

Title: The Stones
Date: September 23, 2018
Subject: How God views us and his purposes for us
Scripture: 1 Peter 2:4 - 12

Rock picking wasn't the favorite task on the farm, even though we'd test our arms to see if we could throw the rocks onto the wagon instead of carry them. Dad would remind us to watch out so we didn't hit each other. Unloading was more fun as we tried to see how fast we could unload them onto the pile. Another opportunity for the warning/scolding about not hitting your brother. It was a dirty job as many were too heavy to throw and they had to be cradled like a baby and gently lifted onto the wagon. Some had to be dug out with a shovel and some needed a chain wrapped under to be pulled out with the tractor. I've heard of veteran rock pickers slyly explaining to unsuspecting novices that if everyone picked only the momma rocks or only the daddy rocks there wouldn't be so many the next year. The comment raised a few quizzical expressions.

Peter, whose name means stone/rock, is an appropriate channel for the Lord to communicate about stones. The imagery is used 9 times in our text. I think it's appropriate to have the Scripture read by someone really familiar with rocks since he works in lots of quarries. Clint is going to read.

READ 1 Peter 2:4-12. We begin with The Stone, the Living Stone, Jesus.

I. The Stone 4, 6 - 8

A. Identity. We think of rocks as inanimate objects. They don't grow. They don't do anything. They just sit there. Yet someone made tons of money by marketing Pet Rocks. Go figure. They're just rocks.

Jesus isn't an ordinary rock. He is the Living Stone. He has life in himself and gives life. He is vibrant. As the Living Stone, he is solid. He's bedrock.

B. Value. The two appraisals of his worth are inserted as an interruption to the train of thought. He's rejected by people. This would have been a perfect time for Peter to dip into the Old Testament and quote Isaiah (53:2, 3, 6) – "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind,... Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem... We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way." He doesn't. Peter merely summarizes all the horrors Jesus suffered as being *rejected* by people. The Jews sometimes get the sole blame for rejecting Christ. They did reject him, but they weren't the only ones. The Romans had a hand in it. All mankind does because of their sin. We forced Jesus to go to the cross. The world rejects Jesus because he doesn't fit into their preconceived notions of what a Savior should be.

In contrast is the way God views him. He was chosen by God. It's a continuation of the thought that began in 1:1. God has chosen people to be his (his elect). It's restated in 1:15. Christ was chosen before the creation of the world to be the method of redemption (1:20). Here, he's chosen by God.

There's the added quality of being precious to the Lord. He's highly prized and therefore is honored. The importance of being chosen and precious is underscored as both are repeated in v. 6. Jesus Christ is God's special instrument of salvation.

C. Function. Jesus is the foundation. Peter doesn't use this explicit term. He refers to the Lord as the cornerstone and capstone. These thoughts weren't new to Peter. He boldly spoke about Jesus before the Jewish ruling council when he was interrogated about the healing of a crippled man. "If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:9-12).

Earlier, while Jesus was still alive, the Savior communicated this truth to Peter and the other disciples when he asked them what people said about the Son of Man. People thought he was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Jesus asked who they thought he was. Peter spoke up, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). For this answer Jesus gives Peter his new name (petros) and states on this bedrock (petra) he will build his church. Jesus is the firm foundation, the bedrock of our faith.

Let's dig a little more into the stone related terms. Cornerstone. Current cornerstones are more ceremonial than construction necessary. They give credit to the architect, engineer and builder as well as provide the date of construction and possibly an enclosed place to serve as a time capsule. Ancient cornerstones were the first building blocks put into position. The rest of the stones and the entire building were aligned with it.

Jesus is the cornerstone as he is the architect, engineer and builder of our salvation. He is the first to rise from the grave and the guarantee of others following in his footsteps. He sets the alignment for his building. We take our positions from him.

Capstone. It's the final wedge shaped stone to be placed at the top of the arch. It holds the other stones together. No mortar is needed as it stays in place by gravity. The world's largest capstone was discovered in 2017. Weighed in at 44 tons or about 4 average African elephants.

As capstone, Jesus is the most important stone. He holds together all the stones of his kingdom.

