

## **The Preciousness of Christ**

*Rev. J.J. van Ekeveld – 1 Peter 2:7a*

Sing: Psalter 306: 1 – 4

Sing: Psalter 143: 1, 2

Read: 1 Peter 2

Sing: Psalter 83: 1 - 3

Sing: Psalter 124: 1, 2, 3

Sing: Psalter 310: 1, 2, 6

Congregation,

The text for this sermon is 1 Peter 2 verse 7a: *“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.”*

The theme of this sermon is:

### **The Preciousness of Christ.**

1. For whom is He precious? *“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.”*
2. How is He precious? What is precious about Christ?

Our text is taken from the first general epistle of the Apostle Peter. As we read in the introduction of this epistle, he writes to scattered strangers, spread over Minor Asia, which is today’s Turkey. Therefore, Peter did not write to a particular congregation, but to Christians who lived as scattered strangers throughout Asia Minor.

Strangers – if it is well, congregation, then we also have become strangers here below. Then your home is not here below. Instead, you understand something of what is written in Hebrews 11 about the patriarchs, namely, that they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Why? They had seen something of the city which has foundations. When you have seen something of that, when you have tasted something of the blessedness of the communion with God, you discover how poor life is without God. You become a “stranger here

below.” Even though you continue to have a task and calling here, to which you are called to be as faithful as the angels are in heaven, yet there is a yearning for God, a longing for eternal communion with God. And this is sure: those who have longing for heaven will arrive at their home above.

Spiritual strangers, in the deepest sense of the word, are homesick people; they know a deep longing for God and Christ, a yearning for the place where God is all and in all.

It is a not a good sign when we feel quite at home in this world. It is a bad sign if we can get along with this world, and are at ease with a life of world conformity in the way we think and behave. Shouldn't it be obvious when we have become strangers in this world with a deep longing for God? It will be noticeable in your whole conduct of life, won't it?

Therefore, the chapter of our text refers to the strangers whom Peter addresses in this epistle in different ways. They are referred to as newborn babes that desire the sincere milk of the Word (that is, the pure milk of the Word of God) so that they may grow and be nourished and matured by it.

Babies are a beautiful image of God's children. Most often, the first thing a baby does when it is born is cry. When God begins to work in someone's life – that is the new birth or regeneration – there will be a Godly sorrow. A baby immediately desires the mother's milk. His or her little mouth immediately seeks mother's breast. This is an image of regeneration, which causes one to hunger and thirst for the Word of the living God; they will intensely desire the milk of the Word.

Peter does not only refer to God's children as strangers and as newborn infants, but also as living stones that are built on the chief Corner Stone, Jesus Christ. This is an image of the temple. The temple was built with stones which had to be hewn from rocks. Since the rocks were rugged, these roughly quarried stones had to be chiseled to make them smooth and square so that they would fit into the temple building. This also is a picture of God's children. Everyone who fears the Lord understands and admits: “There was so much that had to be cut away in my life!”

What has to be cut out of our lives? As Calvin words it, “That beastly love for this evil world.” The love for sin, this wretched pride which time and again emerges - so much has to be cut away in the lives of God’s children.

Hence these stones are moulded to make them the right fit for the building of the spiritual temple, which rests on the only Foundation, Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

The church of God is a spiritual temple and all of God’s children are living stones who are fitted into this temple by the Holy Spirit and they rest upon the only Foundation. Peter says of this in the sixth verse, *“Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded.”*

Our text continues with, *“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.”* Today, we are called to lay our own lives beside this. Do we know that Christ has become precious to us? Then we will also know *why* He has become precious to us.

The Greek word for ‘precious’ means ‘being of the highest value.’ It also means, ‘worthy of all honor.’ Has Christ become of the highest value for us? Is it our heart’s desire to give Him all the honor of which He is worthy?

The word ‘precious’ also contains a note of love. When a husband tells his wife, “You are precious to me,” then this word ‘precious’ is a word full of love. *“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.”* This means that Christ has become inexpressively dear to us. When He is proclaimed, the heart at times experiences: “Unto Him, to this Lord Jesus, is all my heart’s yearning and love.”

Let us now consider the question, as it is worded in the first point of this sermon:

### **1. For whom is He precious?**

For whom does Christ become precious? Our text says, *“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.”*

*“Unto you therefore”* – do you hear the personal note in this text? It is said very

personally, *“Unto you therefore.”* Faith is a personal thing. Sometimes we can be so abstract when we discuss the things of the Lord, the things pertaining to faith. But faith is not abstract, because then one could sustain himself with all those reasonable arguments. No, faith is personal.

