

## **The Body: His Plan, Our Part**

### **Part Four: Congregation Treasuring Together**

*1 Peter 2:1-10*

**Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith on April 14, 2024.**

#### **Read Text**

##### **God's Supremacy First and Foremost**

The Church exists—and I hope that your heart exists, and First Baptist Church exists - to spread a passion and desire for the supremacy of God in everything for the joy of everyone everywhere through Jesus Christ. For someone to have a passion for God's supremacy, you must first know and experience God's supremacy in your own life. For that to happen, biblical truth about God must be taught to children, teenagers, and adults. Teaching biblical truth about God is essential to the mission of this church.

##### **Jesus Christ at the Very Center**

That phrase I mentioned – “through Jesus Christ” – carries more meaning than we first realize. The Apostle Paul wrote, “For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). When you become a Christian, you see with the “eyes of your heart.” This happens when you are born again and have a new nature. And what you see with the eyes of your heart is “the glory in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Christ is the “radiance of the glory of God and the exact expression or imprint of his nature” (Hebrews 1:3). We see the glory of God most clearly in the glory of Jesus Christ who is God's image, his radiance, his exact nature. And we see the glory of Christ most clearly in the terrible but glorious events of the gospel – the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

So when we say that we exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in everything for the joy of everyone through Jesus Christ, we mean that God's supremacy was most clearly shown in the gospel. And we also understand that our passion for to spread this message was also dearly paid for in the gospel of Christ crucified.

So many churches have, in their mission statements, something about loving others. I mean, it is the second great commandment. What we forget is that the greatest act of love we can show other people IS to be passionate about God's supremacy in everything.

Jesus modeled love for us by laying down his life. So, our response should be to lay down everything in our lives so that we can spread the passion for the supremacy of God in all things and for their joy through Jesus Christ. Anything we do, every action we take, that does not have that motivation at its core is not an act of Christian love. Love for others means working to spread the desire to see God's supremacy in everything for joy of everyone through Jesus Christ. That sort of love is costly – it was for Jesus and it should be for us too.

As a church, we must be devoted to this idea of spreading the passion for the supremacy of God in everything for the joy of everyone through Jesus Christ.

### **Fulfilling that Calling**

For us as a congregation to fulfill that calling, together we must treasure Christ. This means embracing the challenge to be the Church in as many contexts as possible. We realize that we cannot be the Church to each and every culture. We also understand that even with our vast diversity of backgrounds, socio-economic histories, preferences, and church experiences, as a body of gathered believers we must embrace the idea, first and foremost, of treasuring Christ together. This is our starting point. If you cannot gather with us and treasure Christ with us, we may not be the place for you on Sundays.

### **God's Response to Christ**

In our text this morning, we see how we can treasure Christ together as a congregation who is affirming and following the leadership of Jesus, under the oversight of pastors/elders/overseers/shepherds, and through the service of the deacon body.

Peter is considering and applying several Old Testament passages that point to Christ as a stone or cornerstone. The first is Isaiah 28:16: "Therefore the Lord God said: 'Look, I have laid a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation.'" And the second is Psalm 118:2: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."

Look at verse 4: "As you come to him, a living stone – rejected by people but chosen and honored by God." We can also read it as "chosen and precious to God." That is an important word. Remember it as we look ahead to verse 6:

“For it stands in Scripture: See, I lay a stone in Zion, a cornerstone chosen and honored (or precious) and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.” Again, the Apostle Peter uses “precious” to get our attention. Consider the implications of that. Almighty God, possessing infinite knowledge and supreme power, possessing perfection – which means God is able to see and honor what is valuable. This Almighty God values Christ as precious. Almighty God treasures Christ.

To treasure something means realizing the precious nature of what you value. If God, who sees everything as they truly are and knows everything as they truly are, treasures Christ, so should we. God treasures Christ above all things. There is nothing more valuable than Christ in the entire universe, because he IS God and he is the *manifestation* of God – the exact imprint so that we can see him and treasure him as well.

Peter tells us that God holds Christ as infinitely precious. That means we should too. We cannot use “precious” as both a noun and a verb. But we can “treasure.” So, that fits better here. It helps us better understand what the Bible wants us to do regarding Christ. We are to understand how precious, how valuable and honored Christ is, and then we treasure him.

Peter uses the plural tense here. It is a plural understanding of you – “y’all” or “you’ns,” if you will. Living stones, not a living stone. This command is directed to the Church, not to merely the individual believer. Together We understand how precious Jesus Christ is, and we treasure Him. He is our treasure. Treasuring Christ together is intended to be the first, last, and every in-between act of the heart of the Church. Understanding the preciousness of Jesus together and making Him our greatest treasure.

Several years ago, I had the pleasure to lead groups of teenagers and adults many times to a northern city in Peru. We would come and help a local church there as well as serve in a school connected to the church. Each evening, we would meet with the Peruvian congregation and worship together. We would sing in Spanish and then any word spoken was translated until the sermon. The preacher would preach entirely in Spanish and then we would get a translated version later back at our lodging compound. However, it was clear during the worship. Even though we did not really share a language, we shared a Treasure.

I think too many people in churches today have neglected their shared Treasure and instead have gotten too sidetracked with having to translate to others what they believe should be considered precious. It ends up in confusion and with hurt feelings because people focused on trying to convince people to value these things that were foreign heart languages to them. Instead, we should be spending all of our time sharing a passion for our shared Treasure, Jesus Christ.

### **More Than Knowing It, Showing It**

The Apostle Peter also makes it clear in the text that treasuring Christ is more than merely knowing that Jesus is precious. It starts there, knowing that Jesus is precious. But then it must become something that we are convinced of and then acted upon.

