

Living Stones (1 Peter 12:1-5)

This week, we begin looking into the second Chapter of First Peter. Sometimes, the chapter breaks in the Bible can deceive us. They were not part of the original autographs. Peter's original letter did not have chapters and verses. So with these chapter breaks, we might be tempted to think that Peter is starting with a brand-new idea in Chapter 2. It's not the case. This is a continuation of what he has been communicating from the very beginning.

As we saw last week, Peter exhorted us to do something. He writes:

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, (1 Peter 1:22-23)

We're going to see that this is a recurring theme. We are responsible for loving one another and the Word of God lives and abides forever. God's Word really is the agent of our conversion.

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17)

The Word of God is also the agent of our sanctification, as Jesus prayed:

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. (John 17:17)

The Word of God is what we desperately need as Christians.

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

So I want to begin this morning by simply reading God's word, First Peter, Chapter 2, beginning with verse 1.

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:1-5)

I want to start unpacking this passage by directing your attention to verses 4 and 5. In verse 4, we are exhorted to come to Jesus. And Jesus is described as a living stone. It is kind of a strange metaphor, in a way. Stones, by definition by definition, stones are not alive. Well, there was a time when Jesus was not alive. He paid the penalty for our sins and that penalty is death. Jesus died on the cross so you wouldn't have to spend eternity in Hell. Yes, He was really dead but on the third day He rose from the dead and now He is very much alive!

So, the question is this: are you going to worship a dead idol or the living Son of God? That is your choice. You're going to worship someone or something, because worship is simply in our nature. You were made to worship.

In the First Century, idols were everywhere. There were wooden idols, bronze idols, golden idols, idols made of clay. And yes, there were idols made of stone. People worshipped them, bowed down to them, paid homage to them. It's no different today, except in our culture we make our idols out of other sorts of stuff and junk ... and money. We make idols out of ourselves. We do! we worship our own freedom of choice, except that we're not really free at all. We're slaves to the one we obey. Without Christ we are dead in our trespasses and sins and we're slaves to our sin.

God mocks the worship of idols.

Their idols are silver and gold, The work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see; They have ears, but they do not hear; Noses they have, but they do not smell; They have hands, but they do not handle; Feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat. (Psalms 115:4-7)

Stone gods have no life in them. Jesus is alive. In fact, He is life. Yes, He died on that cross to pay the penalty for our sins, but He rose on the third day and He lives forevermore. He is living now at the right hand of the Father making intercession for us.

Furthermore, He is engaged in a great enterprise in that He is building a house.

I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18)

Jesus is the chief cornerstone of the Church. He is the living Stone, the living foundation.

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:11)

But here is the amazing thing.

... you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, (1 Peter 2:5)

Jesus is building His Church with ... you! We are being remade in His image. The Living Stone is generating more living stones. And as His Church is built up, you serve as a holy priesthood. If you are in Christ, you are a priest. Unlike the High Priest of old who could only approach the Holy of Holies once a year, you can come 24/7 to Jesus, 24/7 before the throne of God with your Spiritual sacrifices.

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

Do you understand what a wonderful privilege that is? Can you comprehend how infinitely good God has been to you? How infinitely good God is to you? You get to address the Almighty Creator of the universe as Abba, Papa. He has made you a living member of His own family. Living stones!

But before stones can be used effectively for construction, they have to be dressed. They have to be prepared. They have to be shaped. God is preparing you ... shaping you. And listen, it is to your benefit to cooperate with the work.

So with that in mind, let's look back at verse 1. Peter tells us that we're going to have to shed some stuff. We're going to have to get rid of some baggage. This stuff is getting in our way. This stuff is making your living stone unsuitable for building.

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, (1 Peter 2:1)

Back in chapter 1, verse 22, Peter told us to do something. Remember?

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,

That's the positive side. But here he turns to the negative side, to the stuff you need to get rid of. You are to have pure love for one another. In order to do that, you have to get rid of malice. Malice is ill intent. It is depravity. It is ultimate self-centeredness. It's where you put yourself first no matter what the cost to your neighbor. It is the exact opposite of how we are to conduct ourselves as Christians.

