

Like Living Stones

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[0 : 0 0] Today's scripture is from Psalm chapter 31, verses 1 through 5. In you, Lord, I have taken refuge.

Let me never be put to shame. Deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue.

Be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name, lead and guide me.

Keep me free from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hands I commit my spirit.

Deliver me, Lord, my faithful God. And from 1 Peter, chapter 2, verses 2 through 10. Like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.

[1 : 1 2] Now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, the living stone, rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him, 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.

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.

Now to you who believe this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone that causes people to stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.

They stumble because they disobey the message, which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness, into his wonderful light.

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.

[2 : 5 2] This is the word of our Lord. Thanks be to God. So I wanted to start out this morning by offering you a few challenges.

Our reading comes from the book of 1 Peter, and that has five chapters. And I invite you to spend time Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday to read all of them.

It will take you less than 10 minutes a day, but it's going to be helpful for you. The second thing that I challenge you to do is to attend church regularly.

Now it's important for a lot of reasons. And some of those we're going to talk about later today. And the third challenge that I have is for you to bring this.

Bring your Bible to church. I know some of you are like, we have Bibles in the pews. Why would you ask me to bring my Bible? Well, there's something very powerful about reading God's words from your own Bible.

[3 : 59] You can take notes in it. You can mark down things. You can underline words, phrases, as the Holy Spirit calls you. And as you go on through your life, as you're reading your Bible, you'll see those notes, and you'll remember why the Holy Spirit sent that to you.

This Bible is a collection of books, and those books were written by men, but they were inspired by God and the Holy Spirit.

The whole thing through different individuals over the course of 1,500 years. So if you want to see what God wants for us, if you want to see or hear God's voice, it's all right here.

If you want to know, just take a look in this book. So let's take a look at our scripture from Peter today. 1 Peter.

It's a letter that was written by the Apostle Peter to a group of Christians who were spread out in what is now modern Turkey. And I think that it's important that we see that Peter wrote this book.

[5 : 09] Peter, the disciple of Jesus. Peter, the one who walked with Jesus, the one who watched him perform all of those miracles, the one who heard Jesus' teaching in person.

That's the person who's writing all of this. It's what's called, it's meant to be a circular letter. So it's not written to a specific group of people.

We have books in the Bible that are written to a specific group of people. This was written for it to go to a group of people, and maybe they copy parts of it down, and they pass it on to another church, and they pass it on, and they continue until today it reaches us here at Pendleton Center.

We're reading this letter just like it was read in millions and millions of churches. It's an instructional letter, but it's also encouraging.

Peter wrote it at the time where people were being persecuted. There was hatred, and they needed to hear about God.

[6 : 17] We need to hear it because I believe that we are like that in similar times right now. In verse 4, Peter tells us, As you come to him speaking of Jesus, a living stone affected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious.

And it's a little amusing that Peter is going to talk about stones and rocks. He's going to use the likeness of Christ, the likeness of Christ and the church, and it's significant for several reasons.

Peter's name actually means rock. I don't know how significant that is, but I think he was probably a little amused. Peter's name was actually Simon, and Jesus changed it to Cephas, which means rock.

So Peter's talking about rocks and stones, and they play a very significant role in the Bible. You see it all over the place. Altars were built with stones.

God is represented of an immovable and unchangeable rock. When the Israelites were fleeing Egypt, the whole nation received water from a rock.

[7 : 34] When you go for a walk, take a look outside. Take a look at the earth around you. Take a look at all of those stones. We are like these living stones.

We're all different. Some of us are perfect and polished. Some of us are a little dirty. Some of us have broken edges. But we're all like these living stones.

We're all like these living stones. Peter tells us that Jesus is the living stone. And he says that he's going. He says, behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious.

And whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. Jesus is the cornerstone. I actually went to where they were working, doing construction.

And we don't see cornerstones very much in our building. If you look at some buildings, if you go to downtown Buffalo or Lockport, you'll see on the building maybe a little brick that has the year that it was made.

[8 : 42] And that's considered the cornerstone. But in the Old Testament, in the first centuries, when they would build a building, they would find a special stone that was hewn.

And it had to be big. And it had to be solid. And it had to be cut perfectly. And they would put that in the corner of the building so that every stone that they lined up would be perfectly square.

The cornerstone had to be rigid. It was the largest stone. It was the strongest stone. And it was so carefully constructed. The right cornerstone guarantees a solid construction for the building.

Just like that first Lego that you put down. That Lego determines how you can build, how big the shape is, and what the shape is that you can build.

Well, Jesus is that cornerstone of our church and our faith. But he also can be a stumbling block. When we look, starting at verse 7, and I picked this is from the message, it says, Welcome to the living stone, the source of life.

