

LIVING ON THE ROCK

1 PETER 2:11-12

In anticipation of this summer's vacation season, Yahoo Travel has published a list of [America's Most Over-rated Tourist Attractions...](#)

Number One on the list is [Fisherman's Warf](#) in San Francisco.

Coming in second is the [Petrified Forest](#) in Arizona.

Third is [Wall Street](#) in New York City.

And fourth on the list of most over-rated tourist stops is [Plymouth Rock](#).

I've been to three of the top four, and for me, Plymouth Rock is hands-down the lamest tourist destination in America! It's a pitiful specimen of a rock. Trust me Plymouth Rock is a tourist attraction that doesn't "rock."

History students know Plymouth Rock is the 1620 landing spot of a group of Protestant Christians from England. They stepped out of their boats into the new world in search of a place to worship God - according to the Bible and their conscience. They were tired of being oppressed by the Church of England. The Pilgrims longed to worship freely and faithfully.

In a sense, religious liberty in America was built on Plymouth Rock.

Today, folks on holiday from all over world come to Plymouth, Massachusetts to visit this famed piece of history... *but what a letdown!*

Several years ago I taught at a Calvary Chapel Men's Retreat in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Ignoring the advice of my host, between sessions I hiked a couple of blocks to the memorial. I'm thinking, while I'm here, I might as well see the rock! *But everyone was right! It was a laugher.*

Plymouth Rock is a gray, oblong, dirty-looking stone maybe 3 feet by 2 feet. They built a Greek arch over the site, but the stone itself sits in the sand just out of the water. The date 1620 is etched in its side, *but that's all!*

In fact, puny Plymouth Rock has a gate around it to keep it from being stolen. It's just a non-descript stone you otherwise would never notice.

I guess in my mind, I expected to see Miles Standish, with musket in hand, standing triumphantly on a noble looking rock-cliff, jutting out over the sea... Instead, all I saw was a lame, little rock lying on the beach.

Well, in 1 Peter 2, we as Christians are called "*Pilgrims,*" and we're founded on a Rock. And as we learned last week *there's nothing lame about our Rock...* Jesus isn't a *Plymouth Rock*. He's a *Mammoth Rock*.

In verse 4, Peter calls Jesus "*a living stone.*"

In verse 6, He is our "*chief cornerstone, elect, precious...*"

In verse 7, He is the stone the builders of Judaism rejected, but has become "*the chief cornerstone*" of all God is doing in the world today.

In verse 8, for those who reject Him as the cornerstone He becomes “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.”
You can't sidestep Him!

Jesus is the rock that *rocks*. There is nothing lame about the Super Stone! Jesus is a sure cornerstone on which an enduring life can be built.

Plymouth Rock is an *overgrown pebble*, but Jesus is an *El Capitan!*

And it's upon Jesus that we as spiritual Pilgrims have landed our lives.

In Christ we've found forgiveness and freedom. We've left behind the Old World of sin and oppression, and we've stepped out into a New World of holiness, and happiness, and usefulness. Life should never be the same.

But according to Peter, Jesus is not the only “*living stone!*” His followers are like Him. He also calls us “*living stones.*” This means the life of Jesus has been birthed in us. He makes us alive, strong, solid, and rock-like.

Do you really understand what Jesus has done *for you* and *in you*?

This week I downloaded a new recording on my I-pod. I listen when I run. It's by “*Tenth Avenue North.*” And one of the songs is so hopeful...

Listen to the lyrics, “*You are more than the choices that you make, you are more than the sum of your past*

mistakes, you are more than the problems that you create... you've been remade!" And then the bridge...

"This is not about what you've done, but what's been done for you. This is not about where you've been, but where you're brokenness brings you to. This is not about what you feel, but what He felt to forgive you. And what He felt to make you new... You've been remade." Christians are now **"living stones."** We're remade - forgiven, and alive, and strong in Christ.

In the ancient world rocks and stones were building materials of choice.

And Peter is saying now that we've been remade, God is fitting us all together – one stone upon another – stone by stone - as a Temple of praise to Him!... ***Yet here's the question, are we living on the Rock?***

Are we building a life for Jesus - working on a life that really rocks?

