

We are Living Stones!

- 1 Peter 2:4-10
- Peter exulted in the marvelous wonders of our salvation in the first chapter. Now he stands on tiptoe to exult in the status we have been given in Christ as the true people of God who have been called out of darkness and into his marvelous light. We could spend three months of sermons soaking in this passage because of its wonders and glories, and I encourage all of you to come back to it often, and to memorize parts or all of it. Because this is a powerful proclamation of who we are. Sam Storms wrote, "Most of the struggles Christians face stem from their failure to embrace and enjoy their new identity in Christ." Truth! Some believe that this section of Peter's letter was the core instruction for baptism class. New believers were taught this before they went into the water, and I am excited that we have a baptism today after the service! Let's look at this passage under three main points: This is Jesus, This is Us, and Wow, This IS Us!
- **This is Jesus (verses 4, 6)**
- Notice Peter refers to Jesus as a living stone rejected by men. He is not dead but alive. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the cornerstone of our faith, and everything is built on him, our living Savior. Twice Peter says that Jesus is chosen and precious. He is chosen and precious in the sight of God, and as we come to him in faith, he is chosen and precious to us as well. Though we have not seen him, Peter said in chapter one, we love him. He is precious to us because whoever believes in him will not be put to shame, as we see in verse 6. The reference to Isaiah 28 there cannot be fully appreciated without the context. God is raising up the Assyrians to come and fight against his own people because of their rebellion and unbelief. They have no hope of withstanding the attack, even though they tell God, *we're fine, we made a covenant with Sheol and death. Yeah, God, we have a treaty with death and hell, a deal with the devil you might say, and they are all going to leave us alone.* God says it's not the devil you need to worry about. It's me. God says there is a scourge coming and it will be sheer terror to them, and the only thing that can stand against the storm that is coming is God's own building. He says, "Behold, I am the one who has laid a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation." The arrogance of human pride is rebuked by the precious cornerstone, Jesus. God spoke to Isaiah about Jesus again, many years later, in the first of four servant songs. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the streets; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice." (Isaiah 42:1-3) This is Jesus! And "whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." Not by the Assyrians. Not by the atheists. Not by the antichrist. That leads us to...
- **This is Us (verses 5-8)**
- As we come to the living stone by faith, Peter says we also are like living stones, and are being built up as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. That person sitting on either side of you and in front of you and behind you is a precious stone to God, a living stone that is connected to you by the blood of Christ and by the Spirit of Christ. A song from my past was called "We are Family," and it's a catchy tune. But how is the family held together? They sing, "No we don't get depressed, 'cause here's our golden rule: Have faith in you and the things you do, You won't go wrong, this is our family jewel." With all due respect to Sister Sledge, if my faith is in me or you or the things we do, the Assyrians are knocking at the door. We are living stones because of THE living stone. And we are being built together. It is a lifelong building project and the exciting thing is that there are new living stones being added to God's building every day. Every time someone hears Jesus say, "Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me," and does that, there's a new living stone added to God's building. **We** are family. Some of you may remember Sunday morning, August 1, 1999, when Antioch was worshiping at what was then Arts Alive and is now AFAA. One of our sons who was famous for his timely febrile seizures had one in the

middle of the sermon. His fever spiked, his eyes rolled back in his head, and pandemonium ensued. Someone called 911 and the police were coming in the front door while the firemen were coming through the back. A paramedic who was looking at our son said, "Who are his parents?" The answer came back, "They're not here right now; they're at the hospital." He persisted. Well, someone needs to call them. I need to speak to his mom or dad. One woman said, "I don't think that's a good idea. She's pushing right now." The paramedic said, "Well, I need to speak to someone in the family." John Cobb grinned and said, "We're all family here!" And he was right. We are family, being built together as living stones who love each other more and more. If we are being built together, that begs the question:

- Who is the builder? Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18) Jesus is building his church. Can I ask you something? If Jesus was building a housing development in Alamance County, how many of you would want a house there? If Jesus was building a shopping center, how many of you would want to shop there? But Jesus said he is building one thing on the earth. Only one. His church. Two questions, then. Is there anything more important on the earth than the church? And, if not, why are so many living stones disconnected? Why are so many believers living solitary lives of worship apart from a local expression of the body of Christ?
- We are being built up into a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. A house made up of many stones who are all priests. Remember that Peter is writing to Gentile believers, and this would have been shocking and exciting truth to them. They knew of the Jewish faith that not only could a Gentile not be a priest, he could not even come past the outer court. Their worship was seen as ceremonial but not spiritual. And now because of Christ, the dividing wall of separation has been torn down. All who are in Christ can come boldly into his presence. You are welcome there and invited to come and offer spiritual sacrifices. This is not the blood of bulls or goats. "Through him (Jesus) then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name." (Hebrews 13:15). Oh, saints, our worship is daily, so when we come together on Sunday morning and sing his praises or hear his Word or give our offerings as the body of Christ at Antioch, we explode in the magnified worship and celebration as living stones who stand on and give glory to the cornerstone!
- Peter says in verse 7 "the honor is for you who believe." Who are you in Christ? Honored. What is our honor? We know Christ and believe in him. Those who don't believe have rejected the cornerstone, and to them Jesus is a stumbling block and even an offense. Maybe to them, the meek and mild Jesus that hangs on some of their walls is ok. Even the Jesus who is hanging on a cross around their necks. But the Jesus who says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." No, *that* Jesus is way out of line, and who exactly does he think he is, telling me what to believe? Peter tells us: He is the cornerstone, the only hope, the light in the darkness, the savior. As Peter said to the high priest and the rulers in Jerusalem after they had arrested him and John, "This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in **no one else**, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:11-12). There is only one cornerstone. Do you believe? If so, then you will love this last truth. It's about you.
- **Wow, This IS Us! (verses 9-10)**
- Who are we, you and I, in Christ? Knowing this and believing this changes everything. Look again at this almost unbelievable description. But it is believable and we must believe it. It is the truth about who we are. Look at this family portrait of the church. We are a...
- **Chosen race.** This is all of grace. Those who come to Jesus by faith have been chosen to do so. We are elect exiles. We say yes to him because the gift of faith is given to us. The wonder in all of this is not that God would just choose some but that he would choose any! He did not have to. But he did, because of grace, which angels long to look into. Those who do not believe, as you see in verse 8, *choose* unbelief. The sovereignty of God (*they were destined*) is side by side with the responsibility of man (*they disobeyed the word*). All we can do is praise God that we are part of the new Israel, the chosen race, and a people for his possession. Owned by God for his glory! We are a...

- Royal priesthood, holy nation.** Peter looks back to Exodus 19:6, where God said to Israel, “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” The priests were brought into the closest relationship with God, and that door was opened to **all** believers on the day that Jesus died and the curtain was torn in two from top to bottom. There is not a single believer who has less access to God and is less loved and welcomed by God than any other believer. I was reminded this week of DL Moody, a man born into poverty in 1837 in Massachusetts to a devout mother and an alcoholic father. He was led to faith in Christ by a faithful Sunday school teacher, Edward Kimball, when he was 17 years old. He went to Chicago with the intention of becoming a wealthy businessman, but also began a Sunday school in the poorest, most crime-ridden area of the city. In that needy environment he discovered that leading children to faith in Christ was more rewarding than making money. Moody, following the ministries of men like Whitfield and Finney, held great crusades and passionately preached the Gospel. Newspaper writers were puzzled as to why this man, whose bad grammar reflected his 4th grade education, could fill great halls with tens of thousands of people night after night. Nevertheless, the front pages of their morning newspapers often carried his sermon delivered the night before. His life illustrates the necessity of completely yielding to God. While in England he heard evangelist Henry Varley say, “The world has yet to see what God can do through a man who is totally yielded to Him.” Moody was captivated by these words and resolved, “By the Grace of God, I will be that man!” When he died on December 22, 1899, the thousands who gathered for his funeral were told: Though he made no inventions and had no discoveries, though he wrote no poems, painted no pictures, and led no triumphant armies, this unlettered son of a poor woman in New England ... made an impression on the world that this dying century has seldom seen. (adapted from an article by Erwin Lutzer) One of my favorite quotes from DL Moody was this one: “A holy life will make the deepest impression. Lighthouses blow no horns; they just shine.”
- We shine as believers more and more as we walk in the truth and proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once we were not a people and now, we belong to God. Once we had no mercy but now, we have received mercy. And all we can do is praise God. I love that scene in the movie “Sound of Freedom” where the children who had been rescued from the wicked people who were holding them captive were singing joyfully in their native tongue. One of the rescuers said, “You know what that is? That’s the sound of freedom.” When we praise God, that’s what he hears!
- Who are we? A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and people for his own possession. What do we do? Proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.
- Prayer
- Greet One Another