

AS LORD (“consubstantial with the Father” JHWE), Jesus is THE ROCK/CHIEF CORNERSTONE

Dt 32:4, 18, 30-31; 2 Sam 22:32; Ps 18:2; Ps 78:35; Is 28:16;
I Pet 2:5-7; I Cor 10:1-4; Eph 2:20; Mt 16:16-20

I. WORDS MATTER:

- A. Heb *tsur* (in Dt 32) signifies “origin, fountain of being, first cause;” Rabbi Moses ben Maimon said: “He is the first principle, his work is perfect.” “Rock” is a good metaphor for God, for rocks provide materials/nutrients for earthly beings as well as defense, security, protection
- B. Gk *petra* means rock, solid (in NT a translation of Aramaic *Cephas*)

II. GOD IS OUR ROCK

- A. Firm Foundation—“He is the Rock, His work is perfect” (Dt 32:4, 18, 30-31); “For who is God, except the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God?” (II Sam 22:32)—thus we sing: “How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, / Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!”
- B. Progenitor—“the Rock who begot you” (Dt 32:18)—Primary Cause
- C. Presence provides “shadow. . . in a weary land” (Is 32:2)—thus Fanny Crosby: “He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock / That shadows a dry, thirsty land” . . .”

III. JESUS IS THE CORNERSTONE

- A. Prophesied (Ps 118:22—to be rejected by builders), clearly fulfilled by Jesus (Mt 21:42-44)
 1. Psalmist’s “stone” re coming Messiah
 2. Jesus warned against resisting Him, the Messiah
- B. Jesus’ claims
 1. His Person (“rock of offense planted in Zion”—Is 8:14—cited in both Rom 9:33 & I Pet 2:8)
 2. His Words (Mt 7:24-27)
- B. Peter warned against resisting Christ Crucified (Acts 4:11)
- C. Peter (*Petrus*, the “Rock”) Proclaims **THE ROCK** Christ Jesus (I Pet 2:5-8)
 1. Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy (Is 28:8)
 2. Jesus founded Church & IS Her Foundation
 3. Jesus’ followers become “living stones”
 4. Jesus’ message launched in Sion
- D. Paul exegetes/analogizes “rock” in OT (I Cor 10:1-4)—typical rabbinical exposition of text
 1. Israelites baptized unto Moses & Christian baptized unto Christ enter Covenant
 2. Manna eaten in wilderness & now available as “spiritual meat”—NB rabbinical speculation re eternal/supernatural manna & Jesus’ bread of life discourse & Christian understanding of Last Supper (Jn 6:31-59); Supernatural Manna in OT & Supernatural New Manna in Eucharist
 3. Water from rock following Israelites (Jewish traditions re water from rock ever present with them, i.e. Christ) & blood/wine” spiritual drink” flowing from Jesus’ side; wine in Eucharist
 4. Rebelling, Israelites lost Promise & rejecting Jesus as Cornerstone similarly forfeits Promise
- C. Paul explains Jesus is the Cornerstone (Eph 2:19-22)
 1. Fellow citizens in household of God
 2. Resting on apostles
 3. Founded on Christ Jesus, the “chief cornerstone”

IV. JESUS ESTABLISHED HIS CHURCH UPON THE ROCK (Mt 16:16-20)

- A. Rival interpretations of “Rock”:
 1. Peter (*Petrus*) himself, and, subsequently, **apostolic succession** (crucial for Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican communions)
 2. Peter’s *confession/faith*, thus believers’ **faith** (Protestant)
 3. Peter’s LORD: the Living Lord Jesus **Christ** (universal Church consensus re Jesus’ primacy)
- B. Christ’s Church (*ecclesia*) empowered
 1. Church Militant—“the gates of hell shall not prevail”
 2. Church Triumphant—to whom The Keys to the Kingdom are given, “binding & loosing”

T.S. Eliot's "Choruses from *The Rock*"

During the 1930's, T.S. Eliot helped write a play, "The Rock," dealing with the collapse of cultural Christianity so evident in our day—a Church in disarray which "does not seem to be wanted / In country or in suburbs; and in the town / Only for important weddings"—a Church desperately needing to hear the voice of Christ, the "Rock." Lamentably, Eliot sighs, in some lines which I think sum up our century: "the wind shall say: "Here were decent godless people: / Their only monument the asphalt road / And a thousand lost golf balls." Indeed: "The world turns and the world changes, / But one thing does not change. / In all my years, one thing does not change: The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil."

The choruses contain marvelous lines, such as these from the first chorus which confirm what many of us know in our more honest moments: the "progress" we so highly tout and energetically pursue is an illusion, for

"The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to GOD.
Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries
Bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust."

So we're lost and anxious, defeated by our greatest achievements:

"O weariness of men who turn from God
To the grandeur of your mind and the glory of your action,
To arts and inventions and daring enterprises,
To schemes of human greatness thoroughly discredited,
Binding the earth and the water to your service,
Exploiting the seas and developing the mountains,
Dividing the stars into common and preferred,
Engaged in devising the perfect refrigerator,
Engaged in working out a rational morality,
Engaged in printing as many books as possible,
Plotting of happiness and flinging empty bottles,
Turning from your vacancy to fevered enthusiasm
For nation or race or what you call humanity;
Though you forget the way to the Temple,
There is one who remembers the way to your door:
Life you may evade, but Death you shall not.
You shall not deny the Stranger."

In that struggle the Church is called to adhere to the ROCK, to do what can be done in the present moment, to leave the results of the endeavor in His hands, for "the Church must be forever building, and always decaying, and always being restored." What we must do is to preserve our inheritance, to build and re-build the Temple of God. This is because men "constantly try to escape / From the darkness outside and within / By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good." But we must ever remember that "the Son of Man was not crucified once for all, / The blood of the martyrs not shed once for all, / The lives of the Saints not given once for all: But the Son of God is crucified always / And there shall be Martyrs and Saints. / And if blood of Martyrs is to flow on the steps / We must first build the steps; / And if the Temple is to be cast down / We must first build the Temple."