A few verses earlier Peter laid out our calling - we're **"a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a special people,"** but now he wonders if we're living up to that birthright? Have we embraced our calling?

Sadly, this doesn't happen automatically. If becoming a Christian were like climbing a mountain no one would ever underestimate its significance.

Once you've navigated the thin air, and steep terrain, and risked your life to scale Mount Everest — you appreciate being on top of the world.

But no one becomes a Christian by daring deeds, or risking their life.

Being a Christian is not climbing a mountain. Jesus is the mountain climber. I'm the onlooker. We're saved because Jesus risked His life for us. He did the daring deed. *He climbed the mountain dragging a cross behind him.* Jesus did the heavy lifting. Our job was to behold and to believe.

But once we're on top with Him we should be just as thrilled as if we'd climbed there ourselves. Fellowship with Jesus - knowing God - should be every bit as exciting and breathtaking as if we'd risked it all and climbed the mountain personally. We should appreciate the vistas ever bit as much.

And our gratitude should spill over into every arena of our lives...

This is what the rest of the book is about. From here on, Peter will talk about practical living... *being good citizens, obeying the government, respecting your boss, handling persecution, loving your spouse, loving one another, returning evil with good, leading the church, following our leaders.*

A Christian isn't just a person who's changed on the inside. We live an outward life that proves it – our *behavior* is consistent with our *beliefs*.

Peter wants us to know that how we live our lives tomorrow is important.

He reaches out to his readers in earnest... In verse 11 He calls them **“Beloved.”** He **“begs”** them to understand. *Now that you’re a living stone are you living on the rock? Are you building a life of faith and freedom?*

And three truths are strategic: your **status** - the **struggle** – the **stakes**. This is what Peter discusses in verse 11-12, **status**, **struggle**, and **stakes**...

Peter writes first about our **status** - in verse 11, **“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims...”** This is the second time Peter has used the term **“pilgrims”**... In 1:1 he addresses his letter to **“the pilgrims of the Dispersion...”** or literally, *the pilgrims that have been scattered...*

During the feast days Jews obedient to the ancient mandate would journey back to Jerusalem. They would come from all over the world. And it was at such a gathering, the Feast of Pentecost that the Master decided to launch His Church. The Holy Spirit was poured out on His first followers.

Fire was overhead... Praise was overheard... A buzz was in the air.

And many of the believers hung around - *at least until the persecution started.* That’s when most of the visiting converts returned to their homes.

Now Peter speaks to them again – with pen and parchment – and he reminds them they’re still *“sojourners and pilgrims.”* They may be *home*, but they’re not really *home*. Their status hasn’t changed. They’re only passing through. Whenever persecution raises its ugly head it’s a stark reminder to followers of Jesus that this world is not our final resting place.

We also are a holy nation in an alien and hostile environment. Don’t be deceived, at times, for self-serving reasons, the world will snuggle up close to the Church, but ultimately it’s not a sympathizer to the cause of Christ.

If this world persecuted the Master - it’ll persecute His followers.

Christians live behind enemy lines. The word *“sojourner”* in verse 11 means *“a temporary dweller.”* Never forget that’s what’s stamped on your spiritual passport, *“temporary resident.”* This world is not your homeland.

We’re traveling through life like little kids in the backseat - and God is the driver of the car. You hit a home run, and win the game. You’re a hero for a moment, and you ask, *“Are we there yet?”* God answers, *“Not yet.”*

Your first kiss creates goose bumps, and you ask, *“Are we there yet?”* Again God says, *“Not yet...”* It’s your wedding day and you ask, *“Am I there now?”* The driver answers, *“No, not yet...”* On your dream vacation you ask, *“We’re almost there, aren’t we?”* And God says, *“No, not yet...”*

When your baby is born there's such elation, you ask, "Am I there yet?" "Not yet." When your baby goes off to college... "Are we there?" "Not yet."

When the grandbabies come, I've been told I'll think, "This has got to be heaven!" But the driver will answer, "Not yet." It doesn't matter how great life gets, this world is not our home. We're a "*sojourner*" traveling through.

