

THE LIVING STONES

1 PETER 2:4-10

Today, I want to talk to you about **“The Stones.”**

And if you're from my generation, when you hear that name you probably think of the famous rock and roll band, *The Rolling Stones*.

The Rolling Stones have been touring the globe for nearly half-a-century. But if you haven't noticed lately... they're getting pretty old.

This July, Mick Jagger turns 67 - *Time is no longer on his side*.

It got me thinking... Maybe *The Stones* need to rewrite some of their song titles to make their music more relevant to their aging band members.

Here are the Top 10 suggestions for *The Senior Rolling Stones*...

10) “I Can't Get No Satisfaction” *“I Can't Get No Circulation”*

9) “Let's Spend the Night Together” *“Let's Take A Nap Together”*

8) “It's Only Rock and Roll But I Like It” *“It's Only Geritol But I Like It”*

7) “I Wanna Be Your Man” *“I Want Your Healthcare Plan”*

6) “Like a Rolling Stone” *“Like a Kidney Stone”*

5) “Gimme Shelter” *“Gimme a Tax Shelter”*

4) “Brown Sugar” *“Brown Splenda”*

– *all we have - where we're headed* - revolves around Jesus. **“Coming to Jesus”** is now our way of life.

And Peter makes three observations about Jesus that set the pace for this new life. He's **a living stone, a cornerstone, and a stumbling stone.**

He notes first, **“Coming to Him as to a living stone...”** Throughout the Bible the Messiah is referred to as a *rock* – or even a *mountain*.

Jesus is strong, steady, unbreakable... He's the bedrock of the truth. He's a refuge from the storm. He's a fortress that can withstand the enemy. He's a missile sent from heaven that shatters the kingdoms of this world.

Jesus is Stone Mountain tough... He's deep, large, and granite-like. He rises above the horizon as a reference point, yet He's a durable foundation.

Yet, have you noticed it's hard to *warm up* or *cuddle up* to a rock...

This is why Peter calls Jesus **“a living stone.”** Yes, He's tough, but He's tender. He looms large, but loves deeply. Jesus is a warm-blooded rock.

With Jesus you're never between a rock and a *hard place*. Jesus is a soft spot in a hard, cold world. Only by **“coming to Him”** do you find rest.

Jesus is “*a living stone,*” but Peter tells us more about Him. The Christ was “*rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious...*”

There was a legend associated with Solomon’s Temple. During its construction the cornerstone was quarried first, but when it arrived on-site the builders didn’t recognize its strategic importance. It was different from the other stones. The builders thought it was an oddity and tossed it aside.

Until the cornerstone was needed... that’s when the builders realized their mistake. They raced to retrieve the precious stone they’d rejected.

And this illustrates how the builders of Judaism treated Jesus.

They didn’t realize He was the chief cornerstone of all that God wanted to build. Jesus was so *different from them* – and *from what they expected*.

They rejected God’s cornerstone and tossed Him out of their Temple.

But what the Jews rejected is still precious and valuable to God. And one day still future, they’ll realize their mistake – the Jews will repent of their sin. They too will come to Jesus, and receive Him as God’s chosen.

Jesus is a living stone, but notice verse 5 takes it a step further, “*you also, as living stones...*” I suppose you could say as Christians “*we’re chips off the old block!*” We take after Jesus. Christ is the *cornerstone*, but we’re all *little*

stones... We're alive with the life of Christ. He breathes, and loves, and moves, and cares through us. And His Holy Spirit makes us strong.

In Christ we're rock solid. Like Jesus, we're also living stones.

And Peter says the stones are “being built up a spiritual house...”

Another name for “a spiritual house” is “a temple.” God is into Temple building. Atlanta's construction industry may've hit the skids, but God is turning you and me, and every believer, into a Temple of praise to Him.

The OT Temple was a tangible building that stood in Jerusalem, on top of Mount Moriah - but the NT Temple is a spiritual house made up of living stones. You and I are being joined together as a house for God.

The church is not a building - its people – *we're building material*. We're the stones that are being assembled on-site. God is fitting us all together.

