

Haddon Robinson tells the story of a young Chinese man who wanted to learn everything there was to know about jade, so he went to an old teacher who specialized in this beautiful gem and asked him to teach him. The old teacher agreed.

In the first lesson, the old teacher placed a piece of the precious stone into the young man's hand and told him to hold it tightly. Then the old teacher began to talk of philosophy, men, women, the sun and almost everything under it. After an hour, the teacher took the stone from the man and sent him home, telling him to return the next day. The man was confused but thought surely the next day would be different.

But the same procedure was repeated the next day and then the next – for several weeks, each time with a different piece of jade. The young man wanted to be polite to his teacher, but finally after a few weeks of the same thing – he planned to quit. He came to the old teacher once more, sat down, and the old teacher put a strange stone into his hand and instinctively the young man said, “Hey, that’s not jade!” To which the teacher replied. “Now, you are ready to work with the precious stone, for now, you recognize what’s genuine.”

Last week, we looked at some of the stinking thinking that hinders our ability as born-again believers to live holy lives and really love one another, and on top of that, it dulls our natural craving for the Word of God. If we are going to be a people of the Word, if we are going to be people who say we to follow the Word – then we must be people who are in the Word – who have an appetite – a hunger for the Word – otherwise we won't grow spiritually – we can't – and like the lesson with the jade, we will not be able to distinguish what is genuine and true from what is not.

This morning, we are continuing in our study in **1 Peter**, but before we go there, let's go backwards a bit to the gospel of **Matthew**, Chapter **16**, because I need to set the stage for our passage.

In **Matthew 16**, beginning with **verse 13**, Jesus is with His disciples and He asks them this question: “**Who do people say that the Son of Man is?**” “*What are they saying about Me?*” So, the disciples answered Jesus and told Him what the people were saying about Him and who they thought He was. But Jesus gets a little more personal and He asks His disciples this question, “**But who do you yourselves say that I am?**” *You told me what the other people thought about Me, but what do you think about Me? Who do you say that I am?*

Jesus is asking this question to each of His disciples and that's a question each one of us must answer for ourselves as well. Jesus asks you and me, "**Who do you say that I am?**"

Well in **verse 16**, Peter, who seems to be the spokesman of the group, answered Jesus and stated, "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**" Jesus then replied to Peter, "**Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.**" Peter gave the correct answer, then in **verse 18**, Jesus continues, "**And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.**"

Let's look at **verse 18** a little closer because there is a play on words here that is significant which applies directly to our study in **1 Peter** this morning. In this verse, Jesus gives Simon the new name of Peter – the Greek word is *petros*, which means "a rock or a stone." Then Jesus says, "**upon this rock I will build My church.**" In that sentence, the Greek word for rock is not *petros*, but rather *petra*, which means "a large rock." When Jesus said I will build My church upon this rock, He was not referring to building the church upon Peter; instead, Jesus was referring to what Peter had said – that being that Jesus is "**the Christ, the Son of the living God.**" It's not Peter – it's the truth which Peter had confessed that would lay the foundation for the church. Peter was just another small rock in the quarry of many rocks, but Jesus is *the* rock upon which the church would be built, and it's that truth which leads us to **1 Peter 2:4** where we get a look at God's building program.

"And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by people, but is choice and precious in the sight of God,"

Peter told his readers that while many people had rejected the Lord – Jesus was God's Chosen One, highly valued by God – and as believers, they had come to know Him. Peter says, "**Coming to Him.**" Let's look at those words for a minute because they really speak to the kindness and the goodness of God that we talked about last week.

Did you know that we cannot come to Jesus on our own? We can't. We don't take the lead, we don't come to saving faith on our own, instead it is a loving and gracious God who takes the initiative with us and leads us into a saving, life-giving relationship with His Son Jesus. God draws us to Himself, and Jesus spoke about this in **John 6:44**, when He said,

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Through the truth of God’s Word and the convicting power of the Holy Spirit – God gently tugs on our hearts, bringing us to that place where we have to answer the question about Jesus: **“Who do you say I am?”** We have to honestly answer that question for ourselves – and we can accept the gospel truth that Jesus is Savior and Lord and come to Him, or we can reject the truth and reject Him.