*“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.”* - The Lord’s Supper calls for self-examination. *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.”* So often we are concerned about others and say, “Did you see it? This one attends now too, and that one. I wonder whether it is real.” We are always busy with others. But how is it with you? Be honest. *“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.”* The personal note is striking.

Next we consider the ‘belief’: *“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.”* What kind of believing is this? Obviously, this is of vital importance. The type of faith referred to here is not merely a believing with the mind. I always tell the young people at catechism: historical faith knows a lot about the Bible. One might even be able to tell how God converts His people (at least that’s what he thinks). You might be busy with very valuable books, and of course there is nothing wrong with that (because I fear we often read vain books). Yet, if it is only with the mind, then your heart is not renewed. Then you remain the same. You could even become a proud person with this type of knowledge. Knowledge puffs up: “I’m so knowledgeable and I’ve read so many Godly writers and I am able to reason about the things of the Bible.” And so we become quite the man or the woman. Congregation, it is quite obvious: that is not the faith our verse refers to. That is a believing with the mind only.

Of course, we do not promote ignorance. Sadly, there is a lot of ignorance about the things of the Lord, because there is so little desire to read and to search. No, we may not and do not promote ignorance. Young people, be busy with the things of God’s Word: read the books which are published especially for you, books which shed light on the Bible, books which put the message of the Bible into simpler words. These can be the means the Lord uses to bring people to Himself.

Nevertheless, if we believe with our minds only, this faith will fail us. Because in the end, you will remain the same – unchanged. When we build on historical

faith and attend the Lord’s Supper with such a faith that only includes the mind, we do not grasp the meaning of the Lord’s Supper.

*“Unto you therefore which believe”* - So it is clear that it is not a faith with the mind only. Neither is it a faith which goes with feelings only. Temporal faith only goes with feelings. We know the parable of the sower and the seed. It tells us about seed that fell on stony places. A thin layer of topsoil covered it. When the sun came up and warmed it, it immediately germinated and soon the green blades appeared. It grew even faster than the seed that had fallen in places with a thick layer of soil, because the sun warmed this thin layer quicker. Yet, it lasted only briefly, because soon the green blades withered. Nothing remained of it, because when the roots grew deeper, they hit the layer of stone – and the small green blades withered away.

Temporal faith lasts only for a while. It is a feelings-based faith. It appears to be true saving faith, more so than historical faith, because feelings are stirred. A temporal believer can sometimes be moved to tears as he listens in church, because the Word stirs up his feelings. Feelings-faith can find joy being busy with the things of the Bible. And yet, it fades away. It was merely feelings. It lasts as long as there are feelings. Basically, feelings-based faith orbits around self. “I was so pleasantly touched.” “I was so moved.” “It is so sweet to have these feelings. And that is what I cherish.” A feelings-based faith is all about self. Everything orbits around self, but life is not renewed. It’s only about your feelings, though they may be religious feelings.

I admit, the relationship between feelings and faith is a difficult topic. Because true faith also comes with feelings. When you receive new life, feelings come with it. True faith is not without emotion. When the Lord works regeneration, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. How does that become evident? In this way: we mourn because of our sins. Love and sorrow are very much connected. Why do you mourn when your father or mother has passed away? Because you intensely loved them.

With regeneration, the love of God is shed abroad in the heart and this love produces a sorrow for sin, a longing for God, and a turning to God. It is this love which renews your heart and life. You become a new man. Not just a different

man or woman - no, a new man. *“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature”* (2 Corinthians 5: 17). This turning to God, to Christ, is lacking in the feelings-only type of faith.

*“Unto you therefore which believe”* - this faith is also not what we call a miraculous faith. What is a miraculous faith? It believes that God works miracles. No, this is not wrong in itself! If only we would believe more strongly that God performs miracles! We have way too little of that. Yet, having a miraculous faith does not mean that you have true saving faith. Think of the nine lepers. They had a miraculous faith. The Lord Jesus had healed them, but they never returned to Him. Only one, the tenth leper, returned. Because he not only had miraculous faith, he also had true faith. And true faith focuses on Jesus.

Miraculous faith – let me try to bring this closer to home. I have witnessed it once with someone who was seriously ill. The doctor said, “I don’t know what to say. I can’t do anything anymore.” But the patient and his family said, “But there is a God who can do wonders!” And they called upon the Lord in faith, believing that God is able to perform miracles. And indeed, the miracle did happen. The seriously ill patient was healed and even the doctor had to admit, “Medically, I cannot explain this. This is a miracle.” The patient was privileged to attend church again.