The transforming power of Jesus sobers us. Some of you have gone from *being stoned* to *being stones*. Faith in Jesus makes us spiritually alive.

The Jewish Temple had *limestone walls* - Jesus is building a spiritual Temple with *limestone walls*. Each of us has a place in His Church.

This is why I say, “Don't be off the wall - find your place on the wall!”

Here's your opportunity to join the band. In Christ you've a living stone, and you have a role in the spiritual Temple God intends to construct.

As I mentioned, this analogy of being living stones in a temple for God, reminds us of the construction of Solomon's temple. The Bible tells us the stones in the OT Temple were quarried off-site – north of the city's walls.

The stones were cut and chiseled and fitted *at the quarry*, so they could be easily assembled on-site. 1 Kings 6:7 reads, “The temple, when it was being built, was built with stone finished at the quarry, so that no hammer or chisel or any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built.”

The temple was a place of peace and worship – not your typical construction site. God didn't want the halls of the temple to be filled with the noise of banging and sawing, so He had the stones sized, and chiseled, and fitted together at the quarry. Once the stones were custom fitted – they were delivered to the Temple Mount and assembled according to plan.

You and I are like those ancient stones - and the work of *making us fit* and then *fitting us together* - is what God is doing in the world today...

Here's what we need to remember - **the world we live in is the quarry.**

Heaven is the temple – and the temple is a place of peace and reverence and worship. There are no

construction noises in heaven. You never hear any banging, and drilling, and sawing – *that happens in this life.*

When you get banged around – and drilled on – and chiseled away - and chopped off - whittled down to size – that’s what’s supposed to be happening in this life. We live in the quarry. This life is a construction zone.

Don’t be surprised when your rough edges get sanded down - and your ends leveled – and your jagged exterior broken off. It’s loud, dusty, noisy, and chaotic in the quarry. But that’s where the important work gets done.

And this is where *our cooperation is necessary.*

The difference between *living stones* and *limestone* is that living stones have a mind of their own. They can jump up when they think the cutting is too severe. They can run when the chiseling gets uncomfortable. We can thwart God’s work by trying to escape the pick – or dodge the drill.

This is often what happens when a person changes jobs, or leaves a church, or avoids a friend. God is using a particular situation to quarry us. He’s carving, shaping, piecing us together - but we need to cooperate.

Always remember, “[Heaven doesn’t start until we get to heaven.](#)”

For now God is working on us in the quarry. He’s building a Temple of praise by fitting us together – and

only when He's done, will He ship us all to heaven, where we'll be the Temple He'll occupy for all eternity.

Peter calls us “a living stone”, but also says we're “a holy priesthood.”

In the OT only the tribe of Levi served as priests. The priesthood had a dress code. “You had to have Levi genes.” The priests were the go-betweens. They represented *God to the people* and *the people to God*.

But in the NT every believer has become a priest. We no longer need another human to get to God. Jesus had cut out the middleman. 1Timothy 2:5, there's “one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus...”

You no longer need a third party – an operator – a server that can log you onto God. You have your own access. You are a “holy priesthood.”

I don't think most Christians understand the revolutionary implications of this concept. For centuries Roman Catholicism oppressed its members and dominated people's lives through the priesthood. Common people didn't dare read their Bibles because the Church taught you couldn't understand it without the assistance of a priest. *They made it a sin to try...*

The priest told you what to think and how to live. Rather than mediator, the priesthood became a barrier between God and people. He barred them from truth and freedom - and from the grace that's freely given in Christ.

More than any other doctrine it was **the priesthood of the believer** that lit the fires of reformation. This truth is what sparked Western democracy.

If *priest* and *parishioner* and *prince* are all equal before God – if everyman is his own priest – then every person should have an equal vote and equal rights – and an equal opportunity to worship God as he pleases.

The doctrine of “**The Priesthood of Every Believer**” was the catalyst that brought us out of the Dark Ages and changed Western Civilization forever.

If you love freedom, then you owe a debt of gratitude to Christianity.

