

Communion - Friday Service

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Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] For those of you who perhaps did not realize that Alistair I. McLeod would be with us from tomorrow, I trust that in the course of what has gone of the service you've been able to recover from your disappointment. Be assured that I also would have much preferred to have had Alistair preaching this evening, but that was not possible. Now I should, in saying that, stress that preaching is seldom a burden, and often it is a pleasure. And in that task, part of the challenge is to select an appropriate text or theme. Now that's all the more challenging on a one-off occasion, such as this evening. In the regular Sunday pulpit ministry, if we're going through a book, Acts or Daniel or some kind of theme that is being followed, it's more straightforward perhaps to determine what is to be preached on. As I say on a one-off occasion, the challenge is to find something that would be suitable and helpful for the occasion. And as I was pondering on this earlier in the week, I was in parallel reading an article concerning the traditional Scottish communion season. Sometimes we might describe it as the traditional Highland communion season, and the particular emphasis of each day over the course of the weekend.

So on Thursday, it was a fast day where the emphasis was on acknowledging, confessing, and repenting of sin. While Friday, today, was known as, described as, and indeed in some parts still considered as a day for examination. But that examination was not intended to be morbidly introspective, but rather an examination with a view to identifying marks of grace for the encouragement of the believer as he would prepare to participate in the Lord's Supper. And in that context of the purpose of Friday, you had, and still have in some congregations, the question meeting. And at the question meeting, a verse of Scripture was selected, and men of mature Christian experience would speak to the text, and often would include some words of personal testimony. And the article that I was reading gave some examples of the text that might serve as the subject matter of the question meeting.

And one of the texts cited caught my attention. And the text is as follows. Now, to you who believe, this stone is precious. As I say, in the article, it gave some examples of texts that would be suitable for the purpose. And this was one of them. And as I say, I was drawn to it. And to be honest, it was something as almost random as that, that led me to think, well, that would be something suitable and helpful to preach on this evening. Now, one of the reasons, and forgive me for this rather long introduction, but bear with me, one of the reasons I was drawn to this text is that it appeared to provide a welcome opportunity to dwell on the preciousness of Christ. Now, to you who believe, this stone is precious. We've read the passage. This stone, this cornerstone, Jesus Christ, He's precious. And what better way to spend this Friday evening preparatory service than meditating on, and indeed enjoying the preciousness of Jesus Christ?

Now, as I began my study of the passage, and especially the verse in question, little did I know the adventure it was to be. Now, my first task was to find the verse. Remember, I simply saw the verse quoted, and it wasn't, the article didn't identify where it was. Now, I had a rough idea of where I would find it, but I confess to not knowing the exact location of the verse. And as I scoured 1 Peter chapter 2 to find the verse, I couldn't find it.

Now, I should explain that I was searching in the Bible that I use for study purposes, which is the English Standard Version. I have to say, I find it the one that is most helpful for me, certainly. And so, that's the Bible I was using. And as I searched through that chapter, I couldn't find the verse. And this was rather bemusing. Now, I soon discovered the reason why I couldn't find the verse. And the reason was that the ESV translation of the text is markedly different to the NIV, the church Bible, and indeed the AV before it. The NIV really just follows the AV in this particular occasion. So, just to illustrate that, in the passage that we've read there in 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 7, the first sentence of that verse in the NIV, what we've read, is as follows, Now, to you who believe, this

stone is precious. And for those of us brought up with the King James Version, well, that rings true to what we're familiar with in that particular version. To those who believe, or to you who believe, this stone is precious. But now listen to how this verse, or this part of the verse, is translated in the English Standard Version. It is as follows, So, the honor is for you who believe.

[6 : 01] So, you notice there quite a marked difference. On the one hand, in the NIV and in the King James, Now, to you who believe, this stone is precious. But then we have this alternative translation.

And I should stress, this is simply a matter of translation. There's no textual issue here. It's purely one of translation. In the ESV, so the honor, or preciousness, if you wish, is for you who believe. So, you can, I hope, appreciate my difficulty, and indeed, to begin with, my disappointment. See, mentally, having seen this text in the article and having been enthused by the possibilities that it afforded for spending some time dwelling on how precious Jesus Christ is, I was stymied by discovering that there was certainly an alternative way in which the original Greek could be translated, translated, and the way that the ESV chooses to do so. And that alternative translation, far from focusing in the first instance on the preciousness of Christ, highlights rather the honor or the preciousness of the believer. So, it is really a marked difference depending on how the words are translated. So, what to do? Well, one possibility was to find another text. And the thought did cross my mind, I confess. That seemed one way of getting around the difficulty. But I decided to persevere and to explore further the reasons for the divergent translations, and more importantly, establish what God is saying to us in this text. Now, my happy conclusion, which I'm going to reveal to you at the beginning, and then I trust work my way through to explaining how I came to this happy conclusion. But I'll tell you what the conclusion is at the start. My happy conclusion is that while I do opt for the ESV translation on the basis, and we'll look at this in a moment, that it appears to do greater justice to the original, this opting for that translation, far from denying us the opportunity to appreciate or dwell on the preciousness of Christ, which was my desire, allows us to do so in a grander and more wonderful way. Now, at the moment, I'm simply stating that. I haven't explained how that is so. I'm stating the conclusion, and now we're going to work our way towards that conclusion. So, bear with me.

