

“The Chief Cornerstone”

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Scriptural Foundation: 1 Peter 2:4-8, ESV

A Living Stone and a Holy People

⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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.”¹

⁷ 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,”²

⁸ and

“A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.”³

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

Last week I found a single Lego in the corner of my garage. The little white Lego only had two nubs on top; it was one of the tiniest pieces and very insignificant and unimpressive in and of itself. In fact, it was so insignificant, I planned to bring it for this message, but I forgot it and left it on my kitchen table. That is how insignificant this little Lego is.

As you know, individual Lego's were designed by their makers to connect with other Lego's in order to create virtually any kind of shape and form. Each shape can range from the very simple and mundane to the very complex and creative.

Last year Kimberly and my son, Jackson, visited Disney and they told me of viewing a massive Tyrannosaurus Rex made entirely of little, tiny Lego's. This past year the Lego store in the Mall of America built the largest Lego model to date: a giant thirty-four foot, blue robot made out of minute, little Lego's. This robot weight ten tons!

Children, and many adults, love these little pieces. The Lego group projects the world's children spent 5,000,000,000 hours a year playing with Lego bricks. They further estimate they have produced over 400,000,000,000 in the past fifty years, an annual production of 20,000,000,000 pieces, or six hundred pieces per second. If all the Lego bricks produced would be divided equally among the world's population of 6,000,000,000, each person would have sixty-two Lego bricks. Wikipedia reports this regarding Lego's: “Lego pieces of all varieties are a part of a universal system. Despite variation in the design and purpose of individual pieces, over the year's each remains compatible in some way with the existing pieces. Lego bricks from 1958 still interlock with those of the current time and Lego sets for young children are compatible with those made for teenagers. Each Lego piece must be manufactured to an exacting degree of precision. When two pieces are engaged they must fit firmly and yet be easily disassembled. The machines which make Lego bricks have tolerances as small as ten micrometers.”

¹ Isaiah 28:16

² Psalms 118:22

³ Isaiah 8:14

Today, we learn from our text individual believers are like Lego bricks: Fairly unimpressive when we are isolated from the group, but designed by God to fit together with such precision so as to build a spiritual house which glorifies God, not only through time but throughout all eternity. The main idea presented in these verses is found at the beginning, when Peter says,

⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house...

Remember, Peter is writing to a group of people who are outsiders in this world. They were reviled and derided, ridiculed and persecuted. Peter writes to encourage to them they had made the right choice in following Jesus and they have good reason to persevere and hope of a future joy. He wants them to know the outsiders of this world are really insiders to God. Peter wants them to know they cannot grow outside of the context of God's salvation, but also outside of the context of God's people. We cannot sustain spiritual vitality in the midst of persecution when we intentionally disconnect ourselves from other believers. This may be a temptation as a result of persecution – to avoid close connection. In these five verses Peter encourages us to embrace the value of our communion with one another and to stick together as a people precious to God and set apart for His own possession.

We believers are called to be like Lego's: We connect our lives together in strong relationship so God would build us into a spiritual house which worships and serves Him. Indeed, we lose our value if we isolate ourselves from one another, for our design by God is for us to connect to one another. We fulfill our very worth when we connect together in close communion with one another and in service and sacrifice to God together.

I read this introduction to my wife, as is my custom on Saturday's. I wanted to see how she responded to it, because if she does not like it, I will change it. If she does not connect with it, then it probably will not connect with others. After reading to her this analogy I have given regarding Lego's, she immediately responded, "Well, I do not believe we are functioning as well as Lego's do. You might want to make that disclaimer. Lego's are like sinless Christians!" That is true. We tend to have extra "stuff" which keeps us from having precise connection; that sin which sticks to us and either causes us to drift away from the group intentionally, or when we are a part of the group not to be the kind of person others can easily stick to. Lego's are like sinless Christians and that is why sanctification is so important for the church of Jesus.

I wish Jesus' church would function as well as Lego's do; that every piece would be connected to other pieces to build this spiritual house for the glory of God. Often, however, we become like the Lego hiding in the corner of my garage. That Lego found a place for itself, away from its community, but in doing so it forfeited its very design and value. If I could not find the other Lego's to put it with, what good in one Lego and what will I do with it? I tell you, I will throw it away. God is the Builder and He designs to build His house by connecting His people in relationship with each other.

Recently the Barna Group, a group which takes surveys among Christians, released a six-part study based upon twenty years of research. This group has been around for a long time. One of the more interesting finding is this: While almost eighty percent of Americans consider themselves to be "Christians", only forty percent of that eighty percent, less than half of those claiming to be Christians, attend church, and are not connected to church in a vital way, on a typical Sunday.