Peter also calls us "*pilgrims*." The word "*sojourner*" speaks to the fact we're headed home. The name "*Pilgrim*" describes the way we get there.

Webster's dictionary defines the word "*pilgrim*" as "*one who travels to a holy place as an act of devotion.*" A person on pilgrimage in the holy land won't just view it as a vacation. He or she will use it as a means of deepening their devotion to Jesus. What makes a trip a *pilgrimage* is not just the destination – but the *person's purpose* behind the trip, and the *person's behavior* on the trip. A pilgrimage is "*a walk of worship.*"

As believers we're traveling to the holiest of all destinations - *heaven*.

And Peter's contention is you don't raise hell on the way to heaven. In route to heaven the goal is to act like you will when you get there.

A pilgrim lives with *love in his heart*, and *praise on his lips*, and *humility in his steps*, and *gratitude in his soul*, and *the glory of God in his sights*. It's not just his

destination, but his attitude on the way that makes him a pilgrim.

Let me provide you some needed perspective. A pilgrim has one allegiance - not to the country through which he passes, but his home country. His heart is fixed on home. His eyes are set on the road ahead.

In fact, there's a certain aloofness that characterizes a sojourner or a pilgrim. A traveler is more interested in *finding wings* than *sinking roots*.

A sojourner isn't looking to settle down in this world at this time. Yet too many Christians I know get overly attached to country and culture.

Here's an example. I'm all for a free market economies and American democracy. I believe both are ultimately derived from Christian principles.

But in its history the Church has lived through all kinds of governments and economic systems. Christianity spread under kings, dictators, and the feudal system. Its greatest expansion occurred under Roman emperors.

Apparently, the power of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the cross work equally well under communism, as they do in a free market society.

We're going to learn next week that as Christians we need to be good citizens, but God doesn't wear red, white, and blue. He's not waving an American flag. He's bigger than any one county or system of government.

And neither is God limited to a particular culture. All too often, Christians are seen by the world as promoting a sectarian brand of culture. In the minds of many Middle East Muslims, Christianity and western materialism go hand in hand. Christianity is *white man's* - or *rich man's religion* – not so!

It's wrong to portray Christianity as conservative, 1950-ish, white middle class American culture. Neither is it 1960s Hippie, Jesus-freak culture.

Christianity is growing among tribal Africans in Nigeria. It thrives among indigenous Philipinos. Peruvian Indians are coming to Jesus in droves.

Christianity is *a belief with no borders* – politically, or geographically, or culturally. True, biblical faith is trans-cultural, and spiritual, and eternal.

Mike Warnock tells of a mission trip he took where he ministered to poor North African immigrants outside of Paris. It was just after 9/11, and he was shocked to see little boys reenacting the planes that hit the Towers.

He heard shouts of *“Ben Ladin is my father”* and *“Vive Saddam.”*

Mike has a deep love for his country and he recoiled when he heard such venomous, anti-American sentiment. But that's when he had to decide... Was his first allegiance to *Uncle Sam* or the *Lord Jesus*? Mike laid aside his American pride to share the love of Jesus with these Muslims.

As travelers, passing through, we need to remember that Christianity's headquarters is not of this world. The here and now is not our home.

The Church's challenge is to navigate an always shifting political and cultural landscape, while our values are founded on an unchanging Rock.

Never forget, you're **status** in this world is "*sojourner*" and "*pilgrim*."

But we also face a **struggle**. Peter writes, "*I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul...*"

The term "*fleshly lusts*" sounds like another name for some perverse sexual fetish. "**Fleshly lusts**" sounds like a porno site or an X-rated movie.

And it certainly includes such behavior, but the term Peter uses is far broader. A *fleshly lust* is a *natural desire* that's lost its bearings. It's a desire that's come un-tethered from the will of God. It's now on its own.

Think of a boat that's come un-tethered from its anchor. It now floats uncontrollably around the harbor smashing into stuff – even other boats - and doing all kinds of damage to itself and everything that's in its path.