I've stated my case that I consider that this verse, as the ESV translated, where the focus isn't in the first instance on the stone being precious, Christ being precious, but the believer enjoying honor or worth or preciousness. But even though that is so, I want to establish how that, in a very interesting way, far from taking away from our appreciation of the preciousness of Christ in an interesting way, and I think in a challenging and helpful way, highlights and magnifies, if that is possible, the honor or preciousness of the Lord. What do we need to do in order to make our way to that conclusion? And I hope, justify the conclusion. Well, I think we need to answer two questions. First of all, very briefly, answer the question, well, what is it actually that Peter says here in verse 7 of chapter 2? And then move on to what will occupy more of our time, as it ought to do, is what does Peter mean in what he's saying? First of all, what does Peter say in here? I'm referring to the issue of establishing the correct translation. We've already noted the two alternative translations. I'll repeat them again, because I've got it in front of me, but you're having to keep a mental note of these things. And so, let me just repeat again the two alternatives. You have what we've read, what's in front of you. That's a little bit easier for you to keep a handle on, because it's in front of you. We have there in verse 7 in our church Bible, these words at the beginning of the verse, now to you who believe this stone is precious, clearly referring to Jesus Christ. But then in the ESV, which you don't have in front of you, most of you, so try and keep a hold of this, a mental hold of this, that part of the verse is translated as follows. So, the honor is for you who believe. Okay, so try and keep these two possibilities in your mind. Now, literally, the Greek that is being translated, or that the translators are endeavoring in good faith, of course, to translate to the best of their ability, literally, it is as follows, therefore, or now, therefore, the honor to you who believe. Now, the word stone that we have in the NIV simply isn't in the original. Now, that isn't a criticism of the NIV.

Sometimes it's necessary in order to explain what is being said, to introduce a word that's not illegitimate. But just, it's worth making the point, the word stone simply isn't in the origin.

[11 : 20] The key question, as we would endeavor to determine what is the most appropriate translation, the key question concerns the word translated honor or precious. In the NIV, the word used is precious. In the ESV, the word translated or used is honor. But the key question is, who does this word refer to? That's perhaps obvious already from simply presenting to you the

alternative. Does the word honor or precious refer to Christ as per the NIV, or does it refer to the believer as per the ESV? Now, both are possible, but the ESV translation is, in my very humble opinion, to be preferred for two reasons. One is grammatical, and the other is context. Now, you're just going to have to trust me on the grammatical argument, which is a very dangerous thing to do, but on occasions such as this doesn't allow us to delve into it. So, forgive me for asking you to do such a thing as trust me on that. But the contextual argument is more accessible. Notice in verse 6 what immediately precedes what we have in verse 7, which is our primary concern. In verse 6, Peter is quoting from the Old Testament, and we read, See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in Him, the believer who trusts in Him, will never be put to shame.

So, that is immediately before the text in question, you have this statement that the believer will never be put to shame. And then Peter continues, now or therefore, I think would be more helpful, therefore, therefore, far from being put to shame, the believer, the one who trusts, will receive honor.

This is the contrast that is being made. He won't be put to shame. The one who trusts in the cornerstone, he won't be put to shame. To the contrary, he will receive honor. Honor will be due to him.

You could also notice in verse 7 itself a contrast that is perhaps helpful to notice in establishing what we're saying. You have, first of all, this statement, if we follow the ESV translation, as I'm suggesting, you have the statement that the one who believes receives honor. But then the verse goes on to contrast the one who believes with the one who does not believe. And what does he receive? Well, he receives shame, but he stumbles. He stumbles on Jesus Christ. So, the believer receiving honor, the unbeliever receiving shame. So, this is what Peter is saying, following, as I say, this translation that is opted for in the English Standard Version.

