

Living Stones

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Date: 13 October 2019

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[0 : 0 0] My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us.

We're glad you're here. And we're... Is this going in and out? Oh, okay. Sorry. We're glad we have backup sound equipment. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which means that God has something to say to everyone in His Word.

He has something to say to people who have been Christians their entire lives, people who have been Christians for maybe a very short amount of time, and perhaps people who wouldn't consider themselves Christians, people who have doubts or questions or objections about Christianity.

God speaks all of those things in His Word, and so that's why we come back to it week after week. If you've been with us, you know that we're in the book of 1 Peter, and the book of 1 Peter is a letter.

[1 : 0 5] It's a letter written by a man named Peter, and he writes it to churches that are in modern-day Turkey. These churches are in the first century A.D. And he writes to them because they are facing some challenges.

They are feeling out of place in the world, and they're facing opposition from the world because they're Christians, because they follow after Jesus. And so Peter writes to them to encourage them and also to instruct them.

He writes to them to encourage them that Jesus is worth it. Jesus is worth living for and loving for. He's worth suffering for and dying for. And he also writes to them to instruct them how they should live in this world as people who follow God.

We have been sort of going back and forth between instruction and encouragement. Near the beginning of the letter, it was almost exclusively encouragement, and then we had a couple places of instruction. And now we're back to encouragement, as Peter has been talking about the community of God and how people are to act towards each other in the church.

Last week, we looked at how we get along in the church and the putting away of malice and slander and hypocrisy. And now we continue to look at the church community, asking questions like, how is it different than other communities?

[2 : 1 4] And what does the church as a community have to do with suffering? If this is a book about people who are facing opposition for being Christians, they're feeling out of place, if they're suffering for the name of Jesus Christ, what does God's community, the church, have to do with that?

It's with those questions that we come to chapter 2, and you're going to find this. It's in your worship guide. You'll also find it in your Bible or on your phone. And we're going to be starting at verse 4.

And as we come to this, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that while the grass may wither and the flowers fade, his word stands forever. That's why we read now, starting at verse 4, as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house.

To be a holy priesthood. To offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture, behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious.

And whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

[3 : 30] And a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. Please pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Father in heaven, we thank you for your word that you give to us, that you haven't left us alone like orphans in a merciless universe. You haven't left us in the dark to stumble alone.

But instead, you have given us your words as your instruction, that we would know the way to walk in this world. We ask that you'd send your Holy Spirit now to help us, that we would listen carefully, that we would understand that you would open our eyes and unstop our ears and soften our hearts, that we'd be able to believe and see and understand everything that is written about you in your word.

We ask these things not because we have earned them or deserve them, but because Jesus has earned them for us. And so we ask them in his name. Amen. As many of you know, there's all sorts of things that go on at our church throughout the week.

And sometimes I get to see more of those than others because I'm here. And I think it was last, now, two summers ago that I told you about the shelter of the wing out there that people hide under during the hailstorms. Another thing that I observe is we have several Bible studies that meet at our church throughout the week that aren't associated with our church.

[5 : 03] They just use our building. We open it up to them. And there's one that meets on Thursdays. And we have asked this Bible study group and really a lot of the groups that meet to park over on the east side, our east parking lot.

That's the door that we unlock, the entrance that's open. Makes it easier for them to come in that way. And of course I see these cars as I come in throughout the week, especially when I come in on Wednesdays and Thursdays and these groups meet.

And this group on Thursday, though, there's one thing that's happened several times that I've noticed as I've come in. And so you have all these cars over on the east side, and yet there's one car over on the west side right here behind me.

And the car that always parks on the west side is a black Porsche. Now, I'm not criticizing this person. If I had a black Porsche, I would also park on the west side.

Okay, this is not a judgment on anyone's character. This person is wise in the ways of the world. In fact, often I try to find a parking spot away from other cars so that people aren't going to scratch my car or knock their doors into it.

[6 : 16] And my car is much less valuable than a Porsche, right? But as I would see this car week after week for several times, the last time as I saw it and I walked into the church, I thought, you can stay safe and never be hurt, but you'll always be alone.

You can stay far away from all the other cars. You can guarantee that no other door will ever hit your door. You can guarantee that no one will ever scratch your bumper.

And you'll always be by yourself. You'll always be alone on the other side of the parking lot.

Peter writes this letter to these people here and he makes not a point but an assumption. There is no such thing as a Christian parked alone.

There is no such thing as a Christian out by themselves on the west side of the parking lot. Instead, he gives us this image of what it's supposed to look like for the community and the church.

[7 : 34] We see in verse 5, he tells them, you yourselves are like living stones and you're being built up into a spiritual house. And you're coming, verse 4 to him, he's talking about Jesus who's a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious.