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

You also need to get rid of deceit. Be real with yourself and be real with God. You need to be honest with others too, but to do that you have to be honest with yourself. Admit your sin.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:9-10)

Deceit leads to hypocrisy. That's where you talk a good game but fail to walk the talk. We need to set that aside too. I've found people are really quick to accuse Christians of hypocrisy. Too often, they're right, but you know, when someone tells me that they won't come to church because it is filled with hypocrites, I've been saying "No, you should come ... you'll fit right in." But we need to watch out for that particular sin and then lay it aside.

Envy, too. When somebody is blessed, we need to be happy for them because envy leads to covetousness. Besides being sinful, it also robs us of our peace and contentment.

Finally, Peter mentions evil speaking. The Greek word literally means defamation, or back-biting. It is gossip in its purist form. Why is it that we are so prone to this? We try to build ourselves up by putting someone else down. If that's you, jettison that particular trait! Confess it to God and repent!

Well, that's easier said than done, isn't it? In fact, I don't believe it's possible for us, by effort alone, to even begin to live lives that are worthy of our Lord. We need to be honest about our desperate need and we need to take advantage of the means of grace our Lord has generously provided. Look at verse 2:

as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, (1 Peter 2:2)

And there lies the key. If you are to be dressed as living stones worthy of the Temple of the living God, you need to partake of the pure milk of God's word. This Book is so critical to your life as a Christian. You need to be fed or you are going to die.

This metaphor Peter uses I find really appropriate. When a baby is born, he or she almost immediately begins looking for his or her mother's milk. Babies are absolutely focused on their need to nurse. They are obsessed with it. They will not be distracted from it. They are more interested in nursing than anything else. Honestly, they don't really care about how cool their crib is. They probably prefer to have a dry diaper, but their desire for Mom's milk trumps everything. When they are hungry, they definitely let you know about it. It doesn't matter if it is three o'clock in the afternoon or three o'clock in the morning, you're not going to get any peace until baby gets momma's milk.

Oh, if only we were so desirous of God's word. Do you desire God's word as much as a baby desires mother's milk? Don't go too far with the metaphor though – this is not just for new Christians, not just for baby Christians. The word of God is for all Christians. All Christians need the Bible. Every Christian will starve without it. We need to read the Bible. We need to Study the Bible. Seek out Biblical preaching. Seek out Biblical teaching.

Paul, exhorts Timothy to ...

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Timothy 4:2-4)

Friends, that time has come. Biblical preaching, expository preaching is getting harder to find. It is a fulfillment of prophecy:

"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord GOD, "That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the LORD. (Amos 8:11)

*But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have **known the Holy Scriptures**, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:13-15)*

The word of God is living and it is powerful. It will make you wise for salvation. By it, the Holy Spirit will perfect your salvation. Don't starve yourself. Desire God's pure milk. It is the only way you will grow as a Christian. It is the only way you will be prepared as a living stone, fit for building the Church of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is building His house. You are the raw materials. And boy, are you raw! So am I. But if you have trusted Jesus alone as your Savior, you have entered a holy priesthood. Holy, because you have been clothed with Jesus' holiness. You are a priest, because your job is to offer spiritual sacrifices to God.

What are these sacrifices? Well, the first sacrifice is your very life. It is your body.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)

As Paul says to the Galatians,

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

You must sacrifice your life to Jesus. Instead of living for yourself, you live for Him. And there are other spiritual sacrifices you must offer: your prayers, your praises, your affections, your obedience, your labor, your money. You offer it all on the altar.

For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Corinthians 6:20)

That might seem a bit scary, a bit uncomfortable. Your flesh objects. You want to make sure number one is taken care of and that is your flesh speaking. You want to take care of yourself. But listen, God can be trusted. In fact, He can be trusted way more than you can trust yourself. If you seek Him above all else, if you genuinely are more interested in His will being done than your own, He will more than take care of you. As Jesus Himself said:

"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:31-33)

I'm convinced God can be trusted. In fact, I trust the Lord way more than I trust myself. He's promised me an inheritance. He's promised that He will complete the work He began in me so many years ago. He has promised that He is building His house with living stones. I count myself so blessed to be one of those living rocks.

How about you?