And let me also champion this doctrine! As Christians we all are a “*holy priesthood.*” This means I have no justification for trying to force my opinion or prejudices on you, and you have no right to try and force yours on me.

Certainly, it’s a given that we’re all under the clear teaching of Scripture.

But when I see prideful church leaders with inflated views of themselves pressing their opinions on people as if they were the words of God it upsets me. It’s wrong for one Christian to claim a closer connection to God than another... and then presume to explain God’s will for his or her life.

Hey, I have a hard enough time discerning God’s will for my own life, let alone take responsibility for uncovering

God's will for you. Every believer is his own priest. It's up to each of us to listen to God and obey Him.

And we have the help we need. *The Bible and the Holy Spirit* are both at our disposal. God is faithful to personally interact with each of us.

Also as a priest we have a job to do. Peter says the duty of a priest is **“to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”**

The OT priests offered *animal sacrifices*. The blood of bulls and goats flowed from the altar. Whereas, NT priests offer **“spiritual sacrifices.”**

As a priest the Bible gives me 5 offerings I can present to God. Write these down. I can sacrifice **self, souls, stuff, song, and service**. Let me give them to you again, along with a few verses to back up the points...

Romans 12:1 places **self** on the altar. **“Present your bodies a living sacrifice”**. God wants you to give Him yourself – your body and your mind.

Go where God says go - do what God says do - think what and how God says think. Place self on the altar. Living stones are living sacrifices.

Romans 15:16 offers up **souls**... Paul refers to the people he influenced and brought to Christ as **“the offering of the Gentiles.”**

When you lead a person to Jesus it's an acceptable sacrifice.

In Philippians 4:18 Paul is speaking of the **stuff** – the monetary support sent to him from the Philippians - and He calls it “**an acceptable sacrifice.**”

This is another way to offer God a sacrifice – give an offering. You’ve probably got a wallet made of cowhide or sheepskin. The hard work is done! The animal has already been sacrificed. You’ve been stuffing money in it for years - now its time to take some out. When you stuff that money in the offering box God sees it a spiritual sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to Him. As a priest unto God it’s our duty to offer a regular sacrifice.

Hebrews 13:15 tells us **songs** are still another way to sacrifice to God. The author of Hebrews refers to our worship as “**the sacrifice of praise.**”

Here’s the deal, when Marvin leads us in song God equates what comes out of my mouth as a sacrifice, *not because my singing sounds like a bleating lamb in the throes of death – though it does.* Actually, God trains His ears to interpret my bleating as “**a joyful noise.**” But God appreciates the effort. Raise your voice – lift your hands – direct your attention heavenward and God knows you mean well. You’re thankful. You love Him.

Praise is a sacrifice, as is **service**. The next verse in Hebrews, 13:16 tells us, “**Do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.**” An encouraging word, a good deed, a random act of

kindness to another person is seen in heaven as a sacrifice to God.

As priests our job is to sacrifice *self, souls, stuff, songs, and service*. Peter tells us, *“to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God...”*

Then he writes in verse 6, *“Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture...”* And he quotes several OT passages. First is Isaiah 28, *“Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”* Jesus is *“a living stone”* – but he’s also the *“cornerstone.”* Jesus is the *“chief cornerstone.”*

Visit the country sides of England and Europe, and you’ll find old stone churches. Christians have met in these churches for a thousand years. When you build a rock church you intend for it to last a long, long time.

This is why it’s important you build it on a solid cornerstone. The keystone is the rock on which all the others lean. It’s the lynchpin. Pull out the cornerstone and the whole structure topples like a house of cards.

This is what characterizes a Christian. A true believer builds their life with Jesus as his cornerstone. Everything in his life leans and rests on Him.

Lots of people like the idea of *looking religious*. They’ll tip their hat to Christianity and make Jesus a brick in the house. They’ll fit Him snugly into one of the walls. *Not much depends on Him*. In fact, they can ignore Him when

it's convenient, or even pull Him out of His slot for a time and nothing much in their life changes... Nothing rests on His involvement.