In other words, this is God's design for his people. Not that they would be isolated and alone like stones who are scattered around but instead they are stones connected intimately and directly to one another as part of one house.

God's intention is not for his people to be isolated following him as individuals but instead that they would be like these stones who are part of one structure which means that they are close together.

means that they are rubbing up against each other. Means that people are trying to find exactly how they can fit into the structure and work around all the other people who are building together to create this one mission, this one group of people, this one temple, this spiritual house.

Now that's not really the point that Peter is making in this passage. It's his assumption. Why is it his assumption? Because of course that's the category that the Bible has for Christians that they would always be together as God's people.

[8 : 45] They would not be isolated and alone scattered around like individuals. He doesn't say you are like stones who are in random places in the field. Now we have some stones that are in random places in the field.

But we also have a building. And Peter's telling them that being in the church is much more like the building than being scattered. These are people who are joined together as one body. Another way of putting it would be this.

If you said, you know, I am I'm a Christian. I love Jesus. I follow after him. I love what he taught. I believe he forgave me of my sins.

I just can't really stand other Christians. So, I say, you know, the church is great for people who need that kind of thing. It's pretty messy and it's not necessary.

We don't really see that in the New Testament. It's really more just these believers who are following after. You know, if I do come, maybe I'll come to a church and I'll just kind of be there on the back row but I'll make sure that no one ever knows my name and I don't have to, you know, no one will ever scratch the side of my car door, right?

[9 : 54] I'll never be in this community where someone could actually hurt me or do something that would offend me or challenge something that I believe. if you said that to someone living in East Berlin in the 1960s or you said it to someone living in communist Russia in the 1970s or the 1980s or you said it to a Christian living in Pakistan in 2019 or in China in 2019, they would not understand what kind of crazy talk you were saying because that is the only way they know how to survive.

The recipients of Peter's letter are living in a culture where they are feeling out of place. Of course, they are together like living stones. This is not even Peter's word of instruction.

He's just encouraging them. As you walk together in this world, this is how you're making it. You're not just a group of people. You are a group of living stones that are founded on the living stone.

If you were to talk to some of those other people from different places and different times in the history of the church, they would say, of course, of course we're living stones. Of course we're together working towards one mission.

How else would we survive? How else would we make it? Of course we're not an isolated Christian somewhere out there disconnected from other Christians.

[11 : 24] That would be nonsensical. There's no other way I would be able to make it in communist Russia. There's no other way that I would be able to survive East Berlin. There's no other way that I would be able to make it.

The recipients of this letter understand what it's like to live in a culture and a world where they don't feel like they belong. Peter encourages them that not only do they belong, but they are part of this living spiritual house put together with other Christians and founded on Jesus.

I say that Peter is writing to encourage and instruct these people and he's encouraging them with this and instructing them. How else would you survive in that culture, in that world, without some kind of alternate community?

Christianity is lived out in the church, in the context of the church with other Christians. Peter doesn't say there's these living stones and there's also kind of these random stones that aren't part of the building, but they're connected to Jesus somehow.

No, every stone, every stone is part of the house. And so every one of God's people has a place connected not just to him, but to each other.

[12 : 53] If you truly believe that you are what we talked about in chapter 1, verse 1, if you believe that you are an exile and a stranger in this world, then you're going to find your people really fast.

If you have not found your people really fast, God's people, the church, then you do not truly believe you are an exile and a stranger. And so Peter encourages these people, letting them know that they're not just an assortment of individuals, but they are actually the place where God's power resides.

They are living stones based on the living stone. Now we might see some language here that's familiar because he's telling us not just that these are people who belong into community together, but he tells us the nature of this community.

Verse 4, they are coming to him that is Jesus, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious.

Where have we heard chosen before in 1 Peter? in chapter 1, verse 1, we were told they were not just exiles, but they were also elect.

[14 : 12] Remember I explained to you that elect is related to our English word election where we choose someone and so that people are chosen by God. The same language here is applied to Jesus.

He was also chosen by God, but rejected by men. What kind of spiritual house is this? What kind of stone are you?

You're a stone, lowercase s, that looks like the stone, uppercase, capital S. What is happening to you, he's encouraging these people with this, what's happening to you is simply following the pattern of what happened to Jesus.

Jesus was chosen. The stone. You are stones, you're also chosen. Jesus was rejected as a stone. You were also rejected.

Jesus is living. He's a living stone, verse 4. Guess what? You are also alive. You have the spiritual life that we've talked about that comes from the new birth that Jesus taught about in John chapter 3.

[15 : 22] and Peter has referenced multiple times now. So he's encouraging these people, you belong to this powerful house and what you are experiencing, what you're going through, the type of stone that you are, is connected to Jesus, the great stone.