In this passage, Peter builds a lofty view of God's church so we would be drawn to it and to committing ourselves wholly to the church and others in God's family and pursuing God's design and joy for our lives. Peter is answering the question: Why is the church valuable, and I believe this is an important question for us to think about.

Peter gives us four reasons: First, the church is valuable because of our relationship with the Living Stone, as we read,

⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious...

Here Peter is talking about Jesus and he calls Jesus a "living stone". What an unusual metaphor that is! A stone has no life. In fact, in English, we use a stone to describe a person who has no physical life whatsoever. An EMT might say something such as, "It is too late to do anything for when the ambulance arrived he was 'stone dead'." A stone is the very last thing we expect to be animated and warm and lively, and yet Peter takes these two words, which seem to be at great paradox, and he meshes and slams them together. He uses this as a title of Jesus; the Living Stone.

Why does he do that? I believe Peter has been thinking about Old Testament Scripture which particularly speak about the Messiah, the Christ, as a “stone”. Peter is meditating upon Isaiah 28, which says,

¹⁶ ...thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘Whoever believes (in Him) will not be in haste.’”

He is also dwelling upon Psalm 118,

²² The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

And, in Isaiah 8, we read,

¹⁴ And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling...

Peter quotes these verses directly in Verses 6, 7, and 8 of 1 Peter 2.

The Old Testament does not attach the word “living” to the word stone as it is describing the Messiah in this way, but Peter does because he has been overwhelmed by the power of the resurrected Christ. Peter was the one who fled from the little girl in denial of the Lord Jesus, until he saw the risen Christ and then he was empowered by the Holy Spirit coming into his life as a result of the resurrection of Jesus. That is Peter’s message throughout the Book of Acts. He proclaims the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

He is not content merely to call Jesus a “stone” for fear some of that figure and metaphor might bleed over into the thinking Jesus is lifeless. Instead, he places this adjective He is the “Living Stone”, the “Resurrected Stone”, and the “Stone in whom life revolves”. Peter says Jesus is the “Living Stone.” He is the origin of all life and there is no life which exists outside of Him. His life never, ever fades away, but rather is permanent.

Peter loves this word “living” because he has used it two other times. In 1 Peter 1:3, he talks about believers having a “living hope”, and in Verse 22, he talks about the “living and abiding word which produces spiritual life in the hearts of those who would receive it”. Peter understands Jesus is life, because he was there when Jesus said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life,*”⁴ and he was there when Jesus said, in John 5,

²⁶ “*For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.*”

Jesus is living, not in the sense we are living because we have a derived life which has come from God, and if it were not for God giving us life we would never have it. Jesus' life is inherited and is found in its very nature. Jesus does not merely possess life, but by His very nature He is life. There is no life which does not originate from Him. That is the great and essential truth.

The Christians to whom Peter is writing here are under extreme persecution. They are literally losing their physical lives as a result of their faith. They are tempted to ask these questions: Is Jesus worth it? Is this going to “pay off”? Is this road I am traveling upon and committed to a dead-end? Is my investment going down some drain or some empty hole? Those are the questions they are tempted to ask in the midst of this, because from a worldly standpoint they are losing everything and if they are not gaining something of greater value than that which they are losing, they are saying, “It is time for me to get off of this road!”

Have you ever ask the question: Is it really worth it to follow Jesus? We often do not ask that question until we begin to lose something as a result of following Jesus, for if you follow Jesus faithfully and for very long, you will lose something very valuable to you. Then you will have to ask these questions: Before I make this next step, is it worth it? Is the road I am on a dead-end, or does it really lead to life? Peter’s words are, “As you come to Him, as to a Living Stone, He is the Living Stone who gives life to all who would come to Him.

⁴ John 14:6

We need never fear losing life when we come to Jesus because He is life. Nothing He offers ever passes away, which is in contrast to every other valuable thing in this world which is disconnected from God. Peter mentioned that in 1 Peter 1, as he quotes the Old Testament,

²⁴ ...for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls...”⁵

That is what this physical world is like, a world separated from God and disconnected from Christ. This world, everything in it and all of its glory, is going to die and fade away. What then? Those who have Christ come to a Living Stone. The life He gives us will never be taken away from us. We never lose our life in coming to Him, but instead through Him we find it. That is Peter’s message. If we turn toward Him we are turning toward life. If we turn away from Him we are turning away from life. Jesus is that precious, Living Stone.

