

Title: The Keystone of life.

It's always good to have a good self image. But did you ever know someone who had a bloated image of themselves. Not only did they think they were "all that," but their image was based solely on worldly values. Not only that but it was a shallow self-image. They were constantly trying to convince others that their self-image was true. They were enslaved by a need to protect that image. A while ago, I saw an interview of Muhammed Ali on TV. In the late 60's, he was the heavyweight boxing champion of the world. His signature words were "I am the greatest!" He was famous for the back and forth banter with a commentator Howard Cosell. However, twenty years later, at this interview what I saw was sad. It wasn't just the prematurely aged man, head slightly bowed down, speech slow and slurred from Parkinson's from too many hits to the head. What was sad was Muhammed Ali's words. The show host asked him, "Hey Ali, all that bantering with Howard Cosell. all that "I am the best." All that was just blustering, just an act right? At first, Ali said "yeah it was all an act." But then quietly under his breath you could hear him say "But I am the best." The host prodded him again, "But that was just an act right. But Ali wouldn't let go. He continued to say "I am the best." "I am the best." It was just very sad to see a broken man, whose ego refused to let him let go of "a image of greatness" he had for himself. He was a slave to his ego. His self worth hinged upon an image of greatness he had made for himself. The problem was that he had bought into the world's lie that greatness was power. As a result, he was slave to his need to see himself as "great." It was very sad.

It is important to have a good self image. But "worrying" too much about our self image can be bad. One of the reasons why is because a worldly self image usually is based on the recognition we get from others, in our work, from our family and friends, from the world. This puts us on a roller coaster of feelings. precisely because we can't please everyone all the time. We can't always be great. We can't always be the best. We can't always be right. In fact, putting too much concern on our self-image is dangerous because ultimately "self image" is an Earthly thing. This is not what God wants for us. God on the other hand calls us to look to Him for our image. God calls us to define our selves according to what He thinks. In Christ we have a new identity a true self-image, as members of His family. As members of this new family our self image is not based on our personal desires nor on the perceptions of others. Rather God has called us to base our "self-image" upon Christ. To base one's life in Christ is good. To base one's life in anything else is bad.

Let us go to our Gospel lesson from Matt. In our Gospel lesson Jesus tells the parable of the vineyard and the tenants. It tells of the doom awaiting those who reject the owner of the vineyard. By analogy, it warns of the doom awaiting those who reject the Son of God. Why is he telling this parable? The Pharisees have been rejecting Jesus, as the son of God. So, Jesus has spoken this parable against them. Jesus then asks them a key question: “What do you base your religion, your life on, or more to the point, who do you base your religion, your eternal life on?” He asks them “What is the meaning of that which is written:

The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone?” Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.”

A capstone is part of an ARCH. It is the topmost, center piece in an arch. In an [arch](#), the capstone, or sometimes called the [keystone](#) holds the arch together. The capstone keeps the arch standing. If you remove the capstone the entire arch falls to the ground.

How does this apply? The Pharisees had built their entire religion or more to the point, their entire self image, around “obedience to the law.” They believed their righteousness before God came from following the letter of the law. However, there was a problem with this. You see, obedience to the law is impossible for humans. Humans cannot attain righteousness from obedience to the law because we were sinful. So, Jesus was telling the Pharisees, obedience to the law was no capstone. They were building an arch without a capstone. The arch of their life would eventually collapse. Jesus tells them that the true capstone, the only capstone was himself. For those who reject the capstone, the arch of their life will fall and crush them. Those who thought that their entry into Heaven depended on their earthly obedience, were doomed to fail. On the other hand, those who built their life around the true capstone, Jesus Christ the arch of life will stand for them. For those who live by a religion based on “the obedience of Christ,” who live by a religion based on good works of Christ, who rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to do good works, salvation was theirs.

Interestingly enough, the concept of capstone is hidden in the word “Faith.” The word “faith” means more than just “cognitive belief.” It is more than just believing in the existence of God. It contains the idea of “trust.” But it is more than just trust. It stresses “the object of that trust,” It stressed the thing or person that you are trusting. “Faith” in something, has the implication that you are relying on that “something,” that you are leaning on that “someone”. Or going to our parable, an

arch relies upon a keystone to keep it up. Without the keystone it would simply fall. Those who have the capstone are those who put their faith in Jesus, who lean on Jesus in order to stand, those who have the capstone base their identity on Jesus, those who have Jesus as their capstone, will stand. What else does it mean to have Jesus as our capstone? Our very image leans on him, is built upon him. A verse from 1 Peter 2 illustrates this.

“⁴As you come to him, the living Stone - rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him – ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood,?”

It says that we are built to be a spiritual house, which is a royal priesthood. Why is that significant? As sinful human beings we do not have the right to come before God. But for those whose house is built on Jesus all that has changed. In the Old Testament times, only the priests were able to come before God to pray for the people. God would not hear the prayers of the average man on the road. But since Jesus died on the cross, the curtain in the temple separating us and God was ripped apart. Because of Jesus we are God’s priests. We have been given the privilege of coming before Him, to enter his temple. We are allowed to pray directly to him. We have become a “royal” priesthood. We have a new identity. And it is this new identity which now defines our new self image. As priests we have been given the privilege of coming directly before God, God our creator, God the omnipotent and to lay before him all of our desires and needs. We have been given the privilege of praying directly to God and knowing that he hears us. We are a priesthood, a royal priesthood. What a privilege! Nothing in this world can compare to the high calling which we have as priests of God, the almighty.

But it is important to remember, that we are not a family of royal priests by birth or by personal worth, for we are still sinful beings we still carry around our sinful Human nature. Rather we have the “status” of being a royal priesthood, because of Jesus. Yet it is also more than just status. We have a relationship. Our relationship with God is so intimate that we are considered to be part of his family. Though we are still sinful beings, God has given us the status of being Sons and daughters. Being given this status is very similar to being adopted. In fact, our becoming sons and daughters of God is many times referred to as our adoption into the family of God. Just as in an adoption, the child is never a blood relative, but it has all the rights and love which any blood relative would receive. Likewise, as adopted members of God’s family, we have all the rights and love which any blood relative would receive. But that which God has done for us goes beyond just status, even beyond being just adopted. In fact, we are being changed by the Holy

Spirit to be in physical fact, that which we are presently, only in name and status, through Jesus Christ. Like Peter says in verse 5

“you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood.”

We are being “built up” to be a Holy Priesthood. We are being built up by the Holy Spirit. As we mature in our relationship in Christ, as the Holy Spirit comes down to us, we are actually changed. As the Holy Spirit comes down upon us, we become more like our high priest who is Christ and are able to do things which are pleasing to God. It will be by this power that we will be able to live out, in reality, our identity as royal priesthood our identity as sons and daughters of God. Our identity as Christians is not dependent on what we do, but what God has already done for us. We, all, are in the process of Spiritual maturation as the Holy Spirit continues to work within us.

May you always remember what you are. You are the greatest! But you are not the greatest because of anything you have done. Rather, you have built your life, not upon the values of this world, but upon Jesus. Because of that, you have a calling given to you by God. You have a new self-image given to you by God, built on Jesus, one which will never need to be defended nor protected. You are the greatest! You are a royal priesthood! It is an identity which can never be taken from you. Live out your new self, remembering always, you are a child of God!
Amen