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THE REJECTED STONE.

"A tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation."

THE word of God compares men to builders. They are either wise or foolish builders, according to the foundation on which they are building. There are those who are building on a rock, and those who are building on the sand: and in the day when God's judgments are made manifest, every man's building will be tried: it will then be seen of what sort it really is, and what it is resting on.

We see builders sometimes throwing aside a stone and refusing to use it: it appears to their eye unsound or unsightly, and they judge that it would be unsafe to build on it, or that the appearance of the building would be injured by it. This was precisely the case with Jesus. God presented him to Israel as his foundation-stone, "a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation" (Isa. xxviii. 16). But those builders cast him aside as a refuse stone. They thought it a foolish thing to trust all their salvation and all their hopes on him, in whom they could see neither strength nor beauty. The stone was disallowed of men, although chosen of God and precious.

In the twelfth chapter of St. Mark's Gospel, the Lord Jesus utters a parable, and reminds the Jews of the scripture which speaks of the rejected stone, to show that man had always rejected what God had set up for his blessing. It is an awful picture of what man's will is. Whenever man has exercised his will, it has been against God; and this is what man boasts of—his free-will. Man does not like that God should interfere with him. In this respect he is like the devil, who cried out to Jesus, "Let us alone" (Mark i. 24). It is a torment to man that God should put any restraint on his will: and so entirely bent is he on having his own will, and his own way, that while he thinks it quite fitting that every one should do what is right in his own eyes, he will not allow the right of God's having a will at all. When it came to the point whether God should have his will or man his, man did not hesitate to put to death Jesus the Son of God, whom God had sent. It did indeed come to this point; there was choice given to man between Jesus and Barabbas,—between the man approved of God, and a robber and murderer,—and they said, "Not this man but Barabbas." This is what man did when God let him have his own way. And do not all men desire to have their own way? Is it not what they call liberty? and yet it is the most wretched slavery, as Jesus says, "He that committeth sin is the servant of sin." To have one's own will, is to be the servant of sin; to do God's will, is to abide for ever.

But God has not left the matter here. If man has shown that

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his will is in the murder of the beloved of God, God has shown his will in the raising of him up from the dead, and exalting him to the highest glory. Men really did *see* the desire of their hearts when they saw Jesus hanging on the cross, but they *saw* no farther. All that is further known is known by faith, by believing the *testimony* concerning him, such as the apostle Peter gave: "Be it known unto you all, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone, which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Jesus is not now *seen*, but he is *preached*; and those who *believe* on him, own him to be God's chief corner-stone, although he is man's *rejected stone*.

First, as the stone, he is *the only foundation*.—"Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Jesus the Christ." For he is God's only Son,—the only one who could uphold that which was built upon him. No creature could do this: not the highest angel. Peter confessed him as the Christ—the Son of the living God: and Jesus said, Upon this rock will I build my church. This is a secure foundation, because he made all things, and upholds all things. But still this alone would not do for us, for we are sinners; and although we might believe that Jesus could uphold by his power, yet this would give us sinners no confidence, as to the putting away of our sins. But him whom God has laid for a foundation, he himself has made his soul an offering for sin. Man, because *he hated righteousness*, nailed Jesus to the cross; but God had him nailed to the cross because *he hated sin* and to shew his love to the sinner. How marvellous! the cross shows man's love of sin and hatred of God, and God's hatred of sin and love of the sinner. What a sure foundation then is Christ crucified, for a sinner to build on; for the holiness and love of God warrant the security of him that resteth upon it. Remember this is not the foundation which man would lay—Christ crucified is the *rejected stone*. It is humbling to man's pride, not to find a foundation in any thing of himself, or in which he takes a part. Many will own that they are sinners, and that they ought to break off from their sins, and to serve God and to pray to him. But reformation, or service, or prayer, are not "*disallowed of men*." Most men will allow them to be fit and proper; but Jesus and his cross are *disallowed of men*. Nothing whatever on which men set any value, can with any reason be called a *rejected stone*. If you are building on anything but on Jesus, you are not building on God's foundation. It is marvellous in our eyes that the whole work of salvation is in another person, and in a way that the wisdom of man never would look for it.