And so everything that's true about Jesus, I shouldn't say everything, many things that are true about Jesus, the pattern of Jesus' life is also true about you. Jesus experienced honor and glory.

If you follow the stone and his path of suffering, rejected by men, you will also experience honor and glory. What is true of the stone is also true of the stones.

Peter's giving us an image here that has many different facets and elements to it. We could talk all day about all the different ways that these stones interact with each other and what this image teaches us about what it means to be a Christian.

But fundamentally, he's telling us that we're in a community. We're being built into a spiritual house and everything that we're doing is based on Jesus as our foundation.

[16 : 35] He's the cornerstone. We still see cornerstones today, right? You go by a building, you'll see a large stone, sometimes on a corner, and often you know it's the cornerstone because it has the date, the year that the building was built chiseled into it.

That's how you know that's the cornerstone. That's the stone that lays the foundation for the rest of the building. Jesus is the stone that lays the foundation for the church. And so how does the church help us walk as a community through suffering?

Well, it helps us walk because it is a community and it's not just any community, it's the living community. And also, as we've talked about before, it's suffering makes sense. As the cornerstone, so the stones.

Of course, we will be rejected by men. Why? Because Jesus was too. Of course, we're living. Why? Because Jesus is living.

He's given us new life. Of course, we will experience these things because as the stone, so the stones.

[17 : 44] And so application here is simple. Don't be surprised when you face what the stone faced. Don't be surprised when you are rejected as well.

and take comfort. You're with Jesus. You are part of the building that lasts. You are part of the living building.

Peter here is comforting and encouraging his readers. as you feel out of place in the world, realize that you are part of the building, the true building that lasts.

You're part of the building you have lost and you are losing things that don't matter eternally. and you have gained and you are gaining things that do matter eternally.

And so you are part of something so much greater and so much more glorious than you realize. and you are doing it together.

[18 : 49] You are not doing it alone and isolated but you are doing it rubbing shoulders with other people, having conflict with other people, rejoicing with other people, working side by side with other people, having hospitality with other people.

You are a living stone. You cannot separate yourself from the other stones any more than you can separate yourself from the stone. This community, however, is not just a gathering of people connected to Jesus, although it is.

And it's not just that what's true of Jesus is true of them, but they also have a mission and a purpose as a community. They don't exist just so these stones can be side by side.

It doesn't exist just so these stones can avoid loneliness in the world or they can have companions like any other group would have companions, but they have a purpose.

And we're going to get even more into this next week, so this is really just whetting your appetite. This is an appetizer for chapter 2, verse 9, which when Peter gives us the mission statement of the church. But he tells us the reason here.

[20 : 01] You yourselves are like living stones with a purpose. You're being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

In other words, you exist to be the place of God's presence. That was the purpose of the temple in the Old Testament. You exist to be a place of God's holiness, which is the section that we just finished, a place where God's ways are lived out, where everyone can look and see what it looks like when people follow what God has commanded.

And then finally, to offer spiritual sacrifices, which here means that their lives of obedience, as they honor God and live together as a community of integrity, as difficult as it is in the world, is a beautiful sacrifice before God.

Peter's encouraging these people who are perhaps wondering why is it worth it to live a life of holiness if it's not getting me anything in this world. And he reminds them that they are part of the living building and that their obedience is something that's offered up to God and that he delights in.

We're going to talk more about this priesthood next week. So I'll just give you a little bit of an appetizer. The priesthood had the responsibility to represent God to the people and represent the people to God.

[21 : 36] They were a part of God's people and now Peter tells them that all of them are a priesthood. In other words, part of their mission is to represent as a whole people, as a spiritual temple, to represent God to the world.

It's part of everyone seeing what it looks like, what this countercultural community is. These people who are doing what we talked about last week, they're putting off slander and hypocrisy and malice and instead they're loving one another earnestly from a pure heart.

They're a priesthood to show the world what it looks like when people truly love each other. They're a priesthood to show what it looks like when people put off the passions that Peter mentioned a couple sections ago where they're walking with integrity, putting off the addictions that cause them to hurt themselves and each other.

Peter writes to these people to give them tremendous encouragement that they would know that as they live their lives before God they are not in vain. But instead they're taking part of something that is living and will live, something that's lasting and will last and something that is honoring and pleasing to God and that will continue beyond anything else in the world where they exist that will one day perish.

and so they can take tremendous hope and encouragement and faith from knowing that they are stones connected to the stone. He continues to encourage them in this way in verse 7 he says, so the honor is for you who believe.

[23 : 15] In other words, while you may have shame in this world because of following after Jesus, you have honor in the world to come and honor that matters. And there's an implicit warning there, if you have honor in this world, be careful because honor in this world does not last and you may have shame in the world to come and the things that matter.

You're a living stone. And you're part of a spiritual house. You're connected to other people. You're connected to Jesus, the living stone, the great stone.

