

## Living Stones

1 Peter 2:4-5

Our text this morning is built upon a pun, a play on words. The pun isn't used for humor, as we might use puns today. Instead, it is a very effective literary device to emphasize a point, something more like alliteration where words all have the same first letter. But here it's actually the same word. This play on words gives us our outline, and Peter uses the play on words to make a very significant point about Jesus and his church. He calls Jesus the living stone and he calls the church living stones. So the subject of the sermon could be defined as "Jesus and the church." Or to use Peter's words more closely, "The living stone and living stones." Point one and point two in my outline this morning.

Not very impressive sounding words, are they? Not very intellectual. Not very complicated nor even eloquent. Just a simple, ordinary image. An easy concept to understand. A stone. A rock. So think about a stone. Imagine in your mind, a rock.

If you have ever been to Atlanta, you probably saw Stone Mountain. And native Atlantans are pretty proud of it. Proud enough to call it a mountain. But I moved to Atlanta from the Shenandoah Valley, and I know what real mountains look like! And you who live around here, you know what a mountain is also. If you are from Colorado, you really know what a mountain looks like and you would call these mountains little hills. So Stone Mountain isn't a mountain at all, but just a big rock. A large granite outcrop. A stone.

And, I might add, its dead. It's just a stone, a hunk of granite. There are a few trees growing on it, and a little vegetation, but the rock is dead. No life. No living flesh. No breath, no flesh and

bones. Just a big stone. And in my opinion, a rather ugly one at that. Some people just call it the big rock.

Stones are images of death, aren't they? Something that is stone cold has no life, no feeling. Stone cold means completely and entirely cold, and it is used to describe a corpse. Cold means lifeless. And that's the image Peter uses, but for the very opposite purpose, to represent life. Don't miss that irony, that intended contrast. We're talking about stones today, but not cold, dead stones. Our subject is living stones. And the living stone. Let's begin there.

### I. A LIVING STONE.

v.4

What does Peter mean by a living stone? More specifically, how should we look upon Jesus as the living stone and what can we understand from that idea? What does he mean "coming to Jesus as to a living stone?"

Let's just say it at the outset.

#### A. Jesus is the living stone.

To understand this image and to make that connection, you have to understand Psalm 118, which Peter seems to have at the forefront of his mind. He also quotes that Psalm in Acts 4. Please turn there with me, and note that Pentecost has just taken place. Peter is one of the main preachers in this newly empowered church, a church now full of the Holy Spirit. So Peter is preaching in the temple in Jerusalem. He's preaching Jesus. To demonstrate the power of God, he heals a lame man, and uses that context to preach the gospel of salvation.

Acts 3:11 "Now as the lame man who was healed held on to

Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed. 12 So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. 14 But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. 16 And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all."

Jesus was killed, but God raised him from the dead. He was stone cold in death; a normal, ordinary dead stone. And God raised him from the dead. Preaching that message got Peter and John arrested, and they were asked about the source of their power.

Acts 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: 9 If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, 10 let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. 11 This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' 12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

That's the gospel of Jesus, as clear as it is anywhere in Scripture. Jesus was crucified, put to death. But God raised him from the dead. He is a living stone! We come to him for life. "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Let's go back to the original source of that quotation, Psalm 118. It's a song of thanksgiving for the gift of life, for the gift of salvation.

Ps. 118:14 "The Lord is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation. 15 The voice of rejoicing and salvation Is in the tents of the righteous; The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. 16 The right hand of the Lord is exalted; The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. 17 I shall not die, but live, And declare the works of the Lord. 18 The Lord has chastened me severely, But He has not given me over to death. 19 Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, And I will praise the Lord. 20 This is the gate of the Lord, Through which the righteous shall enter. 21 I will praise You, For You have answered me, And have become my salvation. 22 The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. 23 This was the Lord's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes. 24 This is the day the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it."

It is the day of salvation. It is the day of life, deliverance from my enemies. The dead stone has become the chief cornerstone!

Jesus is the living stone means that Jesus is the life. Jesus is the resurrection from the dead. Jesus is the only way to eternal life. And I preach that gospel to you this morning. The stone is Jesus, and "there salvation in [no other name], for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

But notice what Peter says.

### **B. Jesus is the rejected stone.**

Verse 4, “rejected by men.” First of all, of course, by the Jews, the nation of Israel.