No, having miraculous faith is not wrong – if only we would believe that more strongly – but it doesn’t mean that your heart has been renewed. It doesn’t mean that Christ as the Surety and Saviour has become precious. It doesn’t mean that you have a divine right to attend the Lord’s Supper. It is of vital importance to separate these matters.

When Peter says, *“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious,”* he is referring to true saving faith. The Heidelberg Catechism frequently speaks of true faith. It describes true faith as a certain knowledge and an assured confidence. These are two keywords as we consider the question, “What actually is faith?”

First, let’s consider ‘knowledge.’ It should be obvious from what we have said before, that we do not merely refer to head-knowledge. The word ‘knowledge’ in

the Bible - that is to say: the Hebrew word for ‘to know’ - carries a very deep meaning. This word is also used for marriage. When a text says that a man ‘knows’ his wife, this particular word is used. In marriage, a husband and wife know each other in a special way. They know each other in love. ‘To know’ in this way is a knowledge saturated with love. They know each other because they commune with each one daily, because they share their lives, because they are intimately connected with each other. So this knowledge goes infinitely deeper than mere head knowledge. It is saturated with love. The knowledge of true saving faith brings us in close communion with the Lord, with the Saviour. Such is the knowledge of faith. You must understand, true faith always produces love. Love is inseparably connected with faith.

This love gives birth to sorrow. “Oh, the Lord has always been very good for me. He has never done anything wrong to me. But I, who have I been for Him?” A well-known verse says, “Never has anyone committed so much evil in return for so much good!” It causes deep sorrow to know that you have sinned against a good-doing God, that you have sinned against a God Who is worthy of receiving all your love. No, you cannot remain standing in the face of this. Instead it brings you on your knees. You will humble yourself at His feet.

This love also causes your heart to be rent open towards God, and so you open your heart toward the Lord, saying, “Oh God, I have sinned against Thee. I feel a deep sorrow for this. But wilt Thou who shows compassion, give ear to a me. Attend to the cry of this poor one.”

You cannot let go of God anymore. At times you are enabled to pour out your heart before Him. That is love. You wouldn’t want to miss that for all the riches of this world!

Do you know something of this from your own life, young people? Are there boys or girls here who have so bowed before the Lord in a quiet place? Are there young people here who know something of this heart-felt desire and say, “The void I feel inside cannot be filled with anything or anyone, except God”?

Love has everything to do with ‘knowing,’ but also with ‘trusting,’ or ‘being assured.’ Love is also connected to trust or assurance. It gives you the freedom to

lay your heart open before the Lord and to confess that you have sinned against Him. Trust means that you have the confidence to tell the Lord that there is a deep longing in your heart for Him. This confidence gives the guilty sinner courage to flee to the Lord with all his sins and guilt. This, then, is the confidence which is also worked by love. Love works knowledge and trust.

Further, as for knowledge, it consists of knowledge of God and of ourselves. And again, knowledge here has a deep meaning. Calvin opens his Institutes with it. His opening statement is of tremendous importance, *“Our wisdom, (...) consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”* These two things are connected. When God becomes real in my life, then who I am before Him also becomes a reality. *“Woe unto us that we have sinned”* (Lamentations 5: 16). These two aspects of knowledge are inseparably connected. It is in this way that knowledge of Christ is gained.

Do you understand that? Then your heart cries out and yearns for God. Your sins however, have caused a deep divide between God and your heart. How shall this breach ever be healed?

In the olden days they used to say, “Man goes into the workhouse.” In fact, man does not go into the workhouse, because he is already in there. That is, in our flesh and blood. We want to work in order to settle with God. “I will do this, I will not do that, I will read more often, I will pray more, I will better my life...” Luther tried this, too, in his monastery cell. However, the harder he tried, the more impossible it became, and the more God’s holiness terrified him. You discover that from your side there will never be a way back to God; God would be perfectly just if He would never look upon you anymore. But what a wonder when the gospel opens and light falls on the Saviour as He reveals Himself in the gospel!

Of this, Luther said, “It was as if the gate to Paradise was opened to me.” A gate opens up when you may see the room that is in Him. Even though you only see it afar off, yet you lift up your head and exclaim, “O God, I can be saved! It is even possible for a sinner like me!” Then wouldn’t this Christ, as He comes to you

in the gospel, become unspeakably precious for you?