If Peter is emphasizing Jesus is life, why does he use this analogy of a stone and why does he meditate upon these Old Testament verses? The word stone is a common word of a stone used in the construction of a building. Peter is communicating to us Jesus is the cornerstone, the very foundation stone of that building. Everything we are as a people, being built up together as a people, rests upon Him and Peter wants us to understand their foundation underneath them, and which is guiding them and leading them, is firm and solid and full of life.

It seems, to this persecuted group of Christians, everything is crumbling around them. The very ground under their feet seems to be shaking. That is what their circumstances are revealing. Often times in our life we look at the ground beneath our feet and wonder whether anything is solid, because everything seems to be shaking and unstable. Peter says, “No, He is the Living Stone, the Rock, and the Cornerstone.”

In the 1st Century construction industry, the first order of business was to select a cornerstone and once selected, it would be set and every wall and line would be built around and measured by that cornerstone. The horizontal walls moving in two different directions would be set upon the angle of that cornerstone. The vertical walls leading upward would be set according to that cornerstone. The cornerstone would become the plumb line in every direction for the entire building.

If the cornerstone is faulty then the walls would be twisted and out of shape; they would not be square and true. If the cornerstone was faulty, the building would be in danger of collapsing inward or outward. It was vital to get, select, and choose a cornerstone which was fit, worthy, true, and perfect in every way.

The architects and construction managers came to this Stone, and Peter is referencing the religious and political leaders of Israel, and they came to Jesus as builders coming to choose and select a cornerstone upon which to build a nation, a people, and a kingdom. They looked at Jesus and walked around Him, and they shook their heads and said, “He is not it,” and they cast Him aside. Peter says this, however, “As you come to Him, a Living Stone, rejected by men...”

When important and smart people reject Jesus Christ, and they do so in such huge numbers, it causes believers to ask sometimes, “Did I make the right choice? Look at all of these smart, sharp people and they look at Jesus and they set Him aside. Maybe I am the one who is not right!” Jesus says, “I understand and the Scriptures understand and prophesied He would be rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious,” and we read,

⁷ 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...”

The word “rejected” means rejected after examination. It is not as though they looked at Him in a surface way and walked by and it is not as though they didn’t see Jesus. No, they looked, they studied, they examined, they watched His miracles, and they listened to His teaching and they said, “No, unfit,” a deliberate, purposeful, rejection of the Christ.

⁵ Isaiah 40:6-8

Notice the contrast Peter makes. I would expect Peter to say, “He was rejected by ungodly people and ungodly men, but precious to you,” contrasting the unbeliever’s response to the believer’s response, but that is not what he does. He is contrasting the unbeliever’s response, “rejected by men” with who’s acceptance? It was with God the Father, “but to God chosen and precious”.

The offense of unbelief is not that others do not agree with us, but the offense of unbelief is that others do not agree with God. That is why unbelief is so offensive; it is others saying to God, the God of all wisdom and all knowledge, knowing everything there was in the past and all which will be, the God who says, “This is my chosen Cornerstone. This is One is precious to me,” and people look at it and say, “No, it is not!”

Peter is telling this persecuted church, “You must make a decision: Whose opinion will you listen to? Will you listen to the leaders of your nation, the insiders, the people who have the clout, or will you listen to God. If you listen to God you will know you will never, ever be wrong, for God is the God of infinite wisdom and infinite knowledge; who knows the End from the Beginning and who sees all things clearly. He is the One who looked down upon this Jesus and said, ‘This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.’⁶” This cornerstone is chosen and elect of God and is precious to Him. It is solid and it will not be proved to be defective, but it is absolutely fit upon which to build your life and to build the Kingdom.

This world and the people of this world still reject Christ. They find Him unfit upon which to build life and they set Him aside. This world still despises that which God holds as precious. In light of this, why would I be tempted to seek the approval of this world? That is true, not only for teenagers and young people. The peer pressure to say you want to be liked by the “in crowd”, why is that? Why would, at the most basic element of life, the in crowd has made a decision to turn away and reject that which God has said is the most precious, most treasured, and the most valuable person in the universe. Why would you care, if they are so flawed in their thinking about this central issue of life, to gain their approval and they would look at us and say, “You are precious. You are valuable. You fit in.”? Why would we care?

God announces Jesus is the only One upon whom we can successfully build our lives. What greater source can we trust than the appraisal of God?

The second reason the church is so valuable is because of God’s work of building us into a spiritual house,

⁵ ...you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house...

This is interesting because now it tells us it is not just Jesus who is the Living Stone, but the members of Jesus' church are like living stones. How are they like living stones? It is through their connection to the Living Stone and their union with Jesus through faith. As you come to Jesus you are transformed and given the life of God. The life of that Stone is infused into your life and you become partakers of God’s very divine nature. We are fundamentally changed. Formerly, prior to coming to the Living Stone, we were as dead rocks and dead weight, but now in Christ we are made alive and we are living stones. That is a miracle.