John 1:10 “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”

Thus, this stone became a stone of judgment. We read in Matthew 21, explaining the parable of the wicked vinedressers, Mat. 21:40 “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?” 41 They said to Him, “He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.” 42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes’?” 43 “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. 44 And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”

So a living stone will be a stone of judgment to those who won’t believe. Jesus will be the grinding stone, grinding the wicked unbelievers to powder. And many still reject him today, don’t they? Many still refuse the invitation of the gospel today, and they will die in their sins under the condemning judgment of God.

That’s why this image is so useful, because as the invitation of the gospel is given, so is the warning of judgment to those who will refuse to believe. It is a warning I repeat today. If you reject

the stone, if you reject Jesus, if you will not believe that God raised him from the dead, if you will not trust in him, in his name, for your salvation, then that stone will become the symbol of God’s judgment, “it will grind you to powder.”

Jesus is rejected by many. But God’s purpose of salvation is still made clear.

v.4 “[He is] chosen by God and precious.”

Not everyone will reject him. Some, many will believe. For God has chosen him for that purpose.

### **C. Jesus is the chosen stone.**

He is, therefore, the chief cornerstone upon which the gospel is built. The chief cornerstone upon which the church is established. The chief cornerstone upon which our faith rests.

Back to,

Acts 4:10 “...let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. 11 This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ 12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

God has chosen him, his only begotten son,

John 3:15 "...that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

So Peter simply says, "Coming to him as a living stone." And that's how a man is saved, coming to Jesus. Coming with faith to believe that what God has promised is true. Coming to Jesus with repentance for sin, with a broken and contrite heart. Coming to him. And that is the invitation of the gospel I give to you. Come to Jesus. In Jesus' own words,

Mat. 11:28 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

That is an invitation to be saved. It is also an invitation to worship, for that's what this passage in 1 Peter 2 is really all about. We come to Jesus, the living stone, and we become living stones, according to verse 5. So again the question, what does that mean?

Think for a minute. What do you use stones for? Building. Building houses. Stones are a whole lot better than dirt, aren't they? So if you want to build a strong and secure house, use stones. That's the imagery Peter is using, only houses are alive, are they? And the stones that are used to build houses aren't alive either. So Peter calls us living stones.

And the house, of course, is called a spiritual house. He is

describing the church.

## II. LIVING STONES.

In other words, a building that is alive! A building that embodies life. In other words, the church. And we are those living stones, we who are members of the body.

I expect you are familiar with this image of living stones to represent the church.

Eph. 2:19 "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

Peter is using the very same image, living stones are the members of the church, the building blocks used to build the church, what Peter calls a "spiritual house."

Peter is using a very familiar Old Testament image also, these stones. Stones were used not simply for the construction of the building of the temple, but they were also used for the worship of God that was to take place in that building. So stones were used to build the altar, the place where the sacrifices of worship were offered to God.

Deut. 27:2 "And it shall be, on the day when you cross over the Jordan to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, that you shall set up for yourselves large stones, and whitewash them with lime. 3 "You shall write on them all the words of this law, when you have crossed over, that you may enter the land which the LORD your God is giving you, 'a land flowing with milk

and honey,' just as the LORD God of your fathers promised you. 4 "Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan, that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones, which I command you today, and you shall whitewash them with lime. 5 "And there you shall build an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones; you shall not use an iron tool on them. 6 "You shall build with whole stones the altar of the LORD your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God. 7 "You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God. 8 "And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law." 9 Then Moses and the priests, the Levites, spoke to all Israel, saying, "Take heed and listen, O Israel: This day you have become the people of the LORD your God."

So stones were used to define the place where God would be worship, where sacrifices would be offered. But again, in the shadows of the Old Covenant, those were dead stones! Just a symbol, an image of the reality of the true worship of God that Peter is now defining for us.

Now, we are those stones, we are living stones. And, to further use this illustration, those stones become,

#### **A. A spiritual house.**

Not a physical house, like the Old Covenant temple. Not a outward temple that was the central point of all of Old Testament worship, but a spiritual house. A house of worship that is spiritual in nature. A spiritual house that is being built, just like the temple was being built throughout the Old Testament.

And that house is the New Testament church. Together, as living stones, we are being built to into this spiritual house we call the church. And that church is now the temple of God, the place of his presence. The New Testament church is the household of

God. The church is now the "holy temple in the Lord," according to Paul in Ephesians 2. The church of Jesus Christ is now the "dwelling place of God in the Spirit." And we are the living stones that are used to build that church.