Therefore, the honor to you who believe, or so the honor is for you who believe. But we have to move on quickly to the next question, which is the more important question, having established the first one, is what does Peter mean by that? What does it mean when Peter says, so the honor is for you who believe? In order to answer that question, what does Peter mean, we have to ask three further questions, very briefly. And as we answer them, I trust we'll establish what Peter means. The first question is, what is it that the believer is granted, as stated in this text? The second question is, what is the means whereby the believer is granted what he is granted? That's a bit of a tongue twister, but I don't want to give the answer away right at the beginning, though it's very clear. So, what is it that the believer is granted?

[15 : 16] Secondly, what is the means used whereby the believer is granted what he is granted? And then finally, how does this work? How does this come together? Now, that question will only become comprehensible when we arrive at it. First of all then, we're trying to establish what Peter means by this statement. Now, so the honor is for you who believe. What does he mean by that? First of all, what is it that the believer is granted? Well, the answer is clear. The believer is granted honor.

The believer is granted honor. Now, so the honor, preciousness, the honor is for you who believe. This is what the believer is granted, honor. Now, at this point, I would encourage you to listen well, and to listen good. You may well be, as I am, a miserable sinner. You may be a stumbling and a bungling Christian, as many of us often are. You may often be a disobedient disciple, but Peter assures you, as a believer, the honor is to you. The honor is for you. Now, this word honor can be translated precious, as it is in the NIV, and it carries the idea of highly esteemed or of great worth. So, what is Peter saying? What is Peter saying that we enjoy as believers? Well, he says to you, he says, you are a man of honor. You are precious. You are a woman of great worth. Or we could say this, very relevant in the context, particularly in our tradition. As we approach the Lord's table, we can say this, you are worthy. You are worthy. And what a wonderful and a fitting truth to reflect on as we look forward to participate in the Lord's Supper. We are worthy. Now, for the moment, we're not explaining how it is that we are worthy, but simply noting what it is that Peter states.

That is what he states. To you is the honor. For you is the honor, those who believe. Also, just very in the passing note that the overall context of what Peter is saying, the context of the whole letter, is also instructive. The letter is addressed to believers who are suffering, who are suffering greatly. Believers who are rejected, who are belittled, who are marginalized, who are persecuted by the world. And Peter assures them, the honor is to you.

Not only does he assure them that the time will come when they will receive the crown of glory that he does assure them of a little later on in the letter as they look forward to the Lord's return, but he says, today, now, the honor is to you. Others don't consider you honorable. Others think that you are of no repute, but that is not God's opinion. You are of great honor. So, that is what the believer is granted. But that takes us on to the next question I had introduced, and that is, what is the means whereby the believer is granted, what he is granted? This honor. How does that happen?

[18 : 31] How does it come about that we receive this honor? Well, the answer is clear from the text. We receive this honor by means of faith, by believing. Honor to you, those who believe.

Belief is the means that God has established. Now, what does this believing involve or look like? Well, so much could be said, and so many angles from which this question could be tackled. But this evening, we will make use of the manner in which believing is described by Peter himself in the preceding verses. You see, in verse 7, he speaks of those who believe. He just takes it as a given that his readers will know who he's talking about and what that means. But in the previous verses, he has, in a sense, described what is involved in believing. And the picture that he uses, and as I say, to describe what is involved in believing can be looked at from different angles. But the picture that Peter uses here is the picture of coming to Jesus. Notice that in verse 4, as you come to him, the living stone. And then he continues. So, to believe is equivalent to, or certainly involves, at the very least we can say that, involves coming to Jesus. Coming to Jesus.

Now, the background here of the language used is, or the purpose is to contrast with the Old Testament picture of believers coming to Jerusalem, coming to the temple, coming to the altar in that way, coming to God's presence. And now, Peter says, we also come, but we come, not a temple built by human hands. We come to the living cornerstone that is Jesus Christ and the spiritual house that he is the foundation of. So, this idea of believing involving coming to Jesus is language that helpfully emphasizes the experiential or relational aspect of faith in Jesus Christ. We must come to him and enter into a relationship with him. But as we consider what Peter explains is involved in coming to him, we will better appreciate in turn what it means to believe. Remembering that it is belief that is the means whereby we receive this honor. So, what does Peter say regarding what is involved in coming to Jesus? Well, I think we can see or identify three elements in verses 4 to 5 about coming to Jesus.

First of all, we come to him as those who share the Father's opinion and description of him, of Jesus. Notice how in the text we are told that in the sight of God the Father, Jesus is the chosen and precious one. Notice there in verse 4, as you come to him, the living stone rejected by man, but chosen by God and precious to him. In God's sight, who is Jesus? Well, Jesus is the chosen one, the one who is precious to the Father. And as we come to Jesus, we do so sharing in the Father's opinion. We believe with the Father that Jesus is the chosen one, the chosen and promised Messiah, and we share the Father's estimation of Jesus as being precious. The Father considers Jesus precious, and we, as we come to Jesus, share in that opinion. Jesus is precious to us. And so, I ask you that question. Is that true for you?