Peter tells us that many had rejected Jesus, they saw no value in Him, and they turned away from Him, but these believers received Jesus – they came to Him and they remained in an abiding relationship with Him. Just like Peter, they recognized that Jesus was the Chosen One, the Christ, the Son of the living God in whom they would be saved – for salvation is in no other. They had a living hope in a resurrected, life-giving Savior, and to these believers, Jesus was embraced as a **living stone** who served as the foundation of God’s building program of the church, which Peter explains in **verse 5**. He says,

“you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

This is an interesting picture that Peter paints for us – describing the church – the body of Christ, like a holy temple being comprised of living building blocks. In this picture, born-again believers become living stones when they trust Jesus as their Savior and Lord. They are quarried out of the rock pit of sin, admitted into God’s building program, crafted and shaped by Him for His purposes, fit into place together according to His architectural plan, and cemented by His grace into the church. We are living stones that are put together to build His living church.

*A Spartan king boasted to a visiting monarch about the walls of Sparta. The visiting monarch looked around and could see no walls. He said to the Spartan king, **“Where are these walls about which you boast so much?”** The king pointed at his bodyguard of magnificent troops. **“These,”** he said, **“are the walls of Sparta, every man a brick.”** The point is clear. So long as a brick lies by itself it is useless; however, it becomes useful only when it is incorporated together into God’s building program for His church.*

Together as living stones, God is building something out of us, and Peter tells us that within the living church, we are to function as **a holy priesthood**. **Did you know that you are a priest?** All believers are priests unto God.

If you recall in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, priests were those people who God had called to serve in the temple. They were the ones who led in worship, they offered sacrifices to God, and they also served as mediators between God and His people. Their purpose was to lead people to God. But here, Peter says that every born-again believer is their own priest before God. Every Christian now has direct access to God through Jesus Christ. You and I can approach God, for there is no longer this elite priesthood where only certain people have special access to God. As believers – all of us, we have the right to come into God’s presence – but with that right as priests comes the responsibilities as priests. Believers are to serve God. We are to worship Him, we are to help people come to Him by sharing the gospel, and Peter says we are to **offer spiritual sacrifices**.

In Old Testament times, priests would offer sacrifices, such as lambs for the sacrifice of sin; however, in the New Testament, our sacrifice to God is much more personal, and the Apostle Paul explained it in **Romans 12:1**, where he says,

“Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”

Because of God’s compassion to us, we are to present our bodies as living and holy sacrifices to Him, meaning – God wants you – your total life – all of you. He wants your complete surrender where He is your everything.

Lorne Sanny, formerly of Navigators before he passed away, said this: *“God’s best has been given to you. **Is your best His?** Your best begins with committing yourself totally to Him. Then God will have your feet to take you where He wants you to go. He’ll have your ears to listen to those who need listening to. He’ll have your mouth to speak what He wants spoken. He’ll also have your time, your career, your money. In giving yourself, you’re turning over to God the most valuable thing you can give.”*

As a holy priesthood in God’s church, we are to offer spiritual sacrifices – we are to offer ourselves totally to Him – no *ifs*, no *ands*, no *buts* – presenting ourselves to God for His service, using the material means He has blessed us with to support His building program, and by loving one another in supportive and practical ways.

When we come to Christ, we become living stones, we become part of God’s building program for His church, and our growth begins as we offer ourselves totally as spiritual sacrifices to God. Peter wants to make sure we understand how

important our response is to God, and also how prophetic our response is to God, so in **verses 6-8**, he quotes from three Old Testament passages: **Isaiah 28:16**, **Psalms 118:22**, and **Isaiah 8:14**.

⁶For this is contained in Scripture: “BEHOLD, I AM LAYING IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNERSTONE, AND THE ONE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE PUT TO SHAME.” ⁷This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for unbelievers, “A STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE,” ⁸and, “A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this they were also appointed.

In these passages from the Old Testament, the stone is the obvious theme. In each case, the stone represents God or His salvation or His coming Messiah, and in quoting these passages, Peter is identifying Jesus as the fulfillment of these prophecies. Jesus is the Stone – He is the Cornerstone.

In the ancient world, the cornerstone was the first and most important stone that was laid in a building project. When people set out to construct a building of stone, which was common in the ancient world, it was vital that the stones fit perfectly – that all the angles lined up, and to ensure this was the case, they used a cornerstone to set the lines for the building. The cornerstone was a perfectly carved stone that maintained the symmetry for the rest of the building. The cornerstone functioned like a square or a plumb line in every direction – setting the right angles for the sides as well as going upward. All of those angles were set by the one massive cornerstone to which all other stones had to agree.

So, a cornerstone ensured every angle was absolutely perfect according to the builder’s plan, and in God’s building plan – Jesus is the Cornerstone, the stone which the builders rejected, and when Jesus mentioned this to the Jewish leaders, it infuriated them.

