

Armagh Baptist Church Bible Studies

Wednesday 2nd June 2010 – 8:00pm

1 Peter 2:4-10 – ‘We are Living Stones in a Spiritual Temple’

Introduction

I want to begin tonight by getting you to think about the Old Testament Temple for a moment or two:

- (i) David planned it and prepared materials for it. It was based on the layout of the old Tabernacle – the temporary tent that went with them in the desert.
- (ii) Solomon built it and overlaid it all with gold. It was a magnificent building
- (iii) Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, destroyed the Jerusalem Temple in 587BC – He had it burnt to the ground.
- (iv) Then the Jews returned from Exile in Babylon, under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah about 520BC, and with encouragement from Haggai and Zechariah they rebuilt the altar and the Temple: a more basic building.
- (v) In Jesus’ time, Herod up-dated, up-graded, renovated and improved the Temple in Jerusalem, to something of its former glory.
- (vi) But in 70AD, within a generation, the Temple and Jerusalem was raised to the ground by the Roman Armies, who over-ran Jerusalem at that time.
- (vii) Peter wrote his letters in 63AD. It was just a year before the Fire of Rome, and about 7 years before the overthrow of Jerusalem and the Destruction of the Temple.

But you’d nearly think Peter knew it was going to happen!

Did Peter remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:1-3, 15 & 25?

Did he realise that those prophecies were soon going to come true and the Temple would be no more?

A. First of all, the central feature of Judaism was going to be destroyed. Old Testament sacrifices would be over! How would true religion, and the worship of the true God, continue without the Temple and all its sacrifices?

B. Secondly, bear in mind that Peter was writing to believers who were scattered in Northern Turkey. Many of them were of a Jewish background. But because of their geographical distance from Jerusalem, they had always felt cut-off from the Temple in Jerusalem – even though it was supposed to be the central focus of their faith – with its place of sacrifice.

Peter writes in ch.2 to give them New Testament teaching on the Temple. If the Temple had been so important in the Old Testament Hebrew faith, why was there no Temple now? Where is the N.T. Temple? What is the N.T. Temple? If the Word of God endures forever (1:25), why did the Temple of which it speaks, come to an end? Let’s try to answer that tonight:

1. Jesus Himself is the Central Focus of N.T. Faith (2:4f)

‘As you come to Him, the Living Stone...’

‘Rejected by men’ (cf Isaiah 53:3)

‘but Chosen by God’ (1 Peter 1:20)

‘and Precious to Him’ (Matt 3:17).

(i) We don’t need to travel to Jerusalem to a stone Temple, or even to a great Cathedral, or to an altar to make any kind of a sacrifice. No, we only need to go to Jesus Christ – to a Living Saviour: *‘As you come to Him!’* Jesus fulfils and supersedes the Temple in every way (Matt 12:6) – so now we come to Him! We don’t go to any building – now we come to Him!

- His body was the Temple of God’s glory (John 1:14)

- He was the true high priest of God, come to offer a perfect sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 4:14-16)

- He was himself the Lamb for the sacrifice (John 1:29)

- It’s by his blood that we are cleansed (1 John 1:7)

- He opened up the way into the Holy of Holies

(Matt 27:51, Heb 10:19-25)

(ii) Remember Jesus said, *‘On this rock I will build my church’* (Matt 16:18) Peter knew exactly who Jesus was talking about! He had no allusions that this statement referred to Him! When Peter replied by saying, *‘You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God’* Peter was sure that rock was Jesus (v16). Paul came to the same conclusion in 1 Cor 3:10-11 – *‘For no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.’*

(iii) But He’s not a lifeless rock – He’s a living stone (1 Peter 2:4).

He is our Rock, the foundation stone of our faith. We need to be building our lives upon Him. (Cf. Matt 7:24-29 – The Wise and Foolish Builders).

But not only is Jesus a Living Stone, and in so many ways supersedes the Temple, read on...!

2. We Ourselves are Living Stones in a Spiritual Temple (vs.5-7)

‘You also, like Living Stones, are being built into a Spiritual House to be a Holy Priesthood!’ (v.5)

Cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17 – ‘You are that Temple!’

(i) So again, we don’t have to go to Jerusalem to a stone Temple; and we don’t need any great Cathedral-like structure in which to worship God. True believers, the people of God, can worship God anywhere, because... **we are** the Temple of the Living God, right now.

