

"The Rejected Stone(s)"

*Fifth in a series on Peter's First Letter,
on Pentecost Sunday*

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1st Peter 2:4-10

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Come to the Lord, to that living stone. Humans rejected him, but God chose him and values him very highly!

Like living stones yourselves, you are being built up into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices that will be well pleasing to God through Jesus the Messiah. That's why it stands in scripture:

*Look! I'm setting up in Zion a chosen, precious cornerstone.
Believe in him! You'll not be ashamed.*

He is indeed precious for you believers. But when people don't believe,
*the stone which the builders rejected has become the keystone,
and
a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.*

They stumble as they disobey the word, which indeed was their destiny.

But you are a chosen clan; a royal priesthood; a holy culture; a people for God's possession. Your purpose is to announce the virtuous deeds of the One who called you out of darkness into his amazing light.

Once you were 'no people'; now you are 'God's people'. Once you had not received mercy; now you have received mercy.

My translation, using N. T. Wright's *Kingdom New Testament* and various commentaries.

I

I once lived with 3 other guys. We were students, looking for summer jobs. We sent out application letters. Responses trickled back. We stuck them to our cheap fake-wood panelled living room wall, creating a mural of rejections.

These were nothing. We all did fine. But when you're looking for a "real job," and when your career, your livelihood, your sense of yourself depend on it, rejections can bury you.

Rejected. Turned down. Pushed out. Flung aside. Told you don't belong. Transgender kids bullied at school. People ethnically cleansed from their neighbourhood. A man told he and his husband are welcome in the church but can't serve in the worship band. because. . . . Followed by staff around stores because of your skin colour. Sitting on the sidewalk, and everyone walking past, not even looking. People see you coming, and cross to the other side.

Peter's writing to people rejected. Some are Jews who now believe Jesus is their Messiah. Many are non-Jews who now realize Jesus is their Saviour too. His death on a cross and resurrection from a tomb have freed them from Sin's bondage and Death's power. Different backgrounds, they all share an allegiance now to Jesus. The Holy Spirit has filled them. They belong together in God's Family.

Their biological families . . . that's different. Because their loyalties have shifted and their values have changed, their old friendships are strained. Relatives are hostile. Doors are closed. Suspicion, slander, and scorn follow them down the street. Belonging to Jesus, they are rejected.

II

Rejection is not good. But it puts them (and all who are rejected) in good company. With us and beside us is

the Stone the builders rejected . . .

Peter knows that line from Psalm 118. It sounds like Jesus.

Jesus, who

*was despised and rejected by others. . .
From him, others hide their faces.
He was despised, and we counted him as nothing.¹*

Jesus, who

*was in his very nature God,
and so did not consider equality with God
something to be used to his own advantage.
He made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a slave,*

¹ Isaiah 53:3.

*being made in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!²*

The Stone. God the Son. Because of who he is, he chose to become among the rejected. In his time, that was slave status. He dove deep into rejection, to crucifixion. Execution on a cross was all about shaming someone out of their community, expelling them from their humanity, cursing them away from God, and only then rejecting them from life.

The Stone the builders rejected.

III

*The Stone the builders rejected,
has become the head-of-the-corner stone.*

I talked about this in the fall. We were looking at another time Peter used this bit from the psalm to talk about Jesus.³ It's a somewhat unclear which stone in a building's architecture he's comparing Jesus to. It might be a cornerstone, the first stone laid from which all the other stones are set. I think it's more likely to be another stone, the highest in the ceiling, the keystone that holds the arches together.

It turns out the rejected Stone is the one needed most, who brings things together to completion, and without whom the whole building falls.

Jesus the rejected, whom

*God exalted to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name. . . .⁴*

It's not — and this is important — it's not that he was "slumming it" for a while, leaving Daddy's mansion to "play poor" on the other side of the tracks, knowing all

² Philippians 2:6-8. See Andrew Roots discussion of this in [Faith Formation in a Secular Age](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017, 160ff.

³ Acts 4:1-12. I talked about it in my sermon "Keystone," preached on September 27, 2020. You can read it here: elorauc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2020-09-27-Keystone.pdf

⁴ Philippians 2:9.

the time he could speed back home to his gated community and, if he gets in trouble, Mom will bail him out.⁵ That's not Jesus.

