know I love you." "Then feed my lambs," Jesus told him. ¹⁶ Jesus repeated the question: "Simon son of John, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord," Peter said, "you know I love you." "Then take care of my sheep," Jesus said. ¹⁷ A third time he asked him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you." Jesus said, "Then feed my sheep. [NLT]*

We have tasted God's kindness. May we be his living stones, built on Christ himself.

Amen.