D. Results. Those who trust in Jesus will never be put to shame (v. 6). The Stone has become precious (v. 7). Others understand the original language of v. 7 to mean that the honor given to Christ is extended to those who are his. Christ followers are on the right side of history, as people like to proclaim their choices. This choice isn't based on people's desires but on the rock solid truth of who Jesus is and what he's done.

Those who don't believe will stumble and fall. The analogy is shifted slightly as a cornerstone and a capstone in their proper places really aren't in positions, on the corner of a building or at the top of a doorway, to make people trip. People do trip over rocks on driveways or stub their toes on even level stone surfaces. It's the concept that people trip. They're confronted by Jesus and can't get themselves to put their trust in him.

The question people have to resolve is: have I personally believed in Jesus that he is the one who can provide salvation or does he make me stumble?

II. The living stones vv. 5, 9 - 12

A. Position. People get their sense of being from all sorts of sources. A woman in the religion arena calls herself “Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Coordinator.” Sounds like an awfully tall order. Sounds like God’s job description.

V. 5 gives a mix of word pictures pertaining to Christ followers -- “like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood.” Each Christ follower is a living stone, alive to the truth of God, but relatively useless if it remains by itself. The stones are used to construct a spiritual building. It’s a house, God’s house, where he lives. The house is in the process of becoming a people group. We don’t remain a building that’s nice to look at but are to be people who render service to the Lord and worship him. Believers are a holy priesthood, people who are set apart to serve God.

More rapid fire word pictures come in vv. 9, 10. We are a chosen people. We are selectable. God chose us not for who we are or anything we’ve done. I take that back. He chose us because we were sinners who needed him and what he has to offer. We’re chosen by God even as Jesus was chosen by God. Different roles and responsibilities, but chosen nonetheless.

A royal priesthood. Serviceable. These two offices were separate in the Old Testament. We share in Christ’s forever kingship and priesthood. Since we belong to him we’re part of the royal family and the priestly line. We don’t have to go through some other human to get to God. We are priests with direct access to God. We are princes and princesses.

A holy nation. Irreplaceable. This is the second time *holy* is used as a descriptive word – holy priesthood, holy nation. Holy means to be set apart to God. In the Jewish Temple the articles used for worship were set apart to only be used for temple purposes. That’s as we would expect. However, even the drinking cups were holy – only to be used in the temple. And the clothes the priests wore were holy. They had to change out of them before they could go out in public. Holy. Set apart. A nation that is unique as it doesn’t have boundaries marked by rivers or oceans. It’s unique in that it’s set apart for God’s use.

A people belonging to God. Valuable. The ESV words it “for his own possession.” We are people whom the Lord purchased. The Greek word carries the idea of marking something as belonging to someone by making a ring around it. Christ makes a ring around us and claims us as belonging to him. Kind of like affixing a brand. The Lord collects people that are worthless in and of themselves. He transforms them into amazing works of art with incredible, eternal value. In one sense, we’re how the Lord shows off his wealth.

Called out of darkness into his wonderful light. Forgivable. The deck was stacked against us. Our sins were piled high to the sky. Judgment was looming. We were surrounded by total darkness, unable to find a way out of our predicament. Jesus lit the candle that blazed the path to our being brought into a right relationship with God.

Acceptable. The text states it so well, we'll just reread it. REREAD v. 10. This is what the Lord has made us.

_____able. Aliens and strangers. The ESV uses "sojourners and exiles." This is the second way people are addressed in the opening words of the book. It follows only being God's elect/chosen. The status of being strangers in this world continues in 1:17 where we're told to live as strangers in reverent fear. This brings us back to 2:11. We are to be detached from the world because we're citizens of heaven.

An architecture student entered a nationwide building design contest judged by a panel of architects. Her entry received Honorable Mention, which under most circumstances would be great but she believed hers was the best. On the last day of the convention she blankly stared at her creation trying to figure out why it hadn't received higher recognition. An old man was also looking at her work not knowing who had made it. At last he commented, "This one, I think, is the best of the lot." The student was ecstatic. Why? The old man was a true authority, the great architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

What makes the difference for us is what the true authority, the Lord Creator, thinks of us. He's the one to whom our ears should be tuned.