Jesus remains despised. He remains rejected. He is still crucified. His resurrection doesn't undo his death on a cross. It vindicates it. He is exalted, still the slave. His name above all others is "*Lord who washes feet.*"

Jesus the cursed is God's chosen. Jesus the discarded is God's most precious. Jesus the executed is the living stone. He is still found among those who are rejected, turned down, pushed out, flung aside, and told they don't belong.

IV

What does this do to them? Those first ones drawn to Jesus, and because of him shamed and slandered, rejected. What does this do to us: drawn to Jesus, who belong to him now?

Listen to what Peter calls us.

He calls us *living stones*. Like Jesus! Sharing is his resurrection life, the Spirit is growing us together into a "spiritual house," the Body of Christ, the Temple torn-down and raised-up. Our life together becomes a dwelling place for Almighty God.

He calls us *a holy and royal priesthood*. We sharing in Jesus' final and for-all sacrifice. He makes us holy. So we offer our praise, our actions, our sharing, our selves.

He calls us *a chosen clan*. The word literally means people who share a common ancestor, either biological or mythical.⁶ By the Spirit, we are born anew into a new relationship, the family of God.

He calls us *a holy culture*. Again by the Spirit, we are being changed into new ways of living, customs shaped by love, and practices formed in prayer. Our human cultures are wonderful. Jesus-culture transforms all cultures and brings out their best.⁷

⁵ Root, 163.

⁶ *Genos* is often translated as "race." However, this term is more and more open to misunderstanding and even toxic uses. "Race" is a concept designed to justify the superiority of some and the subjugation of others. "Clan" is a more useful term that gets at the idea *genos* expresses.

⁷ *Ethnos* is often translated as "nation." It means people joined by similar customs and practices. The relationship by Christianity and cultures is fascinating and, too often, shameful. At its best, the culture

He calls us *God's own people*.

All of these terms are used in the Bible to describe Israel. Now Peter is reaching them out to also include all who are brought into God's People through Jesus the Messiah.

"This is you!" You cast out. You pushed aside. You despised. You rejected.
"This is you!" You are holy. You are royal. You are chosen. You are priests. You are God's family, God's people, God's own.

"This is you!" Church.

Church? Us? Does this feel like us? Does it fit us?

It's true! So now what?

V

Right after saying who we are, Peter tells us what we are for.

*Your purpose is to announce
the virtuous deeds of the One
who called you out of darkness into his amazing light.*

On Pentecost, the message was joy: celebrating what God has done. The gift was communication: people getting to hear it *in their own languages* so they could understand it in their hearts.

I'm wondering if, these days, people often hear best when they are shown.

A friend of mine, Ross Lockhart, tells of driving in the winter. The heater in his truck was broken, so he stopped. It was where new home development was going to be built. He went into the show home to warm up.

*The salesperson greeted me warmly and showed me around the lovely
model home with stainless steel appliances and high-end furniture.
Warming myself by the gas fireplace the salesperson saw me looking out
the living room window at the muddy, snow-covered farmland that would*

of God's kingdom transforms all human cultures. We go terribly wrong, however, when one human culture — often European-based — is said to be superior to others.

soon be turned into paved streets and family homes. The salesperson offered these prophetic words, "It's hard to imagine, but one day soon everything out there will look like what you see in here."⁸

Ross wonders if this is what congregations can be: show homes, peeks at what is coming where Jesus is at work.

If we're going to show Jesus at work . . . well, where is that? Everywhere of course but, in particular, places of rejection. Among those of us, and those around us, who are experiencing being pushed aside, thrown out, neglected, forgotten. Those are places where Jesus chooses to make his home. And there, in him, people find their home.

So here are some questions to finish with.

Are you in one of those places of rejection? You probably have not wanted to be there; it's been inflicted on you. Look for Jesus there, with you, and discover your true home.

Where are those places around us? Will we, as Jesus' people, enter into those places, those lives? To see and show how Jesus is there?

Jesus, the rejected Stone, bringing and holding everything together.

⁸ Ross A. Lockhart, "Ecclesiology" in Brendan McClenahan and Nick Warnes, eds., Faithful Innovation: Beginning a Conversation for a Post-Covid Church (Cyclical Publishing, 2020), 13.