

LIVING STONES

1 Peter 2:4-10

Main Idea: Because God is building us together as living stones upon Jesus, the Living Stone, to be a spiritual house for a royal priesthood, let us offer acceptable sacrifices to Him.

My family used to do a lot of hiking when I was a kid. The one thing about hiking I didn't enjoy was that Mom would say, "Danny, can you put this rock in your pocket for me?" I don't know why they didn't make pockets in women's dresses back then! A few minutes later, "Look at that interesting rock! Danny, pick it up and let's take it home!" This always seemed to come at the beginning of the hike, never toward the end!

"Mom, it's too heavy" "But Danny, that rock is too interesting to leave behind." I was just a young kid, but I can still remember barely making it to the end of the hike, with my pockets dragging on the ground and my arms about to break off!

See, for a kid on a hike, the trouble with rocks is that they are inanimate. They can't hike themselves to the end of the trail. They don't have life!

But in the passage we are looking at this morning, the Spirit of God, through Peter, uses a metaphor of 'living stones'. Peter catches our attention putting these two words, living and stones, in such close juxtaposition. If there are two words that are mutually exclusive, they would be these. I read those words and remember having to carry Mom's rocks on our hikes. It was dead weight. It would take a real miracle from God to make a stone live.

So Peter uses a unique figure of speech. In chapter 1 verse 3 he referred to a "living hope" and in verse 23 to the "living... Word". Now in 2:4 he refers to Christ as "the living Stone." The contradiction in the two words is obvious. A *living stone*? Impossible! But the Living Stone has life in and of itself and can give life to others.

Peter is using a technique that he observed Jesus using so often in taking a tangible object and using it to teach something that we would be incapable of grasping in conceptual language. Peter is explaining that the Living Stone, Jesus, can transfer the very essence of His nature, His own life, to stones that have no life in themselves.

Since we can't understand this passage on our own, let's go to the Lord and ask Him to open up our understanding.

As the Apostle Peter's words speak to us about living stones, you need to remember that in Matt. 16, Jesus changed Peter's name from Cefas to Peter, meaning "stone". You see, Peter could speak about becoming a "living stone" from his own experience. That's how he could testify about the true grace of God and exhort us to walk in it, just as the summary verse of I Peter 5:12 says. Let's read I Peter 2:4-10 (NASB) together:

And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in

Scripture:

"Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious cornerstone, and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed."

This precious value, then, is for you who believe. But for those who disbelieve,

"The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone," and, "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense";

for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The central point of I Peter 2:4-10 is summed up in verses 4-5. *"And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."*

We come to Jesus as the Living Stone. Notice that the text says that Jesus was the stone rejected by men. *"He came to His own and His own received him not."* But to God, Jesus is the precious cornerstone. He is the cornerstone upon whom God has chosen to form this spiritual house, the church.

Who are those to whom Peter is referring as he says, *"coming to Him..."*? Who are those that are coming to Him and being built up into a spiritual house? From the context, it would have to be those who had been *"...born again...from...imperishable seed, the living and enduring Word of God"* in verse 23 of chapter 1. It was those who had *"...tasted the kindness of the Lord"* from chapter 2, verse 3.

So how does one get to be a living stone? The way a mere stone becomes a living stone is to come by faith to the Living Stone, that Stone *"rejected by the builders"* but *"chosen and precious in the sight of the Lord!"*

There comes a point in your life when you are faced with Jesus Christ and with His claims. God will not force you to come to Jesus against your will. But the only way to become a living stone is to respond to God's invitation, choosing to come to Him.

But notice that the text does not say, *"Having come to Him..."* Rather it says, *"Coming to Him..."* That indicates more than just the original approach to Christ. The tense and voice of the participle *"coming"* indicate a habitual drawing near, a continual intimate relationship where we are constantly approaching Him in faith. If you want to grow in grace in the Christian life, there is no substitute for coming to Christ continually, turning day by day and moment by moment to Him in faith.

Remember, our text says that this Living Stone is precious to God. In chapter 1, verse 18-19 we see that the blood of Christ, that unblemished lamb was precious to God. But God so loved you and He loved me so much that He gave His only begotten Son, His precious Son, so that whoever believes in

Him, whoever puts their faith in Him, will not perish but have eternal life! Jesus shed His precious blood so that we could have life.

John 5:9-12 says, *"...the testimony of God is this that He has testified concerning His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life."* Do you want to be a living stone? Place all your reliance on Jesus. Lean fully on Him, trusting no other, and He will give you life!

But verse 5 also makes it clear that these living stones are not just little stones scattered about among a bunch of inanimate stones. God is building something with those living stones.

In English class during my high school years, we were always told not to mix metaphors, but here you see the Apostle Peter, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God giving two metaphors. He says that as living stones, we are being built up into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood. Let's look at these two metaphors in order.

First, the spiritual house speaks to the church. A house built of stones is nothing more than an organization of inanimate stones used as the construction material. But as God builds a spiritual house of stones that are made alive through His life, He forms a living organism, the church. In this process, God takes stones which in and of themselves have no life, and by combining them with the Living Stone, He makes a new living organism, the church.