But Jesus is more than a brick. He's the cornerstone. Everything in my life should revolve around Jesus. How I do work, and finances, and sex, and friends, and decisions, and gender, and dating, and marriage, and parenting, and leisure – everything is influenced and interrelated to Jesus.

If He's not the cornerstone you don't understand Jesus. And you're not enjoying the stability He offers. Perhaps this is why your finances are unraveling, and your marriage is falling apart, and your job is in jeopardy...

Peter writes, *“he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”* As I've mentioned before, *“Life is a test, it's only a test.”* But your life only passes the test if it's resting on Jesus. Believe on Him – rest everything on Jesus – build a life on Jesus and you won't be put to shame.

Peter continues, *“Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious.”* If Jesus is just another brick to you then your love for Him will facilitate.

But if Jesus is your cornerstone, He'll be precious to you. He'll be what matters most. No sacrifice will be too steep to express your love for Him.

Peter writes in verse 7, “But to those who are disobedient...” And then he quotes two psalms. First, Psalm 118, “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone...” And second, Psalm 8, “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.” Here’s Peter’s point - people who disobey God will find Jesus an offense. Lots of folks claim to love God, but a person’s allegiance to God boils down to their attitude toward Jesus.

The Jews rejected Jesus *in the name of God* – but they were tossing aside God’s keystone. The early Church was more opportunistic. They embraced Jesus as their foundation. Today, Jesus is our cornerstone.

Peter goes on to speak of those who reject Jesus, “They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.” We all have an appointment with Jesus. One day, you and I will meet Him face to face.

Here’s what needs to be said to some of you this morning - Jesus is the rock who won’t go away. Either let Jesus be your *cornerstone* or He’ll become your *stumbling stone*... Bow to Him, or He’ll break a few toes.

Jesus is too big – too vital – to be ignored or shoved aside. He loves you enough to keep popping up. He’s the stone in your shoe that interferes with your pace. He convicts and chafes at us... until we surrender to Him.

Jesus is either your *cornerstone* or *stumbling stone* – it’s up to you!

Going into the final round of the 2003 PGA Championship, at the top of the leader board, stood an unknown golfer by the name of *Shaun Micheel*.

At the time Shawn Micheel was ranked 169th on the list of PGA golfers. The Sunday headline of the local newspaper read, “Who is this guy?”

And that’s what the world will one day ask about “The Stones.”

The Rolling Stones might be famous, but “**The Living Stones**” are a different story. When we appear with Jesus in all His glory, people will be asking, “Who are these guys?” They’ll recognize Jesus for sure, but who are all the unknowns with Him? *Who are those no-namers in the band?*

Though your friends and neighbors might not recognize it now, we are a special people – a very important people. Believe it or not, our names are at the top of God’s leader board by virtue of what Jesus has done for us.

In the next two verses Peter explains *who we really are in Christ...*

In verse 9 he tells us, “But you are a chosen generation...”

People today are often categorized by the generation in which they’re born. You’re a **Builder**, or a **Boomer**, or a **Buster** – you’re a member of **Generation X** or **Z**. You’re not a **Millennial** - they’re all in Sunday School!

But none of those generational titles mean anything to God.

He has one chosen generation – and membership is not predicated on *when you were born*, but *if you've been born-again!* It's not about *birthday*, but **new birth**. The group that matters to God is not *builders*, or *boomers*, or *busters*, but **believers**. God's chosen generation is the **Regenerated**.

If God's Spirit has *generated* spiritual life in you – if something came alive in you when you met Jesus - you're a member of a new generation.

You're now the hope of the future. It doesn't matter if you're 9 or 90, you're God's new generation that's supposed to challenge, and freshen, and shake the status quo. Every generation makes its mark for better or worse. We've been called by God to leave this world a different place.

We're a “**chosen generation**” and we're also a “**royal priesthood...**”

In the Old Testament there was no such thing! Ancient Israel observed a separation between church and state. The priests came from the tribe of *Levi*. The kings came from the tribe of *Judah*... *But we're a combination...*

We're God's “**royal priesthood.**” We're both a king and a priest.