*When constructing Solomon’s Temple, it took 30,000 workers over seven years to complete the temple. According to **1 Kings 6**, all the stones were quarried far away from the building site, so there was no sound of hammering heard in the area. Jewish tradition says that one day the building superintendent saw an unusual stone being delivered. Because it was cut in an odd shape, he thought it was flawed. He had it rolled away into the Kidron Valley where it lay untouched and unnoticed. Years later, the builder sent word to the quarry that he was ready for the main cornerstone. The quarry master came and reported, “Why, I had that*

stone delivered years ago.” When they began to search, they discovered the discarded stone in the valley was the main cornerstone. It was covered with debris and moss. It took many men working hard to raise the massive stone out of the valley. When they raised it and set it, it fit perfectly! The chief cornerstone was the very rock they rejected.

Jesus, although chosen and exalted by God, was rejected by men because they would not accept the truth of God’s Word. Jesus was the Cornerstone the builders rejected. He was not wanted. Jesus did not fit into their religious plans, and He offended their sense of pride and self-righteousness – but be that may, Jesus was the One on whom God’s entire plan of redemption rested – for without Jesus, there is no salvation. There is no other name given under heaven by which man may be saved. For those who come to Jesus, Peter says they **will not be put to shame**, He is the foundation for their lives, but to those who reject Him, to those who refuse to believe because they can’t admit their need for a Savior, Jesus is this offensive stone on their path which causes them to trip and fall.

I read this comment during my studies: **Have you ever pondered why people react so negatively to Jesus?** You can talk about every religious leader under the sun, with no adverse reaction. But if you talk about Jesus, people will get irate, because He is on their trail and they cannot get away from Him. **Why do we swear using Jesus' name? Have you ever pondered that? Why Jesus?** Because, you see, He is the great, inescapable fact of life. He grates on people. They fall over Him because He confronts them every place they turn. So, there are only two alternatives in life. We can believe Him and thus make Him the foundation of our life. He then becomes the source of strength and stability which turns us into living stones in His house, and into a priesthood offering up sacrifices. Or we can become unpersuadable. Then He becomes to us that inescapable fact over which we stumble. He is an offense to us. There are no other alternatives.

C. S. Lewis in his book “Mere Christianity” gets right to the point and said this of Jesus, *“He is the Sovereign Lord of the Universe. We either believe Him and make Him the foundation of our lives, or we reject Him and spend the rest of our lives falling over Him. There is no other alternative.”*

If we are going to be living stones – building blocks in the church, if we are going to be a holy priesthood, if we are going to offer spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to God, then we must day-by-day, hour-by-hour come to Jesus. We must walk with Him. We must abide in Him. We must trust that Jesus is who He says He is, will do what He says He will do – take Him at His word, and obey

Him. Jesus gave His best to us, and we are to give our best to Him because ultimately – it's for our best.

I want to share a fictional story with you. Once upon a time, there was a man who was sleeping at night in his cabin when suddenly his room filled with light and the Savior appeared. The Lord told the man He had work for him to do, and showed him a large rock in front of his cabin. The Lord explained that the man was to push against the rock with all his might. This the man did, day after day. For many years he toiled from sun up to sun down, his shoulders set squarely against the cold, massive surface of the unmoving rock, pushing with all his might.

*Each night the man returned to his cabin sore and worn out, feeling that his whole day had been spent in vain. Seeing that the man was showing signs of discouragement, Satan decided to enter the picture placing thoughts into the man's mind such as: "You have been pushing against that rock for a long time, and it hasn't budged. **Why kill yourself over this?** You are never going to move it." Thus, giving the man the impression that the task was impossible and that he was a failure.*

*These thoughts discouraged and disheartened the man even more. "**Why kill myself over this?**" he thought. "I'll just put in my time, giving just the minimum of effort and that will be good enough." And that he planned to do until one day he decided to make it a matter of prayer and take his troubled thoughts to the Lord.*

*"Lord," he said, "I have labored long and hard in your service, putting all my strength to do that which you have asked. Yet, after all this time, I have not even budged that rock a half an inch. **What is wrong? Why am I failing?**" To this the Lord responded compassionately, "My child, when long ago I asked you to serve me and you accepted, I told you that your task was to push against the rock with all your strength, which you have done. Never once did I mention to you that I expected you to move it. Your task was to push.*

*And now you come to Me, your strength spent, thinking that you have failed. **But, is that really so?** Look at yourself. Your arms are muscled, your back is strong, your hands are callused from constant pressure, and your legs have become massive and hard. Through opposition, you have grown much and your abilities now surpass that which you used to have. Yet you haven't moved the rock. But your calling was to be obedient and to push and to exercise your faith and trust in My wisdom. This you have done. I, my child, will now move the rock."*

Source Material:

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