Peter keeps building this illustration and extending the image further and further. Look at how verse 5 continues. We, the living stones, are "a holy priesthood."

#### **B. A holy priesthood.**

We are the priests. The priesthood of all believers is how the reformers put it. We no longer require another person to worship for us, in our place. We offer our own worship, ourselves. That's one of the great advancements from the Old Testament to the New Testament. No longer are human, earthly priests necessary for the people of God to offer their worship to God. Now we have Jesus.

Heb. 7:23 Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. 24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. 26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever."

So we have one high priest, who has made his priestly offering for sin once for all. And he now is the only intercessor

that we need. We come to God as priests, a holy priesthood.

That is our identity as worshipers. That is what a worshiper is, a priest. And what does a priest do? So much to be learned from the Old Testament, and so much about worship to be understood from that Old Testament temple worship. What does a priest do? In simplest terms, a priest offers sacrifices.

And when you and I gather to worship God, that's what we do. We offer to God our,

### **C. Sacrifices of worship.**

But not animals! Not dead sacrifices offered upon an altar of dead stones. No, living sacrifices. Or as Peter puts it at the end of,

v.5 "...to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus."

That's the nature and definition of our worship, offering sacrifices. It is the same principle as defined the worship of God's people in the Old Testament. But now it is alive, living sacrifices of worship defined by their spiritual life and spiritual value to God.

But if you are going to understand correctly what we do today, you have to understand the definition and meaning of worship for God's people in the Old Testament. So think about all the Old Testament sacrifices. In general terms, they represent the heart of the worshiper. They represent devotion, whole-hearted devotion. They represent thanksgiving, whole-hearted gratitude. They represent commitment. Confession. Joy. Trust. They represent the whole-hearted eagerness to ascribe glory to God.

Let me read just one example, perhaps representative of all

the others,

Ps. 96:7 "Give to the LORD, O families of the peoples, Give to the LORD glory and strength. 8 Give to the LORD the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come into His courts. 9 Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth."

That's worship. "Bring an offering, and come into His courts." And that's what we are to be doing this morning here, in this place. We have come to this place, not a place of stone but to the living stone, Jesus. We have come as holy priests, to offer spiritual sacrifices.

Maybe you came because you had to come. And children, I would speak to you specifically. Maybe you came because your parents brought you. You didn't have a choice. So you're here. But it's not enough just to come. You have to offer your sacrifice yourself, your offering.

Maybe you came simply out of habit. Maybe you came because you would feel guilty if you didn't come. It's good that you are here, but that's not enough. Just coming isn't enough. You have to offer your sacrifices of worship to God, as a priest. You are called to offer your own spiritual sacrifices. So don't remain passive. Do just sit and listen. Or worse, daydream. Come to this place to offer your sacrifices of worship to God.

And what are those sacrifices? What are your offerings? Let me just mention a few of them specifically. Your singing. That's an offering of praise to God. Your profession of faith, even using the familiar words of the Apostles' Creed. Your prayers, even when one person is speaking for the whole body, together we offer that sacrifice of worship, the prayers of the saints. Also your

money, tithes and offerings. And most broadly, the sacrifice of your whole life, in submission and commitment to God. So you hear the word of God as it is read and preach. You listen, and you make a commitment to respond to God's word. That's a sacrifice of worship.

And what makes all those sacrifices pleasing to God, acceptable to God, as Peter writes in verse 5? Jesus. No sacrifice or offering that you present to God is perfect, but God accepts your worship and God is pleased by your worship, when you come to him through faith in Jesus Christ.

So please don't just go through the motions. And I hope that our reverence for God doesn't quench the joy and excitement of your heart. So offer your sacrifices of worship with your whole heart, as you hear and respond even to this sermon. Let that begin and be clearly expressed, by your singing!

As living stones, come to the living stone, come to this spiritual house and offer to him a sacrifice of praise.

Ps. 96:1 "Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! Sing to the LORD, all the earth. 2 Sing to the LORD, bless His name; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. 3 Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. 4 For the LORD is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. 5 For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the LORD made the heavens. 6 Honor and majesty are before Him; Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. 7 Give to the LORD, O families of the peoples, Give to the LORD glory and strength. 8 Give to the LORD the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come into His courts."