Ephesians 2:18-22 uses other words to teach the same truth. The same gospel was preached to Jews and Gentiles, *"...for through Him, we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."* The Spirit of God resides in this spiritual house being built of living stones that have been joined the Spirit to the Living Stone!

The second metaphor draws attention to the activity of the living stones who have been joined to the Living Stone. They are *"...a holy priesthood to offer sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."*

The Jewish priesthood was instituted to lead in worship, primarily through offering sacrifices, with the priest acting as mediator for the people as they approached God. The priest was set apart from his people for this activity. In that sense, the Jewish priest was holy, consecrated to God. But look at what Peter says God is doing now.

He is not dealing with a special class of Christians but rather ALL the living stones are being built up for a holy priesthood. All of those who have been given Christ's life are set apart as priests so that they can offer sacrifices.

So far then, we have seen some interesting things about our identity, that is, who we are in Jesus Christ. As we come to Jesus, we:

- are joined to the Living Stone
- are given life
- are all together being built into a building for His dwelling
- are all together being built into a priesthood set apart for Him, one that offers sacrifices that are acceptable to God

Now I want to explore something with you that is intensely practical. What are those sacrifices that we are to offer as a consequence of our identity?

It is clear from Scripture that the sacrifices offered are not for the forgiveness of sin because no one can add to the perfect sacrifice given once for all by the Lord Jesus for sin. Hebrews 10:14 states that *"...by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified."* There is no sacrifice we can contribute, that can make the supreme sacrifice that Jesus gave for the remission of sin more effective.

So what are these sacrifices that are acceptable to God? This passage itself does not specifically enumerate them, but I'd like to talk a little about them and then point out a few specific ones that the New Testament mentions.

First of all, they are spiritual sacrifices. One of Cheryl's avowedly irreligious co-workers at Silverton Hospital said that she recently had an intensely spiritual experience at the moment the moon totally eclipsed the sun. It seems that it must have had something to do with the alignment of these heavenly bodies and the resultant magnetic pull, or something similar, because she is so tied to that which is observable in nature. What she felt is obviously not descriptive of the spirituality in the sacrifices Peter is talking about here.

These spiritual sacrifices are done by those made alive by the Spirit of God. The sacrifices are done at His prompting, and through His enabling. These sacrifices have the Lord Jesus Christ as their focus because the Spirit came to glorify Him.

Now let's look at a few references to these sacrifices in Scripture. First look at Romans 12:1. *"...I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."* In the next verse, Paul goes on to speak of the transformation of mind that allows for the Christian to experience that which is pleasing and acceptable to God. Then he enters into the works of service for the Lord and for His church, employing the gifting that the Spirit has given to each Christian.

First of all then we present our bodies as a sacrifice to Him, in a figurative sense climbing on to the altar. The rest of the chapter shows that moment by moment we need to climb back on the altar, in order to serve Him and His church. I'm not the center of my ministry to others for Jesus sake. In fact, it requires that I continually sacrifice myself.

So in a real sense this sacrifice encompasses everything I do and every moment that I live. My life in this body does not belong to me because it is placed on the altar to the Lord. Now, if I'm on that altar, then what I do, what I sing, what I think, the words that I speak, even the places I go and the choices I make, are all sacrifices that are pleasing to God and are my reasonable service of worship!

In Philippians 4:18, the Apostle Paul characterizes the offering that the Philippian church sent as *"...a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God."* That is similar to the Old Testament incense offerings that ascended to God in a sweet smell. They represented prayer, praise, and adoration of Him. God is honored and He is pleased to accept the offerings that you and I freely and gladly give to Him. They are an acceptable sacrifice. Think about that next time you watch the children joyfully giving to the Lord as they put their offerings in the jug!

Heb. 13:15 speaks of the *"...sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."* In the good times and the bad; when things are easy and when they are hard; when there is plenty or when we are just scraping by; as long as we are on the altar and He is on the throne; when you and I give thanks, we give a sacrifice of praise that is acceptable to God.

Let's go back to our text and notice one more important thing about these acceptable spiritual sacrifices. Look at the end of verse 5. They are acceptable *"...through Jesus Christ."* Apart from Him they aren't acceptable. Why is that? Peter gives us the reason in the next few verses. First quoting Isaiah 28:16, he writes, *"Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and He who believes in Him will not be disappointed."*

In the historical context of the kingdom of Israel being taken captive (28:1-13) and Judah trying to defend itself in its own strength (28:14-15), God tells where real refuge and stability is to be found. It is in Jesus Christ who is that foundation, that cornerstone. There was nothing that Judah could do to protect itself (28:17-22) and there is no other foundation for us to have standing before a just and righteous God. Only the church built on Jesus Christ will prevail against the gates of hell. The Living Stone is the only one who can give life to the living stones.

Peter next quotes from Psalm 118:22. *"The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone."* The translation rendered chief corner stone in NASB is translated from words speaking of the topmost stone, the principle stone that held all the rest from falling. Think of the top stone in an arch, the keystone which holds the arch from falling in on itself.