Are you in this kind of struggle? A noble desire to provide for your family has swelled and morphed into an uncontrollable need to make more money. What once *fed your family* is now *destroying your marriage*.

We all have to eat... but has food become your pacifier? Do you drown your sorrows in a bag of potato chips?... Or maybe your crutch is alcohol. Life is really hard. It's easier to numb the pain than to deal with the issues.

Some of you battle with depression, or bitterness, or hatred, or fear.

An uncontrollable drive for acceptance has trapped you in an abusive relationship... An unforgiving hatred causes terrible thoughts about harming another person... Out-of-control assumptions about how you should look, or how much you should weigh, cause you to abuse your body.

Sexual intimacy is a natural, God-given desire. But you cut the tie to what's biblical, and healthy, and even normal long ago. Today your desires rage out of control like an inferno. All these issues are a struggle - *a war*.

And notice "*fleshly lusts war against the soul*" – not just the body.

Peter could've mention how fleshly lusts cause Cirrhosis of the liver, and STDs, and heart disease, and obesity. Out-of-control desires take a toll on us physically.... But Peter says they also "*war against the soul.*"

When an area of our life spins out of control, it creates a stress and pressure our psyche was never meant to bear. Psychological and emotional disorders develop. Depression sets in. Anxiety attacks.

A fleshly lust will war against your soul – just as it'll harm your body.

And *fleshly lusts* will wreak havoc on your faith. God has made you “*a living stone*” – *part of a spiritual Temple* - but it’s hard to believe that truth if you’ve given in to “*fleshly lusts.*” *Living stones* shouldn’t be *getting stoned*.

This is how *out-of-control habits* war against the soul - they cripple our faith and undermine our belief in what Jesus has done *for us* and *in us*. They force us further from the One who *loves us, lives in us, and frees us*.

Understand, once a normal desire gets detached from God’s purpose, and starts rampaging uncontrollably in your life - reining it in and striking a truce are no longer options. Negotiating a compromise won’t end the war.

At that point there’s only one winning strategy – “*abstain.*”

It’s not *moderation*, but *abstinence*. Peter writes in verse 11, “*Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.*” The Greek word translated “*abstain*” means “*to hold away from one’s person...*”

Here’s what Peter is telling us, once a desire spins *out of control* you *let it go*. Once a lust develops a mind and will of its own and begins to act in destructive ways I can’t go back to it and try to reel it in. I’ve got to create some distance between who I am and that desire.

If the out-of-control habit is gambling I’ve got to stop gambling, and hanging out with gamblers, and going to places where I can gamble.

If it's alcohol I've got to admit that moderation is now impossible. I can't take another drink. One drink and I'm a drunk. "Once you're a pickle you can never be a cucumber." You've got to cut out any and all consumption.

If your addiction is sex, you've got to commit to *total purity*. Reduce your exposure to harmful influences. Stop logging on, and going places, and seeing people, and setting yourself up for failure because you're too proud to admit the severity of your problem. Safeguards become essential.

If you suffer from a food obsession - empty the cupboard.

I realize some desires can't be totally escaped. We have to go to work, and eat, and at the end of the day God made us sexual beings, but we've got to frame the out-of-control impulses we fight and the circumstances that cause them clearly... then **abstain** – *no excuses*. To "*abstain*" is to distance yourself as far as possible from the "*fleshly lust*" you fight.

I've used the illustration before, but it deserves repeating...

Imagine a rope 5 feet long – one end is tied to my ankle – the other end is tied to a pit bull with rabies. *And here I am trying to live a normal life...*

I get up in the morning. Go to bed at night. I work. I come home. I hang out with my friends. *Do you see a problem with this picture? Of course!*

There's no way my life will have any semblance of normality. Maybe for a few hours a day while the pit bull is asleep, but my life is in turmoil.

I can't work because the dog bites and growls at my co-workers.

I can't spend quality time with my kids. They're afraid of the vicious dog.

My wife won't sleep with me because I'm bringing a pit bull to bed.

The only friend who'll spend any time with me is Michael Vick.