And you follow after him knowing that what's true of him is also true of you. Encourage living in a world where sometimes it doesn't seem valuable or worth it, holding on to the hope and the promise that there's honor for you who believe and that this is a spiritual house, a holy priesthood whose obedience is accepted and honoring to God who will give consequences for it of glory and reward that will last into eternity.

You are taking part in something that is so much greater and so much more glorious, Peter is telling his audience here, the recipients of this letter. And then finally, he gives them what's often called the scandal of the gospel.

people. Many people are offended by Christianity and in a sense, it is offensive. They should be for the reasons that's given here which is that there are only two ways to live.

[24 : 59] I've said before, many people in this world would think of there being three ways to live, right? You're either a super good person like Mother Teresa, you're a super terrible person like Adolf Hitler, or you're just a normal good person.

Just doing what you need to do, you're being a good neighbor, you're going to be fine, right? But the Bible just says there's not three kinds of people, there's actually two kinds of people. Here, they're presented as those who build on the stone or those who stumble on the stone.

They're either those who accept Jesus and his offer of salvation or those who do not. There's not super good people and super bad people and normal people.

In fact, the Bible tells us that all people are sinners and deserve God's judgment and his wrath. But God offers his salvation to anyone and everyone who puts their faith in him.

Because this living stone is living and it reminds us that he is risen from the dead, that Jesus died. He lived a perfect life that we couldn't. He died, and suffered the penalty for our sins and then, as 1 Corinthians 15 tells us, he conquered death and rose again from the dead.

[26 : 11] And he did that to pay the price for our sins so that anyone and everyone who has faith in him can have what verse 7 talks about, the honor is for you who have believed.

And so there's only two kinds of people. Peter gives these quotations from the Old Testament. This idea of the stone shows up in the Old Testament over and over again as a sign for the Messiah that's going to come and save God's people from their sins.

And even in the Old Testament, what Peter says here is clear, that this stone is going to be a cornerstone. Verse 6, And whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

Whoever builds their life on the stone will experience the life of the stone. Whoever builds their life on the stone will experience the life of the stone.

And there's only one other option. Verse 7, The honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.

[27 : 16] The image here is of people walking around looking, trying to figure out how they're going to build their building. And they come across this stone, Jesus, verse 7, and these builders reject it.

This is not the stone that they want to build on. And so instead of being a stone that it builds on, it becomes a stone they stumble on. Peter's helping these people understand that that stone that was spoken of throughout the Old Testament is Jesus.

And so those people are building their lives on the stone that will last. And even as they live life in this world, and they see the people around them having all kinds of success and accomplishments and experiences, those foundations will not last.

But the sacrifices and the life that they build on the living stone will last. When it talks here in verse 8 about those stumbling because they disobey the word, it's talking about people who reject the cornerstone.

They reject the offer of the gospel that Jesus gives. They're not willing to confess and repent of their sins and recognize that without Jesus they're without hope.

[28 : 28] But instead these are people who believe that they can build their lives on another stone. But instead the hope of Peter's readers that he extends out to them is that they have built their lives on the stone, the only stone that matters.

And as they build it on the stone, that stone is Jesus. He's the one who gives them hope and life. So what does Christian community look like?

What does Christian community have to do with suffering? Well, it looks like a community of stones who are all next to each other, part of the same building.

They're not isolated, hiding away from each other, avoiding getting hurt, but instead they're right up against each other. There's friction, right? These stones aren't just together on some mission, but they're on a specific mission.

They're on a mission to live out God's ways in the world. And they're not doing that powerless. It's not a pie-in-the-sky hope, but they're doing that because there's a living stone that's giving them that power.

[29 : 42] They're basing their mission on Jesus who rose from the dead and offers that very same power to them. Paul tells us in Ephesians 1 that the power that rose Jesus from the dead is the same power that's at work in us.

And these people can be encouraged as they go on this mission because when they meet discouragement and setback and failure, they know that that is the pattern of Jesus, and so that will be their pattern as well.

And they can also take encouragement knowing that Jesus' pattern was one of honor and glory, and so that will be their pattern too. Verse 7. That what's true of Jesus is true of them, and that this purpose is one that they would be a place of God's holiness and his presence in the world, living out God's ways before the entire world.

Not because they're better than them or superior to them, but because they are connected to the living stone. And finally, Peter tells them that this is the stone and it's the only stone they can build on.

And so as they're suffering and looking perhaps for other options, he reminds them that this is the only one. And so it's for this reason that no matter what we face in this world and no matter what temptations we have to walk away from the building that God is creating through his church, that we take faith and hope and confidence, knowing that what verse 6 says is true, whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

[31 : 23] Will you believe in him? Will you build your life on the stone? Let's pray.