The Jews used to sing this psalm on the path up to the temple. Imagine a Jewish boy about 8 or 11 years old looking at the tremendous rocks in the building that they were approaching. At the top of one of the arches, he would see a keystone, holding all of the rest of the arch in place. Jesus is that keystone!

The temple was built of quarry stone, each stone chiseled to fit into its place right at the quarry. There was not the sound of any iron tool heard at the temple site while it was being built. In that context, there was one stone that just didn't fit anywhere. Can't you imagine Levi, the quarry foreman saying, "Who cut out that stone? It doesn't fit anywhere! Throw it away!"

But Jesus Christ is the one who sustains everything (Col. 1:17). Without Him, everything would fall apart. The One who was rejected by the builders has been made the keystone by God. When the church, that organism, that spiritual house, makes a leader, a program, or a doctrine it's keystone, you will see the church falling apart. Jesus is the keystone chosen by God.

Then in citing Isaiah 8:14-15, Peter paints a vivid picture of that stone which had been rejected by

the builders becoming a bothersome stone of stumbling. The builders rejected it and cast it aside as they planned and built. But Isaiah says that Levi and his men kept stumbling over it because it was always in their way! But remember, God chose that very stone to be the chief corner stone, the keystone that held up the arch. But this stone is always still in the workplace, continually frustrating the builders who keep rejecting it but can't get rid of it! They rejected Jesus Christ but He was still in the picture, pressing His claims.

In verses 9 and 10, citing from the Old Testament Peter employs several metaphors for the building of living stones, the church. "*A chosen race.*" "*A royal priesthood.*" "*A holy nation.*" "*A people for God's own possession.*" We don't have time to look at each of these today, but I'd encourage you to look in the footnotes on each of these descriptive phrases in their Old Testament context to understand more fully what Peter is referring to.

But what is the purpose of it all? Look again at the words of the last part of verse 9. "*To proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*" His "*excellencies*" could be translated as His intrinsic virtues, His praises, or His eminent qualities. We are to show forth His excellencies, those intrinsic virtues of the One who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. We are called to a purpose outside of ourselves, a purpose much bigger than ourselves!

Look at the difference in each of these non-living stones I've got on this table. Some of them are shaped in crystals, some are terribly dense, some bright, some dull, some are brittle and some will sluff off easily, etc... There is tremendous variety in color and texture. Aren't you glad that the same Creator who has made stones so different in color, shape, density, and mineral content, has created living stones, not living bricks! Each one of us is different! Yet each reflects in some way the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. The living stones reflect in different ways, the glory and the grace of the Living Stone.

Some of us have come out of a terribly dark past, sinning in unforgivable ways, but God has now brought us out into His marvelous light, forgiven! We are changed by His Spirit! Our lives show forth the excellent virtues of the only One who could bring us into the light and change our lives. Our lives are a testament to the excellencies of His love, His mercy, and His forgiveness and His power!

Some of us have come out of slavish obedience to various church traditions and religious parameters that governed our lives. Most of us realized how utterly helpless we were to live in a way that satisfied an absolutely holy God, or even the rules imposed on us. But then some of us were pretty proud, thinking we were doing better than most as we compared ourselves to others who lived dissolutely.

But then God, in His mercy reached in, revealing His absolute holiness and our spiritual bankruptcy, and He showed us that we never could satisfy His righteous standard. Wasn't He good to then graciously show us His mercy and His love in Jesus Christ? His grace, His mercy, His love, and His forgiveness are some of His intrinsic virtues that others can see in our lives.

Have you watched God's transforming power take a shy person who could hardly interact with people and make them effective communicators of God's truth? He has taken some here who would shrink

from contact outside their family and made them useful spokespersons for Him. As God's life is seen in them and their witness, God Himself is put on display for the world!

We've seen God make living stones out of some families who were once in bondage to overt satanic activity, but who are now gloriously free in Christ. Their lives and their words proclaim God's power and His love every day!

Some of us, though we belong to Jesus, struggle against sin and we are discouraged by frequent failure. But even in the life of the stumbling Christian, God's patience and His forgiveness are proclaimed. And as the years go on, one is compelled to marvel at the God who cares enough to grow that stumbling Christian into a strong follower of Christ!

So through our lives, we living stones reflect the life of the Living Stone. Eternal life is not just a life that continues throughout eternity but is a different quality of life because it is Christ's life in us.

Verse 10 has some references to the minor prophet, Hosea, in the Old Testament. We could spend another hour just on that verse, but God's love for us as His people and His mercy for us is communicated here.

I love how this whole passage we've looked at this morning emphasizes living in relationship and interdependence. We are living stones only as we come to the One who is the Living Stone. We are totally dependent on Him, though He is not dependent on us. Yet we are interdependent as one stone will never be a building, or even a single wall. We so highly value our independence that we tend to forget that God intends us to live the Christian life in interdependence with other Christians. Let Jesus Christ join you to other believers made alive in Christ, as His Spirit builds a beautiful house for God, to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices to Him!