[9 : 53] The workman took one look and threw it out. God set it in the place of honor. Present yourselves as building stones for the construction of a sanctuary vibrant with life, in which you'll serve as holy priests offering Christ-approved lives up to God.

The scriptures provide precedence. Look, I'm setting a stone in Zion, a cornerstone in the place of honor. Whoever trusts in this stone as a foundation will never have cause to regret it.

To you who trust him, he's a stone to be proud of. But those who refuse to trust him, the stone the workman threw out is now the chief foundation stone.

For the untrusting, it's a stone to trip over, a boulder blocking the way. They trip and fall because they refuse to obey just as predicted.

So those two sections of scripture are taken directly from Psalm 118 in Isaiah. And Peter is pointing out that Messiah, that God chose, would be rejected by his own people.

[11 : 04] Just like a cornerstone, and somebody decided to put it down and realize that it wasn't quite perfect. It didn't quite fit. So they moved it to the side, and people would trip over it.

It's an interesting concept. There's a Greek word for this. It's called skandalon. And it's where we get the English word scandal from.

A skandalon is an impediment. It's a rock that causes people to fall. If you were trying to intentionally trip somebody, you would put a skandalon out, and that would trap them or trip them.

But in the case of Jesus, Peter uses this reference to recognize Jesus. And I'll share a quote from one of the commentaries I read.

It says, So here's the thing.

[12 : 13] You could choose to make Jesus the cornerstone of your life. You could choose that stability. You can choose that promise. Or you can reject the cornerstone.

And if you reject Jesus, it will cause your downfall. If you reject Jesus, you're going to trip over him. You're going to walk into that boulder.

Because all he wants is a relationship with you. I think that it's difficult because in some cases, our church hasn't done justice to that personality of Jesus.

We've taught that Jesus is nice, that Jesus is harmless, that Jesus loves everyone. And it's true that Jesus is kind, and it's true that Jesus does love everybody.

But Jesus also spoke the truth. And sometimes the truth hurts. There was a song written in the 90s by the artist Charlie Peacock, and he says there's no insult like the truth.

[13 : 16] And people often rejected Jesus because he told them the truth. Think about the rich young ruler that came to Jesus, and he said, What should I do to enter the kingdom of heaven?

And Jesus looked at him and said, Sell everything you have. That was the truth for that young man. And he walked away disappointed, and he became offended at what Jesus said.

We need to hear the truth sometimes. I think that in our society, truth is sort of a dying thing. But there's no love without the truth.

Jesus is love. But he also means truth. Do you have someone in your life that loves you enough to tell you the truth?

Well, I want to tell you the truth today. You must choose Jesus. You must build your life with that cornerstone.

[14 : 16] We live in a culture that's so focused on tolerance, as if tolerance means acceptance, that that's the same as love. Love is the truth.

And Jesus spoke that truth very clearly when he said, I am the way, the truth, the life. Nobody comes to the Father except through me. Have you ever noticed how rigid truth is, how immovable, how inescapable it is?

We also hear that we are living stones, and it means that each of us here, even those watching in line, if you're a follower of Jesus, you're a living stone, and God is using each of us to build a spiritual house, not a physical house, simply stated.

This church is a gathering of believers. It's not the walls. It's not the ceiling. It's not the roof. It's not the stage, or the carpet, or any of these lights, or the instruments here.

This is not the church. This is merely a building. People think that the church is made up of bricks and walls, but the bricks are you.

[15 : 30] You are the church. There's a story that's been told of the king of Sparta, and he was taking with him a foreign general, and he was talking about how strong the nation of Sparta was, how impenetrable its fortresses were.

And when that general came to see Sparta, he looked around and noticed there were no walls, and he said to the king, I don't see any of these walls you were talking about. And the king pointed to his soldiers.

He said, these are my walls. Every single man is a brick. And just like that, each of you, each person in the church has a role to play.

We're like stones that fit perfectly together. Several years ago, I watched a video with my students, and I can't remember what country it was in, but they talked about building a building.

And each person in the village went out and picked up a stone and brought it back to build this building. And the rocks were all shaped differently, and they would bring them into a big pile, and the builders would take those rocks and find them and try to intertwine them so that they would match up and put concrete between them.

[16 : 47] That's what the modern church is. That's what our church is. Every single one of us is like one of those stones that God is putting together to build up his church.

But imagine this. Imagine if we were to take those rocks and rather than placing them next to each other and fitting them onto pieces and putting them into place, what if we took one rock and sent it over here and said, that's a great rock.

And we took another one and we put it over here and said, oh, that's a really good rock too. And we put one here and here and here. You wouldn't have much of a building, would you?

I think that's one of the challenges of our church today is that we're not gathered together like we should be. And some of you might say to me, well, you don't have to gather together, right?

You don't have to go to the church building. Well, technically that's true. But let me say this. You don't have to show up at work every day to have a job.