But secondly, this rejected stone, is *a living stone*. A stone to us is the emblem of death: but it is the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes, that the only one who had life in himself, is man crucified. But God raised him up; and he is now preached as the life, the only life of blessedness; so that no one whatever who does not derive life from him can be blessed. Life is not here, it is at the right hand of God; there alone is man to be seen in glory, honour, and incorruptibility. And this is what God commands to be preached—Jesus risen—Jesus and the resurrection. And what a sure foundation is this—to get life out of death, life from Jesus after he has borne the judgment of the cross. This is life from God to God—life everlasting. The believer in Jesus hath everlasting life, because judgment is passed, and death too in Jesus: and he is one with him who has borne them for him. Faith comes to Jesus as *a living stone*.

Again, he is *a precious stone*—God's precious stone, though man's rejected stone. Yes; he whom the builders cast aside as a refuse stone, was the only precious one in God's sight. He is indeed precious to God for what he is in himself; for God only knows him as he is in himself. No one knoweth the Son but the Father. But he is precious too to God for his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross.—“Therefore (he says) does my Father love me, because I lay down my life.” And is it not marvellous in our eyes, that one and the same thing should be precious to God and to a ruined sinner? Many things are precious to men which are not so to God—silver and gold for example; but there is no power of redemption in them; but there is in the blood of Jesus: and therefore it is called *precious* blood. It is precious to God, and precious too to him that believeth. God and the believer can delight in one and the same thing—they have one mind about Jesus' blood. The precious blood at once meets the requirements of God's holiness, and the necessity of the sinner's condition. And then even the sinner who knows the preciousness of the blood of Jesus in cleansing his sin away, lives to know him who has shed it; so that he who is chosen of God and precious, is precious also to him that believeth.

Then again he is *the chief corner stone*—the head of the corner. He is not only the foundation of blessing, but the one alone who keeps and secures it. He is the key-stone of the arch which holds it all together: as it is written, “He shall bring forth the head-stone with shoutings, Grace, grace unto it!” In the day when Jesus shall appear, then it will be known that there is nothing really valuable but in him. The universal song of angels, as well as the redeemed sinners, will be “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.” Yes; none of these will ever be held to the glory of God, or for the benefit of others, but

by him who is still despised and rejected by man. It is a solemn thought, that no blessing which the heart of man craves can be found out of Jesus. And herein is faith, to own that it is so now before it is manifested to sight. As he himself says, "Whosoever shall *confess* me before men, him will I confess before my Father in heaven." And this confession is to *own* Jesus now in every title and character in which he has been and is still *disowned* and rejected in the world.

Lastly, the rejected stone is the "stone cut out without hands," which is to smite the image of worldly glory which King Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream. (Dan. ii.) This world's glory and honour continues, because men have rejected and do still reject Jesus. But he speaks of the stone which the builders rejected thus:—"Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall it shall grind him to powder." Jesus is to the Jews a stone of stumbling: they entirely reject his claim to being the Christ of God. But the Gentiles, who have now the power of the world, say he is the Christ, though they do not confide in him for salvation: they say they believe, but in heart they deny him, for they do not believe that his blood alone cleanses from sin,—they think that they can do something towards saving themselves. Neither do they own his Lordship by obedience to his will: their laws are quite contrary to his laws, although they say to him, Lord, Lord! It is indeed marvellous to think that Jesus, the rejected stone, is to be manifested as the stone to fall upon and crush every thing that is high and lifted up, and to grind it to powder. What will man's strength, or wisdom, or honour, or riches, profit in that day? It is plainly written, "The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and *every bondman*, and *every freeman* hid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" The day is coming which will try the foundation of every thing and every one. The stone will either fall on you, or you being founded on it shall never be confounded. The Lord give you grace to discern between the sand and the rock.

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