This faith, then, is the faith we need. It is not a faith in which I can uphold myself; instead, it is a faith which teaches us the experience, as the form for the administration of the Lord’s Supper states, that we “lie in the midst of death.”

At the same time, it is the faith which, in my need and death, renders Jesus precious. This is the second thought we want to consider. Not only for whom He is precious, but also *how* He is precious.

First we will sing from Psalter 124: 1, 2, 3

**Verse 1**

*My heart doth overflow,  
A goodly theme is mine;  
My eager tongue with joyful song  
Doth praise the King Divine.*

**Verse 2**

*Supremely fair Thou art,  
Thy lips with grace o'erflow;  
His richest blessings evermore  
Doth God on Thee bestow.*

*And what follows in verse three*

**2. How is He precious?**

Who is the great Host at His table? Christ, the Surety, the Mediator, the Saviour. Who are welcome at His table? The form says that Christ has instituted the Lord’s Supper only for believers.

What is one of the essential characteristics of faith? Our text says it: that Christ becomes precious. “*Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.*” When He has become precious unto us, congregation, we have come to know something of Him. He has not remained a stranger for us.

However, there are various exercises of faith related to the knowledge of Him who has become precious to us. The form for the administration of the Lord’s Supper speaks of three parts: misery, deliverance, and thankfulness. Regarding the second part, the form speaks with much assurance - as if the believer can

always confidently believe that Christ has removed all his sins. This, however, can also be a point of much strife and affliction within the soul. There are different exercises in faith and also in the knowledge of Christ.

Some have seen something of Him from afar off when the gospel opened up for them in the night of their lives. Do you know this from your own life? When you sat in church and looked at the people around you, you thought, “I believe that all those people can be saved. But I myself? There is no one in church as poor and miserable as I am. So much sin lives in my heart! Would it still be possible for me?”

You sat in church and listened to the sermon. But then the gospel opened up. You were able to see something of Jesus as He reveals Himself in the gospel, though it was from afar off. But already at this initial looking unto Jesus, though little of Him yet was known, you saw so much opening that you said, “Now it is even possible for me!” And so you lifted up your head and Jesus began to become precious. It cannot be any other way, can it? You felt the same as the disciples in to Emmaus felt, as they reflected on the conversation that Jesus had had with them, *“Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the scriptures?”*

There are those who, when the Scriptures are opened in the preaching, at times sit in church with their hearts burning within them. Brakel says, “Then it is as if your hands and your feet and your eyes, indeed your whole heart is drawn to Him.”

This initial looking unto Jesus is already unspeakably good. He becomes precious for you and you understand what someone once said, “I do not dare to say that Jesus is my Saviour, but my heart yearns for Him.” Then you have come to know Him. He has not remained a stranger to you!

Others have been brought closer. They have seen more of the Saviour. They have gained more insight into how Christ as a diamond, as a pearl of great price, shines against the dark background of a lost life. Again, others may say with assurance what Paul said, *“I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded...”*

We should carefully observe how the Form for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper conveys this part about deliverance. It does not speak of the firmness of faith itself, but the firmness of the promise. It says, *“Whether he doth believe this faithful promise of God that all his sins are forgiven him only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ.”*

The promise is faithful. The promise of the gospel speaks of the forgiveness of sin for the sake of the blood of Christ. Faith focuses on these faithful promises. It hopes on them, leans on them and pleads on them. This does not mean that faith is always strong. But a weak faith is still faith. The form says, *“For we do not come to this supper to testify thereby that we are perfect and righteous in ourselves; but on the contrary ... we feel many infirmities and miseries in ourselves...”* One of those infirmities mentioned, then, is that we do not have perfect faith.

*“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.”* But I can hear believers saying, “O God, I do not have a perfect faith. So much is lacking. There is so much distress and strife in my heart. I’m standing afar off, though my heart yearns for Him. Lord, Thou knowest it.”

You know what Calvin, that great Reformer of Geneva, says? “We have faith that time and again has to say, with the father of the lunatic child, *“I believe, Lord. Help Thou my unbelief.”* I think Calvin knew this from his own life. Weak faith is still faith.

Nevertheless, I also have to say this: if He has remained a stranger for us, if we do not know that He has become precious to us, how could we possibly proclaim His death at His table? It is about answering the grand question of the gospel catechism: *“What think ye of Christ?”* Be honest. How does your heart answer this question? No matter what the condition of spiritual life is or what exercises of faith have been experienced, this is true: Christ becomes precious for the believer.