In Luke 19:39, when Jesus was taking the trip toward Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the religious leaders who had rejected Him as the Cornerstone, listened to the praises the people were giving Him, declaring Him to be the Messiah. They came to Jesus and said, “Jesus, rebuke your disciples.” They recognized the people were giving praises to Jesus which should only be reserved for being given to God alone. They recognized Jesus' claim to be God and receiving the worship of God. What did Jesus say in Verse 40, *“I tell you, if these people were silent, the very rocks under your feet would cry out and give me praise.”*

Do you think it would be hard for God to make a life living and start shouting out praise to Jesus at that moment? No, He spoke and the worlds came into being. But, the same miracle, if He would have done that, that would have been no greater a miracle than taking you and me and making us living stones to be able to truly give praise to God. We are living stones. We have been fundamentally changed. We share Jesus' life. His life becomes ours.

⁶ Mathew 3:17

The Apostle Paul would say this in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live.” Paul is saying, “I have died and yet I live, but the life I now live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and who gave Himself up for me. I live through the living Christ.”

Peter continues by saying we are built up, and not only are we living stones given God’s life inside of us, as a spiritual house. What a wonder it is to be a part of God’s house.

In Hebrews, the Bible tells us, Christ is faithful over God’s house as a Son, and we are His house if indeed we hold fast our confidence, our boasting, and our hope. We are His house.

Every healthy church participates in a building program. I am not talking about a physical building such as the one we worship in today, but it is God’s building program building us into this living, or spiritual, house. God is in the business of building His church with Christ Jesus as the Cornerstone and individual believers as the bricks. When God gives us life in Jesus Christ, He fits us into our place in His building plan. He is the architect. God’s purpose in transforming us into living stones is to use us as living stones for the build of His house. It is not merely to say, “Here is a living stone. Look at how wonderful it is,” and He shines it up and puts it on a necklace or set it on a mantel somewhere. No, His very purpose is to design and fashion us into living stones so we would connect then with other living stones to bring glory to God by becoming a spiritual house.

God is the Builder and we are the building materials and what a great picture Peter uses to help us understand our connection to the church. A single stone is of no greater use if left to itself than a single Lego brick, but together God places us in connection with one another so we can become something magnificent.

The building we worship in today is a beautiful structure. I consider this building a gift from God because it provides for us a very enjoyable place to worship God together. Red bricks cover the outside of this building and I enjoy driving past this building and looking over at it. It looks just beautiful to me. The people who designed it and put it together made it beautiful. I enjoy driving into the parking lot. It looks lovely. It looks beautiful to me. Each individual brick, however, if you separate it from the building is rather a plain thing and is purposeless. It is not joined together with others, but when they are mortared together by a skilled craftsman, following a very precise architectural, creative design, these individual bricks which are not much in and of themselves, become something beautiful. This is the analogy Peter is drawing for us.

What if these bricks in our building decided to do their own thing and to find their own individual, geographical spot upon which to rest themselves and became a brick here and a brick there, put together without any real builder or design, and each brick acting according to its own whim. What would happen? There would be no beauty, no function, no purpose, and there would only be lost potential. Friends, this is true of individual believers when we decide not to connect to other believers, by God’s design, under God’s spiritual leading, as God Himself directs us to build His house. It will be a connection of strong and deep relationships and it will be a connection which follows God’s design.

That is the reason, when we think about church, we must not think, “What do I want to be in reference to Jesus church? What are my past experiences? I have had some bad ones so I want to distance myself. What are some works I believe would be ‘cool’ and ‘nice’ for me to be a part of?” No, we want to say, “Lord, what would you have me to do? I know you want me in strong connection. It is necessary for mortar and the strong unity and ties which bring bricks together in order for bricks to become a spiritual house. I know that to be true and I am guided by a number of other principles of your Word.” It is important for each person to say, “Lord, I want to follow your lead in the way you intend for me to build a spiritual house. That is why I am here. I am not here for my own personal, self-advancement so much as I am here to build a spiritual house for your glory. Lord, how would you have me do it?” God calls us to place our lives in His skillful hands and when we do, He will mortar us together with other believers so we become part of something much greater than ourselves.

In 1 Corinthians 3, God tells us,

¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one's work will become manifest ¹⁶ ...know that you are God's temple...

We will be evaluated as living stones at the End of the Age. And, Verse 16 tells us this wonderful truth why the church is so beautiful and valuable. We are the place where God dwells and we tend to be the place which gives this world a picture of the wonder of our God.