While Jesus was on earth, his body was the Temple of the Living God.

He was indwelt by God – He was full of God’s glory!

But Jesus has gone back to heaven now, and there is no Temple in Jerusalem now, so where does God live on earth now?

Ans. He lives in his people (believers) – God indwells **us** by His Holy Spirit!

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit of God filled the N.T. Church for the first time – some 3000 people were filled with the Spirit that day. But every time somebody has got saved since, it's like another Living Stone has been cemented into the Church – that individual has been filled with the glory of God's Holy Spirit, and so the whole church (made up of believers) is indwelt by God, by His Holy Spirit – so **we are** the dwelling place of God on earth now! *'You are the Temple of the Living God!'* (1 Cor 3:17).

So there is no physical temple now in the N.T.; there is only a spiritual one. It's not dead stones, lifeless stones, now – we are living stones in a living temple – we are indwelt by Divine power.

So the Church of God is not a building – The Church of God is the people – 'the saved' – the believers in Jesus Christ: Those who've entrusted their lives to Him, and built their lives upon Him as their Rock - foundation stone.

3. So as the Temple of God, how are we described here?

A Chosen People (v.9)

Here again, Peter reminds us just as he did in 1:1-2 that we are chosen by God, we're not discarded as worthless! As a people, we are God's chosen people – we're not rejected, but selected and adopted - as His!

A Royal Priesthood (v.9) or a Holy Priesthood (v.5)

We are kings – children of the King of kings and Lord of lords – royalty! But we are holy priests too – our function is to minister to people on God's behalf – in terms of service. And to come to God on behalf of people – in terms of prayer. In that sense we fulfil a priestly function – as go-betweens!

A Holy Nation (v.9)

Regardless of our earthly nationalities – whether we're British, Irish, or whatever, now we belong to the Kingdom of God! – And that allegiance must be more important than any old political ties now!

A People Belonging to God; who were once not a people at all (v.9-10)

Once we were in darkness – we were a non-people (nobodies)!
Once we were objects of wrath; now we are objects of God's mercy!
Now He has called us out of darkness into His wonderful light (the Gospel)!

4. But as the Temple of God, what is our Function?

(i) **To be a Holy Priesthood (v.5)** – that means all of us, not just the clergy!

Priests served God in His Temple – we are in the Church to serve Him!
Priests minister to people on God's behalf – our service, witness, outreach, good works are to benefit those around us, in service to God.
Priests come to God on the behalf of people – sinners can't approach God directly, because of sin in their hearts. It may be a case that they don't pray, or they can't pray, or they just won't pray. But we can pray for them!

(ii) To offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ (v.5)

Now this does not mean that we are to offer sacrifices for sin today, in order to get forgiveness, or cleansing or as any part of confession. No...

- Jesus has done all that for us, once and for all! (Heb 10:11-14)

- All such sacrifices are no longer acceptable to God today.

Therefore there is no longer any need for official priests as a separate office or rank within the church, and there is no need for masses which are meant to be a re-enactment of the sacrifice of Christ for sin.

So what are the *spiritual* sacrifices that God is looking from us now?

(i) Romans 12:1-2 – Our bodies/lives dedicated to his service.

(ii) Hebrews 13:15 – The praise and worship of our lips.

(iii) Hebrews 13:16 – The good works we do for others, now we are saved.

(iv) Phil 4:10-20 – The money/gifts we give to God's work and his servants.

(v) Romans 15:16 – Even the people we win for Christ!

Those are the functions we are to perform in God's Kingdom – in His Church – in His Spiritual Temple, as the priesthood of all believers – as living stones in His Temple.

Conclusion:

So are you functioning properly?

Are we in His Spiritual Temple?

Are we in His Church? Are we in Christ?

What have we done with Christ?

Have we built our lives upon Him, the Living Stone, the Rock?

Notice as we close:

(v.6) – The open offer and promise of the Gospel – to trust in Him.

(v.7) – Many believe he is precious, but many are still rejecting Him!

(v.8) – Many stumble over Him: Faith in Christ – can it really be that simple?

(v.8) – Some have just disobeyed the message: that's what it boils down to.

All we are called to do is trust in Him; come out of our darkness, and come into his wonderful light! Wouldn't it be great if we as a church were given the privilege of being more and more a part of that task in this area in the days to come? Inviting people out of darkness into his wonderful light!