My whole life is in shambles. And I can spend thousands of hours in counseling learning how to be a good employee - and a better husband - and loving dad - and a loyal friend - but face it, until I get that dog-gone dog off my ankle, nothing I do will solve my problems and help my life.

This is why Jesus said, "If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you..." Peter is saying something similar, "*Abstain from fleshly lusts...*" Remember, these desires "*war against your soul.*"

Either you're killing the lust, or it's killing you. There's no signing a truce. There's no happy medium. *Joy and freedom* can't coexist with *fleshly lust*.

When you came to Jesus you were crucified with Him. He changed you.

Now you need to crucify that *“fleshly lust.”* Turn it loose. Let it go. Declare war. Galatians 5:24 tells us, *“Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”* It’s time to go on the offensive with new habits.

Think new thoughts. Develop new patterns. Start living a spiritual life.

Yes, the Christian life involves a struggle, but you can overcome.

In fact, it’s vital you overcome because the **stakes** are really high.

Peter explains this in verse 12, *“having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*

The Gentile - or unbelieving world of Peter’s day - was guilty of floating hateful lies, and false rumors, and malicious slander against the Church.

Over the years there’ve been plenty of falsehoods told about me and our church. In the early days our informal atmosphere and contemporary worship caused some folks to label us a cult. Because we revel in God’s extravagant grace we’ve been accused of being soft on sin. *Lies happen.*

But we’ve never suffered the injustices hurled at the early church.

Believers in Peter's day were accused of cannibalism. Communion was misunderstood. "*Eating the body and drinking the blood*" sounded sinister.

The Church called its weekly meal the "Agape Feast," or "Love Feast." They shared a good meal with the poorer members of the fellowship, but the world suggested the name referred to some kind of wild, sexual orgy.

Christians were viewed as **anti-social** since they didn't participate in Rome's lewd and violent entertainment. They were called "**atheists**" since they refused to worship Rome's pantheon of gods and goddesses.

The early Christians had volumes of misinformation to overcome.

Yet overcome it they did – *not by debates, or rebuttals, or letters to the editor to set the record straight* - but through the exemplary way they conducted themselves. *Living on the Rock* is what silenced their critics.

Barclay writes of a time a few hundred years later. "In the early third century the Greek skeptic, Celsus, made the most famous and systematic attack upon the Christians. He accused them of ignorance and foolishness and superstition and all kinds of things - *but never of immorality.*"

By this time in history, the Church had gained such a reputation for integrity and purity most Romans found it hard to believe there was such a thing as an "**immoral Christian.**" *What kind of an impact do you think we'd have if we still had that reputation?* Today, the only way the

Church makes headlines is when there's a sizzling scandal. *We're not living on the Rock...*

Never forget, "Your life is the only Bible some people will ever read."

Here's a poem, "You're writing a Gospel a chapter each day, by the deeds that you do and the words that you say. Men read what is written, either faithful or true; so tell me, what is the Gospel according to you?"

We need to build our lives on the Rock... the *stakes* are really high!

In verse 12 Peter speaks of "**the day of visitation.**" He's probably thinking of the special day, at the end of the age, when Jesus returns to rapture His Church. But what if he's also thinking of a very average day...

A day like tomorrow maybe... You wake up like any other day, but all through the day, Jesus is invited to look on and drop in. *It's take a Savior to work day!* Jesus eavesdrops in on every conversation. He's privy to ever text message. He participates in all activities. It's Open House all day long.

Understand this is your tomorrow – and today - and your next day. For a God who's everywhere at all times every day is a "**day of visitation.**"

And He's expecting us to live in such a way that those outside the faith will glorify Jesus!

In closing, you're a pilgrim. You won't be home until you get to heaven.

But along the journey your Lord cares about the pilgrimage. He's always dropping in and making visits. Jesus assures you of your **status** – and helps you in your **struggle** – and reminds you that the **stakes** are high...

In Christ you're "a living stone," *but are you living on the Rock?*

Our lives rest on a *Mammoth Rock*, not a *Plymouth Rock*. *Jesus is no lame rock*. Let's all build a life that glorifies Jesus... *a life that really rocks!*