Yesterday at the UGA Graduation we kept hearing “President Adams this and President Adams that...” I told my kids I liked the sound – from now on call me, “*President Adams*” – but I’m more important than a president. In Christ I’ve become a king and priest. I’m a “*royal priesthood*.”

One day soon, we’ll reign and rule with Jesus. He’s coming back to right all wrongs, and establish His kingdom on this planet. And if you’ve been faithful to Him in this life you’ll have a part to play in the world to come.

But *today*, we’re priests – we’re standing in the gap between people and God. We’re teaching God’s Word. We’re representing God to man.

And for me, here’s a great reason to get out of bed every morning.

If you need an incentive to fight the traffic, here it is... Everywhere you go you’re a divine diplomat. You represent the living Lord Jesus to dying people. You’re in position to place the *hand of man* into the *hand of God*.

But a “*royal priest*” is not all we are – we’re also “*a holy nation*.”

Before any of us came to Jesus we were black, and white, and yellow, and red. We were African and Asian and Anglo and Latino. We were a very diverse people. I’ve said it often – you’d never be able to get the people in this room today together *without a fight breaking out* if it wasn’t for Jesus.

Yet in Christ we've gained a new ethnic and national identity. We're a **"holy nation."** We've got a **common homeland**, heaven - a **common bloodline**, the blood that flows from Jesus' side - a **common policy plank**, in all we do we want to glorify Jesus. *How can we now divide over trivialities?*

Yet at times we do. We polarize. We get our focus off our spiritual, eternal identity - and rally around superficial distinctions. It's tragic.

Suddenly we're *Georgia Bulldogs and Florida Gators – Democrats and Republicans - Mac Users and PC Users*. Hopefully, when the chips are down we'll remember we have a higher calling and a stronger devotion.

We're citizens of heaven. No matter what else you happen to be – black, white, legal, illegal, male, female - your first allegiance is to **"a holy nation."**

And we're also God's **"own special people."**

When God saved us He did it because He loved us *individually*, but God also has plans for us *corporately*. He's birthed a new social category.

We're God's peeps. We embody His nature. We live out His values.

If you want to know what life is like in Cuba, you don't have to travel there. In Miami there's a neighborhood known as **"Little Havana."** Cuban immigrants look, speak, act, and dress like people in Cuba. It's mini-Cuba.

And this is similar to the role the church should play in culture.

If someone wants to know what heaven is like all they should have to do is walk into a local church. God wants us to be an outpost of heaven right here on earth. You should be able to sample heaven by walking into Calvary Chapel. “Wow, how they love each other - their praises of God were so sincere – they had such a concern for truth and a compassion for people – the healing, and strength, and help I found - *it felt like heaven!*”

This is why church is so strategic! You should *pray for your church* - and *give to your church* – and *serve at your church* - and *be at your church*.

Church is a big deal. This gathering each week is as close as some people are going to get to experiencing heaven. We need to make it count!

I can think of no higher ambition... than to provide our community a little taste of heaven week after week! We are God’s “*own special people.*”

Peter sums up the purpose of the Church in verse 10, “*That you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*”

Check this out, we’ve gone from “*not a people*” to “*the people of God.*”

Did you know a purebred puppy, with at least a three generation ancestry, will cost you \$1500 - whereas you can adopt a mutt at the animal shelter for a few bucks? The dog's value is determined by its pedigree.

This is what Peter says about us. *We've gone from spiritual mongrels to spiritual purebreds.* We've born of God! We have a special pedigree.

Some of you have never had a place you could truly call home – until now! Through Jesus you've made your way home. He's now home base.

And you've *“obtained mercy.”* Judgment was stayed off by God's mercy.

Jesus loves us with a love we don't deserve... Let's be proud of who we are in Christ. Let's rejoice that we're part of a Temple built to praise God!

Let me close with an old expression, *“a rolling stone gathers no moss.”*

But a rolling stone – a person with no identity, or ties to something greater than himself – also lives a lonely, secluded, miserable life.

That's why I'm glad I'm a living stone – not a rolling stone. And if you're alive in Christ you too have joined the band... you also are a *Living Stone!*