

May 18, 2014
Easter 5

"Living Stones Built on Jesus the Living Stone"

1 PETER 2:4-10

As 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, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." ⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," ⁸ and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message-- which is also what they were destined for. ⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

A family had two framed posters hanging in their living room. The one had artistically displayed names for Jesus such as Lord, Shepherd, King, Savior and Lamb of God. The other poster artistically displayed names for you the Church, such as Sheep, Branches, people of God and the Bride of Christ. It is very comforting to see the beautiful connection between these names for Jesus and these names for you his church.

Before us this morning we have our Lord Jesus being called the Living Stone. You, his church, are also called living stones because of your connection to him. Please, don't think your life has no meaning or value. The most precious diamond in the world is a rare pink diamond weighing in at 100 carats and worth over 16 million dollars. Your life as a living stone built on Christ the Living Stone is priceless to your God who purchased you with the blood of his own Son.

The Living Stone

Peter comforts the Christians who are being persecuted by telling them their lives are built on Jesus their Living Stone. "As you come to him the living Stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him." Before the days of concrete, people used large stones to form foundations for walls and homes. The large farmhouse in which I grew up as a child had brick walls three layers thick on the first floor and two layers on the second floor. The three foot wide basement walls were support by huge stones that German stone masons had split and mortared together. The stones were important for supporting the building, but they could not give life to the building. Jesus is the foundation of the Christian Church. He is the Living Stone that gives eternal life to the people whose lives are built on him.

Jesus is the Stone that was carefully chosen by our heavenly Father. My father told me

how the stone masons could pick a large rock from the field and know exactly how to split it with small wedges and a hammer so that it could form the 90 degree angles needed for the huge walls. As much as we may admire the stone mason who carefully splits and shapes stones for a foundation, it is nothing compared how carefully our heavenly Father chose Jesus to be the Living Stone on whom we depend for eternal life. Peter quotes from Isaiah 28 and Psalm 118 to help us appreciate how carefully our Father chose the life of his Son to rescue us and save us. "See I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

If you were to look up this verse in Isaiah 28 and read the verse that comes after it, you can gain an even greater appreciation for the Living Stone your Father chose to save you. Isaiah 28:17 says, "I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line." I am holding in my hand a plumb line. You can determine if the wall you are building is straight by holding up the plumb line against it. When God measures the human race with the plumb line of his holiness and perfection he finds that every person ever born into this world is crooked and sinful and far short of his glory. Just as a wall that is crooked cannot make itself straight, we have nothing in ourselves to make us straight and acceptable to our God. He takes us and builds our lives on Jesus, the Living Stone. Through Jesus we are justified, declared not guilty. That gives us life that lasts forever.

Peter also quotes from Psalm 118 that says, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone." Psalm 118 goes on to say that this is marvelous in our eyes. The picture given here is that of an arch that is perfectly constructed to last forever. We are amazed the some of the arches built by Romans for the aqueducts are still standing after 2000 years. The plan of salvation our Father built for us is the perfect arch with a perfect capstone. When our heavenly Father raised Jesus from the dead, he proclaimed to us, "Just look at that perfect forgiveness I have provided for you in my Son. There is nothing left for you to do. I have done it all perfectly for you." "Living, loving, dying, rising, Jesus did it all for me."

Some don't want Jesus to be their Living Stone. Peter says that he is rejected by men and Psalm 118 says, "He is the stone the builders rejected." Peter also quotes from Isaiah 8 where it says that Jesus is "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that causes them to fall." This past week in our Santa Maria Terrace Bible study we began looking at Matthew 23 where Jesus condemned the religious leaders and the Pharisees for rejecting him as their hope of salvation. They foolishly thought they could build their lives on their worthless attempts at trying to keep God's laws and the extra rules and regulations added by generations of different rabbis.

Instead of building their lives on Jesus, Jesus became offensive to them. He became someone they hated, someone they stumbled over. Jesus told them they were like whitewashed tombs, white on the outside but full of rotting corpses on the inside. Peter says they were destined for this not because the Lord rejected them, but because they rejected the Lord.

If you have ever built a sand castle on the beach, you know that the sand castle does not last. Soon the tide comes in and in a matter of minutes what was once a beautiful product of hard work and clever engineering is not just sand being washed by the waves. Everything inside of me says, "Go for it. You can build your life on your own ideas, your

own accomplishments and your own plan of salvation.” If I follow that natural way of thinking, my life will end up in a huge disappointment. If I build my life on Jesus then I will be a living stone that lasts forever.

The Living Stones

So what do these living stones that are built on Christ look like? What does your life look like in the eyes of your God now that you are built on Christ? Peter says, “You also like living stones, are built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” The stones that Herod used to build the temple in Jerusalem were impressive. The stones that were used by Solomon to build the first temple were even more impressive, yet they cannot compare to you and me who are living stones that offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. Did you know that the large stones for Solomon’s temple were cut into exact sizes and shapes at the quarry and then fitted together when they were brought to the temple almost similar to fitting Lego pieces together? The stones had to be hauled and then placed into the exact position by very skilled stone masons.

Here you are today, at this point in your life, and you are a living stone built on Christ. You had nothing to do with coming to Christ and building your life on him. This was done for you by God’s grace. In his grace and mercy your God positions you exactly where he wants you in his church to bring spiritual sacrifices to him. That means when we come to worship as we do today we gather to point each other to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, just as Old Testament sacrifices directed people to Jesus the Lamb of God. That is a huge honor and privilege given to us. Also when you go home today you continue to offer spiritual sacrifices that direct the eyes of people around you to Jesus. What a honor it is to be used by your God to offer spiritual sacrifices that direct the eyes of people you love to Jesus. What an honor it is used to be used each week to bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But what kind of people are you as living stones built on Christ? Listen again to these words from verse 9, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who calls you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” You are a chosen generation. God chose you from all eternity to be a living stone built on Christ. He also chose you from all eternity to live a life of good works out of love for him. Ephesians 2 says, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” I am holding in my hand a stone . This stone was formed and shaped by the hand of God. God created stones in his original creation. He washed and smoothed stones in the great world flood. He polishes and smooths the stones in the streams such as the Santa Ynez River. You are a living stone chosen by the Lord. He places you in a certain time and place to give glory to Jesus the Living Stone.

You are a royal priesthood. One mother put a plaque above her kitchen sink that read, “Divine services conducted here each day.” Whatever you do in this community, you always have a the higher calling of serving the Lord in his kingdom.

You are a holy nation. You are citizens of the United States of America. You are also

citizens of Jesus' kingdom. That means you are going to live your life differently from people in this country who are not living stones built on Jesus the Living Stone. You will not use the bad language that other people use. You will not join in gossiping about other people at work. You don't want to cultivate impure thoughts in your private life because that could lead to impure thoughts in your public life.

You are a people belonging to God. You are his property. The Lord has his name on you. You want to show forth the praises of God who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. These Christians who were going through persecution left their mark on the Romans who were not Christian. One heathen history made the comment that Christians showed such love for each other. They even called each other brothers and sisters.

A stone like this has no value. That is how we once were. But now we have tremendous value and worthy because our lives are built on Jesus the Living Stone. "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." You are someone very special. You are a living stone built on Jesus the Living Stone. Amen.