Can you say for yourself, yes, this is what I believe, that Jesus, as the Father considers him precious, so he is precious to me? He is of great value. I value and esteem him as altogether precious and lovely and wonderful. He is precious to me. Coming to Jesus involves sharing the Father's opinion concerning Jesus, but coming to Jesus also involves, in second place, being part of him and vitally connected to him. You see, you have this picture of the spiritual house. You also, in verse 5, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. Jesus is the cornerstone, and you as living stones are being connected to Jesus. Coming to him involves being connected to him.

[23 : 16] To use the language that Paul ordinarily uses when he speaks of the believer as being in Christ, that vital connection to Christ. See, it's not an arm's length thing where we have certain opinions concerning Christ. No, we come to Christ that we would be connected to Christ. And as we are connected to Christ, so we are built up in our faith together with all of God's people. So, coming to him involves sharing God's opinion, the Father's opinion concerning who Jesus is. It involves being vitally connected to Jesus, and finally it involves coming to him in permanent worship and service to offer spiritual sacrifices. We're built up into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Our praise, our prayer, our whole being offered to him in worship.

These are the elements involved in coming to Christ. This is what believing involves. We need to believe in order to receive the honor. Well, what does believing involve? Well, it involves coming to Jesus and coming to him in these connected and complementary ways that we identify. It's not a one-off act of faith, but a life of coming to Jesus day by day and every day. So, this is the means whereby we are granted this honor as we believe. Those who believe are granted this honor to you who believe the honor. The final question, how does this work? How does this work? Now, let me explain the question. We recognize already that the believer is granted honor. We simply stated that. That is what Peter says. Fine. We also have recognized that the means by which this honor is granted is belief or faith. But what's the connection? How is it that believing secures for us this honor that Peter speaks of? Now, the key to answering the question is to return to the second element of what is involved in coming to Jesus that we just noted just a few seconds ago. As you may recall, we said that the second element that Peter describes involved in coming to Jesus is that we would be vitally connected to Jesus, that we would be in Christ as part of this spiritual temple or household. And you see, it is in that coming to Christ that we would be in Christ that we would be connected to Christ. It is in that coming and in that connection that we are granted the honor that Peter refers to. It is as we are in Christ that we become precious and of great worth. Indeed, we become worthy. The honor or the worth that we are granted, that Peter speaks of, that we are in Christ that we are in Christ that we are in Christ that we are in as we are connected to Him. Perhaps if you think of it from the Father's perspective as a means, I hope, of further illustrating this. When the Father sees you, believer, in Christ, what does He see? Or indeed, we might say, who does He see? Well, He sees Jesus because you are in Christ. He sees the preciousness and honor of His own dear Son. The Father's estimate of you as you have come to Christ and as you are coming to Christ and as you are connected to Christ. And as you are connected to Christ, the Father's estimate of you, His opinion of you, is the opinion that He has of His Son, Jesus Christ. That is why Peter is able to say to these poor, struggling believers, still struggling with sin as we struggle with sin, to you the honor, for you the honor. Because of who you are, you are those who believe. You are those who have come to Christ, you are those who are coming to Christ, you are those who are connected to Christ, you are those who are in Christ. And so as He is precious, so you are precious. As He enjoys honor, so you enjoy honor. Now all of this brings me back to where I began and my initial disappointment that the manner in which this verse is translated and that we have opted for would appear, or at that initial point appeared to deny us the opportunity of dwelling on the preciousness of [28 : 20] Christ. As the verse that we are considering explicitly speaks of the honor of the believer, not of Christ, to you who believe the honor. But what have we discovered? Well, I hope we have discovered it. I hope I've been able to explain it or present it in a manner that has been clear. Well, what we've discovered is that this verse implicitly but powerfully deepens our appreciation of the preciousness of Christ. You see, we now can understand that this preciousness is a preciousness that not only can we admire, that is not a bad thing to admire how precious Jesus is, but it is a preciousness that mysteriously but wonderfully we share in as we come to Him. You see, we're not just looking on in odd amazement, how precious is Jesus, which is a good thing to do. But here we discover something we might even say greater, that this preciousness is not only to be admired, but it is something that Jesus graciously and wonderfully shares with us as we are in Him. So, this weekend that begins. The invitation is extended. Let us come to Jesus, sharing the Father's estimation of Jesus as precious and highly esteemed. Let us come seeking to be vitally connected to Jesus. Let us come and offer our lives as a spiritual sacrifice. And as you come, be assured that you are worthy in Him, that you are honorable in Him, that you are precious in Him. Let us pray.