[17 : 48] But if you skip enough days, you won't have that job. Church is meant to be close together. It's not about being in this certain building at a certain time.

It's about gathering together regularly so that we can encourage each other, so that we can pray for each other, so that we can build each other up. The past few years have been quite a challenge because of the pandemic, so many changes in the church, life, just everything that's going on.

So if you can't get to church, if you're sick or you're compromised, that's fair, and that's safe, and that's reasonable. And that's why we have video and we have groups that meet by Zoom.

But let's say this. If what's holding you back from coming to church regularly is fear, fear over the change, fear over acceptance, fear over things being different, that's not from God.

That's from the enemy. And if fear is what's holding you back from being in the presence of the other believers here, that's something we need to talk about. If convenience is what's holding you back.

[19 : 11] Because I've had people tell me, you know, I really like going to church at home. I can sleep in. I can stay in my PJs. I can have breakfast and drink a cup of coffee.

But we need you. We need you here. You need each other. The writer of Hebrews says it very clear in chapter 10, verse 24.

We're in some of the difficult times in church history, and we're going to need each other like never before. I had someone tell me this week, if it wasn't for God and the support of the people in this church.

I don't know where I would be right now. We need each other because it's tough to follow Jesus. And studies have shown that gathering together is actually good for your health.

There was research from Purdue University, and it revealed the number of people who report excellent health is nearly 50% higher for those who attend church regularly over those who don't.

[20 : 31] See? It's good for you. Come. Have some friends. Feel good. You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation of people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellences of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

I love that phrase, out of darkness into his marvelous light. And here we learn four things that are critical here. Number one is that you are chosen.

Two is that you are a royal priesthood. Number three, that you're a holy nation. And number four, you're a people for his possession. There's a whole sermon in that one verse.

It's packed with historical content, packed with symbolism, but I want to sum it up for you. First, I want you to know that each of you are chosen.

How does it feel that God picked you? Remember, back in gym class, and there are two captains, and the captains got up and they had to pick teams, and all you're thinking is, please, please don't pick me last.

[21 : 48] Well, God never picks anybody last. In fact, he picks you before the foundation of the world. he picked each and every one of you first.

You are chosen by God. Second, we hear that we're a royal priesthood. What does that mean? It means that we're prepared for a special task.

That task of a holy priesthood is to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. Our very lives. as a living stone in devotion to God.

Paul says in the book of Romans that you are a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable to God every single moment of every single day of your life. Your words are a living sacrifice.

We're a holy nation set apart. We're set apart for special purposes. We're like the special forces. At last, he says you're a people for his possession.

[22 : 55] And that's beautiful. Who do you belong to? Who's got your back every minute of every day? Jesus. We can't lose.

We won't lose. We have God on our side. We are to take that and do something with it. You may proclaim the excellences of him who called you out of darkness.

What we're going to see all through this letter is that Peter is writing to the exiled believers not just so that they survive but in doing so they have a positive impact on the people in their lives.

Peter pays special attention throughout this letter so that the believers know that their actions make a difference to the people around them. It's important that the actions influence of us.

Influence those people that we consider outsiders. God wants them. He wants them to be brought from darkness into his marvelous light and we are the ones to proclaim that reality.

[24 : 03] We're facing a difficult time in history that's for sure. We have hate. Our country's divided and it's difficult to follow Jesus but there's also a tremendous opportunity here to reach our friends our neighbors our co-workers and our family because people are looking for solutions.

They're looking for answers right now. They're looking for hope. I asked you a couple weeks ago if I met you outside of this church would I know that you were a believer of God when I know that you were a Christian and I ask you that again today.

We have a reason to stand firm not just for our survival but to bring more people to Jesus to be the living stone to be the solid foundations not only of our church but our communities.

So let me finish up with a couple of questions for you. What does your stone look like? Are you a living stone? Do you know Jesus?

Are you part of that holy temple that's being built by God? Maybe today you're looking for hope maybe today you're looking for answers or you feel lost when you watch the news when you watch TV or you talk with your friends or you feel like you're in the dark spiritually.

[25 : 32] We're here to say we're all in the dark too but we're brought out of darkness into a marvelous light and we want that for everyone.

Maybe you're here because you're already a living stone and I hope these words encourage you I hope they help you stand firm in our world right now.

I hope you take his place in his holy temple of living stones the church. My prayer is that we continue to influence our community for God's glory and his glory alone and if we follow the words of the song on Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand we'll be alright.

As you go forth into the world remember that you are a living stone in everything you do you can embody and enact worship and we have several opportunities coming up that you are able to participate and be those living stones you can go ahead and look in your bulletin we have the bible studies coming up we have angel wings this coming weekend there's the gathering so there's so many things that you can participate in so now go with the love and peace that Christ brings you each and every day amen to u as We'll be right back.

We'll be right back.

[28 : 15] We'll be right back.