The third reason Peter mentions concerning the value of the church is our opportunity to serve as a holy priesthood,

⁵ ...you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood...

Peter changes the analogy. It is still tied because the spiritual house is still a temple, but now he wants us to think of ourselves as a holy priesthood “to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Do you realize if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you are a genuine, authentic Christian; you are a priest of the Living God? Scripture is teaching us all believers now constitute God’s priesthood on the earth. Some believers are not more priests than other believers. That is not Peter’s teaching here. He is talking to the entire church, “You all are God’s priesthood. You are here on earth to represent me and to serve me and to offer spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to me.”

The primary function of the Old Testament priest was to serve God and offer sacrifices to Him on behalf of the people, but now there is not a separate class of priests. Each person is connected to Christ directly. He is our One mediator between God and man. We do not need a priest to be our mediator, Jesus Christ the Living Stone, and now we have all become a part of His priesthood. When you go to work, tell your co-workers you have decided to become a priest. That might start some conversation.

What specifically are these spiritual sacrifices? Romans 12:1 tells us one way we offer spiritual sacrifices is through the consecration of our whole person, “I urge, therefore, in view of God’s mercy, present your bodies to God as a living sacrifice, which is holy and acceptable to God; this is your reasonable act of worship.” God desires for all of our person to be committed to all of Him. Everything we say and think, all of our resources, our hobbies, and our relationships, everything, is committed and consecrated to His service.

The second spiritual sacrifice is giving praise and thanks to God. In Hebrews 13, we read,

¹⁵ Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Part of our acceptable sacrifice is when we verbalize who God is in His majesty and what God has done in His amazing grace. Men, I urge you to lead your families in this way. Often times men say, “I am not much of a singer and I am not comfortable giving words to what is happening in my heart.” I encourage you to grow; you can grow to become something rather than what you presently are. I will not condemn you for where you are now, but I will say, “Let us grow in grace, sacrifice to God, and in praise and thanksgiving. Lead your families in it.”

The third spiritual sacrifice is also doing acts of love and kindness to others. Do not neglect to do good and share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.⁷

The Bible uses at least these three and mentions sacrifices behind them.

The fourth reason the church is valuable is because of our guaranteed future joy. We will discuss this further in the next study. The principle presented is belief is always fruitful and unbelief is always fatal, for it stands in Scripture,

⁶ 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.” ⁷ 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,” ⁸ and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.”

⁷ Hebrews 13:16

The promise God gives to us is in Verse 6: Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame. Notice the contrast Peter draws in Verse 7 with a word of warning. The word “offense” is the Greek word *skandalon*. This is literally used of a crooked stick which is placed in a trap with the bait attached so when the animal comes along and takes the bait, the stick gets pulled out, the snare snaps, and the life of that animal is over. That is the picture Peter uses of a person coming to Christ and rejecting Him and does not believe in Him. He becomes a rock of offense and the trigger which snaps a trap which takes their life.

The contrast is those who come to Him and accept Him as the chief Cornerstone are the people who are blessed by Him and have life, but those who do not, those who reject Him, it is not as though their life remains the same, but there is irreversible death which comes upon that person. Jesus becomes a rock of offense and a snap trap for those people. That is the teaching of God’s Word.

I encourage you, do not be like the Lego which was resting in its self-satisfied way in the corner of my garage. Too many believers hide in the corner of a garage instead of placing themselves in God’s hands for God’s glory, in deep commitment to one another, as He builds His church. God’s church is too valuable to keep at the very fringes of your life.

If you have never embraced Jesus as your Cornerstone, the offer of Christ is presented to you as you come to Him, as we read in Verse 4. The word “come” is another word for belief. Jesus said, in Matthew 28,

²⁸ *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*

That is the invitation. As you come with your whole person say, “Christ, I find you infinitely precious and valuable.”

And if you are here today and you say, “I am not sure I find Jesus infinitely precious and valuable,” then you cannot come to Him. It is not like praying a prayer in order to avoid negative consequences that you come to Christ to receive His life. You have to come to Him as to a Living Stone, as to the One who has life which is infinitely precious and valuable and chosen. If you believe you cannot come to Him, I tell you, take a Bible, as the most important pursuit of your life, and begin reading the Gospel of Mark or the Gospel of John and say, “I need to find out more about this Living Stone so I can come to Him. God, will you open up my heart to this vast treasure who is Christ?”

Then, when you find Him to be who God claims Him to be, precious and chosen, come to Him and you, also, will become a living stone with an eternal purpose of being built into a spiritual house now and forever. Glory be to God!