B. Purpose. Go back to the word picture of living stones being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood in v. 5. We are to offer spiritual sacrifices. Spiritual sacrifices are those of the spiritual realm. They originate there and can extend into the physical realm. This is in contrast to the Levitical system that required sacrifices of animals and produce. Part of the purpose was to support the temple and priests. The call to offer spiritual sacrifices doesn't negate the need to give financially as that is a spiritual sacrifice (Hebrews 13:16).

Other spiritual sacrifices include worship, praise (Hebrews 13:15), thanksgiving, repentance, obedience, prayer (Acts 10:4), meeting the needs of others (Hebrews 13:16), surrendering ourselves in service (Romans 12:1). It's any attitude, thought or action that serves to build the spiritual kingdom of God.

A second purpose comes in the middle of the long description in vv. 9, 10. "Declare the praise of him who called us." Use our elevated status as a platform to declare the praises of Jesus Christ. Athletes do it all the time. And so do actresses and actors. "Because I'm who I am you should buy Old Spice or vote the way I tell you." We're to be advertisements, commercials and billboards for Jesus.

A third purpose involves the living out of what we profess. READ 11b. This is a rephrasing of what was said in 1:14— "do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance." Do we understand the repetition underscores an issue faced by Christ followers? Twice within a few verses our sinful desires are brought up. It's like they keep resurrecting themselves. Christ has made us dead to sin but we're also told we have to keep on applying the truth by not offering ourselves to the desires that pave the road to sin.

I suppose there are those who might try to make the case they aren't conforming because they only indulge their sinful desires occasionally. Nice try, but no way. Abstaining makes a stronger case. It means to not have one drop of them. It's in our best interest to abstain from the hazardous cravings of the sinful nature.

The purpose is stated in a positive manner. REREAD v. 12. It's not quite the "I'm rubber and you're glue. What you say bounces off me and sticks to you." The accusations of unbelievers should bounce off us. It's getting harder in the toxic climate of anti-Christian sentiment where the things of God are branded as bad and the things of evil are considered to be good.

We are to live exemplary lives of high moral standards. People may accuse us of lying, cheating, slander, etc., but they'll see the witness of our good deeds. They'll also glorify God on the day he visits us. It could refer to when a person's spiritual eyes open and he comes to Christ for salvation. It could be the first has to do with this present life where the person changes their mind about their accusations and then at the end of time will glorify God, possibly a forced glorification. Both of these could be in the future when the unsaved will wake up and see that how we lived made sense and give glory to God, again forced.

The words Peter used may sound familiar. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

John Huffman remembers one of the last statements his daughter Suzanne shared before she died. She was 23 and knew she was going to die in a few days. He recalls, "She had all the churning struggles that anyone that age would have who saw the future being robbed by a malignancy called cancer. She had no power over anything — except the people closest to her. She turned to us, one by one, with words we'll never forget. The words directed to me, her minister father, were at the same moment words of rebuke yet challenge, as she said, "Dad, I want you to be more like Jesus" (preaching.com/sermons/christian-life-living-stones).

Meghan Markle quit acting. She found a better gig when she became royalty when she married Prince Harry. Nice job if you can land it. Her new state of life comes with a new code of conduct -- what's expected and what's not allowed, how she dresses, how she acts in public – all because now she's royalty.

We are royalty and need to act that way.

When you shop at Home Depot, Fleet Farm or Menards, and you venture into the lumber area, especially the outdoor one, you've probably noticed a pile of boards that have been discarded because they're broken, cracked, warped, or just plain look bad. But I don't think you've seen a contractor venture over to grab them for building a house. The store worker would advise against it. "We have much better material over there. These aren't good for much of anything. They're warped and broken. It won't pass inspection."

That's what Jesus has done. He takes the warped wood, the broken bricks, the damaged goods and the lumber that has been tossed aside. He transforms the raw materials and uses them to build a house that will pass his inspection, a place for him to live in.

<<<Have ushers distribute stones>>> Yesterday I picked a bunch of stones, a few with fossils, but most plain, ordinary stones. I selected them with you and me in mind, to remind us that we were chosen by God as living stones. We're no longer detached rocks but stones that are part of God's building that's being transformed into a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices to our God. It's because of Jesus who is the Living Stone, the capstone, the chosen and precious cornerstone.