What about Christ becomes precious? The depths found in the Saviour are the depths of eternity. We can only stammer about them. Who could ever fully explore them? It requires an eternity to glorify Him perfectly.

What about Christ becomes precious? He becomes precious in His names. The name Jesus. Has this name become precious for you? It is His personal name. He has come to seek and to save that which is lost. ‘Jesus’ comes from a Hebrew word which means ‘making room.’ The name ‘Jesus,’ Saviour, can also mean ‘He who makes room.’

Think of Israel’s journey through the Red Sea. There was no way of escape, no room. Before them was the Red Sea, behind them came Pharaoh with his army, on their sides were high unsurmountable mountains; there was no way of escape. They were locked in. But then the Lord made room, cutting right through the sea. Israel has sung about it throughout the ages, *“He led in safety through the flood, The people of His choice, He turned the sea to solid ground; In Him let us rejoice”* (Psalter 173:5).

That is also how it is experienced in our heart. No room from my side, because before me I see the waves of God’s wrath. Behind me I see hellish Pharaoh who says, “There is no salvation with God for you. You have sinned too much.” On my sides I see the mountains of guilt and impossibilities, which I cannot cross. But when through the gospel it may resound in my heart, “His name is Jesus. He is come to seek and to save that which is lost” – then, O congregation, then there is room made where there was no room. Then a way is opened to God’s friendly countenance where there was no way. How inexpressively precious Jesus’ name becomes!

Further, His name is ‘Lord,’ ‘our Lord.’ He has made His people His possession. He will keep and hold them. He guards them like the apple of His eye. He will not rest until His church is with Him. He is Lord, the exalted One, the glorified Christ, who will draw His church unto Himself to be forever with Him.

Lastly, the name ‘Christ.’ This name proclaims the glory of His official ministry. Christ, Messiah, Anointed. Anointed as Prophet, Priest and King. This is Christ’s office, a threefold office.

He is Prophet. He reveals and declares the way of salvation through His Word and Spirit to blind sinners, sinners who do not know how they can be saved.

He is Priest. He gave the offer of His life on the cursed tree of Golgotha. He hung there, bleeding from a thousand wounds, burdened with the guilt and the

curse of all His children. And when He called out, in the darkness and depths of hell, *“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”* – Christ has cut a way through the Red Sea, through the waves of God’s anger and wrath, to the light of His friendly countenance. He is Priest. He is at the right hand of the Father, after He has entered heaven with His finished work, and ever lives to make intercession for His people. *“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”* (1 John 2: 1).

He is also King. As King He will gather His Church. He will keep His Church, the Church which has to go through Satan’s mauling. The church which is afflicted and distressed. The Church which loses all grounds in itself and cannot remain standing. He protects His Church as King. He preserves her and brings her to her eternal home.

Oh, how precious He becomes in His names and in His offices!

And also in His states. In the state of His humiliation He has loved His own till the end, that is, till hell. I hear God’s children exclaiming, “That is the place I deserve! But this precious Jesus has taken my place, so that the gates of Paradise will open unto me!”

How precious Jesus becomes in the state of His humiliation! But also in the state of His exaltation. He rose from the dead. He is the exalted One in heaven, where He concerns Himself with the good of His children till the end.

How precious He becomes in His willingness. I see Christian in Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress standing before the narrow gate, with the heavy burden on his back. He knocks on the door and says, “Are you willing to let me in? Me, a wicked and vile rebel, who deserves nothing but hell?” And from behind the gate it sounds, “I am willing with all My heart.”

Such is Jesus. He is willing with His whole heart to give free entrance to vile, miserable, condemned people, burdened with their load of guilt. He wants to have them, as miserable and as guilty as they are, to make them examples of His grace. How precious He becomes in His willingness!

But also, how precious He becomes in His all-sufficiency! The church of the Reformation confesses in the Canons of Dordt that Christ’s work is abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world. In Him and in His blood is atonement, sufficient for the whole world.

Oh, do you have to say, “There is no one in this church who is as wretched as I am!”? I tell you, if there is enough in Him for the whole world, then wouldn’t it be sufficient for you? To whom else would you go with all your guilt, with your condemnation, with all your misery, than to Him? In Him is life. In Him is forgiveness. In Him is salvation. In Him is the friendly countenance of God.

Congregation, there is indeed a beginning, but not an end to the preciousness of Jesus.

Lay your heart next to this question, *“What think ye of Christ?”*

Amen.

Concluding Psalter 310: 1, 2, 6