In verses 2-3, Peter writes: “Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up into your salvation, if you have tasted that the Lord is good.” Take note of the words “desire” and “tasted.” Desire the milk of God’s word, because in God’s word you taste the goodness of the Lord Jesus himself. When you read Peter’s words here, you should be struck by them. These are not just knowing words. These are emotion and action words. These are words that make you feel something as you read them.

You see, knowing that the Lord is good and tasting that the Lord is good are two different things. They are not the same. Imagine you are making supper for your family of, oh, I don’t know, say four. Three of the four are excited about the new recipe but the fourth is more persnickety. They come and say, “Will that be any good?” And despite never tasting it, you reply, “Of course it is good.” Well, later, after you’ve tasted it for yourself, now you know that it is good, and you are convinced that the even the picky eater will enjoy it and be satisfied.

To be clear, knowing is involved. But being a Christian must mean so much more than simply knowing things about Jesus. To treasure Jesus must come from experience that leaves you full of heart and very satisfied and content in Him. If you treasure Jesus above everything, you will find yourself feeling satisfied and content even when the situation is not easy or fun.

To live is Christ and to die is gain. That statement is true because Jesus Christ is more valuable to us than anything this world has to offer. I remember singing a song a long time ago and the lyrics said, “This world has nothing for me, and this world has everything. All that I could want and nothing that I need.” Our old selves, our old, pre-salvation hearts were convinced that this world contained the most valuable things. Excitement. Pleasure. Influence. Popularity. Acceptance. Wealth. But ultimately, we realize that those things still leave a heart empty, so when we receive a new heart through salvation, that new heart understands and feels the value of Christ. And then because of the understanding and experiencing the value of Christ, we then see the world differently. We see it through His eyes and we approach it and interact with it for His sake.

Peter tells us in verse 1 that this act of treasuring Jesus changes how you act. “Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander.” You see, when believers treasure Christ above all, there is no need to deceive, to trick. There is no need to pretend. Why would there be? Why be sneaky when you have an infinite treasure that satisfies all of your needs? Why would you ever envy anyone or be jealous of anyone else? We can find every important valuable thing in Christ.

Why would you slander anyone or be malicious? Why would you talk about someone behind their back to anyone for any negative reason at all if you truly treasure Christ? What vengeful desire does Christ not overcome? When you treasure Christ, you develop a Spirit-given gift, the ability to be free from sin’s grasp.

### **Treasuring Christ is the Mark of a New People**

In a way, treasuring Christ defines a new race of people. Now, I get that is sort of a hot-button word, it is loaded. It can trigger some of you. Before you meltdown, remember that this idea and this word is one that Peter uses here in the text. In verse 9: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Peter uses three significant words here: race, nation, people. Race is translated from the Greek word *genos*, from which we get the word “genealogy.” Peter uses *ethnos*, from which we get the words “ethnic” or “ethnicity.” And *laos*, from which we get the word *laity*.

Peter used all three words that Israel used to define herself – race, ethnic nation, and *the* people of God – and then he applied them to the Gentiles and Jews who treasure Christ. He applied them to us. He applied them to the church.

The church should treasure Christ and by doing so, Christ creates a new people-group. This concept of what the church is supposed to be should be paradigm-shifting for some of us today. A lot of people do not view the church as *genos, ethnos, and laos*. They do not see the church as a new people-group, created and assembled by Christ.

They see church as a collection of things and stuffs and ways. Things to do. Stuff to value. Ways to worship. None of that is *genos, ethnos, and laos*. None of that is race, nation, and people. Having this view, that the church is a service industry that is meet our needs, fill our tanks, rub our backs and necks and feet, fill our tummies, and be a de-facto social club is all worldly understanding. It is treating the church like a grocery store or a department store. Don't find what you're looking for? Try another one. This one isn't making you feel all the warm fuzzies, then look somewhere else. "My momma told me, you better, shop around." Except the church is to a gathered group of believers who have been knit together by Christ and crafted into a new people-group.

I said this before several weeks ago when we started this series. I asked you why you think you are here at First Baptist Church of Martinsburg. I asked you to consider the reasons why. There are all sorts of reasons given as to why people go to church. Some like the music. Others are there because of the friends. Some grew up there. Others like the preaching. Some like some specific ministry or outreach of the church. And they act under the impression that they are there because they looked around and decided for themselves to go.

It is not the pastor or the worship or a friend or a ministry or even a history that brought you to First Baptist Church of Martinsburg, West Virginia. It was God who did that. You are here because it is a divine appointment. It was God in Christ that made you a part of the Church Universal. And it was God in Christ that made you part of the church here today. Christ did this because He is hand-crafting a new people-group.

So you sitting here today, if you know Jesus, you are a chosen race, a holy nation, a people for his possession. And the supreme trait of this new race, this new people-group is to treasure Christ together. When we do this, when we treasure Christ above all other things, it transforms us and the world around us.

It exposes the differences that alienate us from one another as being sinful, things that we value more than Christ. We are not blind to our differences when we treasure Christ together. Instead, it makes us realize the value of the diversity of the body of Christ. If you have ever been mad in church because there were all these new people and you didn't like it, you were treasuring something other than Christ.

### **A Heart to be Shared**

Finally, Peter points out that this heart action of treasuring Christ is meant to be shared. Verse 9: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, *so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*”

We treasure Him for all of the precious, excellent things – his death for our sins, his resurrection for our victory, his glorious work in building a new race of people who come together and treasure Him above everything. That is the clear purpose of the congregation – to proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” We exist to spread the passion for God's supremacy in everything for the joy of everyone everywhere through Jesus Christ, by treasuring Christ together.