

A young Hebrew exile named Daniel entered the throne room of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to interpret a dream the king had experienced. Many lives hung in the balance as he went in to tell the king what it all meant. The king was a mess. He couldn't sleep and he was troubled deep in his spirit. In fact, the king had threatened to take the lives of all his counselors if they could not interpret the dream. None of them could but they called on a young man that was an outsider living in exile. Daniel lived in favor with God. He was consistent and a godly young man.

Daniel entered the throne room and in essence said:

“You saw, O King, a great image, and its appearance was frightening. The head of the image was of fine gold. Its chest and arms were of silver. Its middle and thigh were of bronze. Its legs were of iron, and its feet partly iron and clay. Then a stone was cut out of a mountain not made with hands, and the stone struck the image and broke it into pieces. The interpretation, O King, is this: the precious metals are all the kingdoms – and you are the head made of fine gold. The stone, however, is the coming kingdom of God. And it shall stand forever, and of its increase there shall be no end.” (Interpretation of Daniel 2:31-45)

But Daniel was not the only one to speak of God's kingdom as a stone. Isaiah saw it in a vision God had given him years before:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious.” Isaiah 28:16 NLT

The Psalmist also spoke of a cornerstone that would bring salvation to all that believed as well as a stone that would be a stumbling block for those who rejected it. (Psalm 118:22)

Embedded deep in the history of Israel is the thought that there were God's promised kingdom and that Jerusalem was God's saving city with a temple that stood at the center of God's activity in the world.

Centuries later Jesus Christ shows up as an impoverished itinerant preacher from Galilee. He took all the imagery of the stone passages in the Hebrew Scriptures and applied them to Himself instead of Judaism, Jerusalem or the temple. It was pure blasphemy to the ruling Jewish leaders of that day.

In encounter after encounter Jesus chipped away at the poetic stone imagery of Israel and declared that in Him all the promises of God and His Kingdom were being fulfilled.

Now you might ask what does all of that have to do with 1 Peter 2:4-10? What I have given you is a very brief lesson in the rich history of Israel's identity but now Peter whom Jesus called “the rock upon whom I will build my church” writes these words.

⁴ You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor. ⁵ And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. 1 Peter 2:4-5 NLT

These are incredible words. In one sentence Peter grasps the entire wealth of Israel's history and identity and applies it to Jesus Christ as well as any man, woman or child who comes to faith in Christ. This brings us to this foundational fact:

1. Jesus is the Living Cornerstone: Honored by God

Everything in Christianity is centered on the personage of Jesus Christ.

When we come to Jesus – not to Jerusalem – we come to the Living Cornerstone

When we come to Jesus – not to Judaism – we come to God's Kingdom.

When we come to Jesus – not to an ornate temple – we become God's "spiritual house" and His "holy priesthood."

These words applied metaphorically were some of the most exalted words that could have been used within the Jewish world. If God were to dwell anywhere it would have been in the temple. In addition the royal/holy priesthood of those picked and honored to stand in the presence of God.

And now Peter is declaring that if you come to Jesus the Living Cornerstone these truths will be transferred to you as a follower of Jesus Christ. As a Christian, we should discover and come to believe that the church has become God's people and place in the world.

⁶ As the Scriptures say, "I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem, chosen for great honor, and anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." ⁷ Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him. But for those who reject him,

"The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone."

The fact is that for the Christians Jesus Christ will be the Cornerstone of our lives.

2. We are to be living stones: Hand-picked by God

Peter is moving past the idea of being God's family to more descriptive words. The Apostle Paul uses the idea that we are God's body as the church but Peter uses an architectural metaphor that suggests that we are God's building to dwell in.

Kyle Dugdale in his Master of Architecture thesis for the Harvard Graduate School of Design wrote about the role of architecture in our post-Edenic world. He says that ever since humanity was forced to leave the Garden of Eden, we have been busy constructing buildings. His point is that as architecture rises it is in some measure an attempt to replace the sense of being at home, a feeling that has seemed to elude us east of Eden.

"Architecture has struggled to mitigate the effects of the fall. But the city is a poor substitute for the Garden of Eden. Architecture performs at best, the role of a fig leaf, covering humanity's

exposure. In the end, it is perhaps, not so much a cure as it is an expression of humanity's homesickness."

These first century readers were living in out of the way places. Many of them were on the run from persecution. They were nowhere near Jerusalem's great stone temple. Peter is suggesting to them that they are at the very heart and center of God's activity in the world.

Do you know what would happen to us if we really believed that? Do you know how our priorities and lifestyles would change? Can you imagine what an impact even a few Christians could have on the world around them if they believed this truth?

There is one other implication that we should take note of here. Peter's metaphor challenges the current notion of sacred space. While I love the idea on Wednesdays at Williams Street when we close off the worship area and create a place for prayer and fasting, in reality it is not about the building or even the room. People are God's sacred space.

The New Testament does away with the idea of being at home anywhere outside of faith in Jesus Christ. His Spirit dwells within us. We are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. I am not sure how this works in the life of someone who celebrates or relies on his or her weaknesses and sinfulness. Everything I read in the word of God suggests that God is not blind nor does He somehow magically not see our sin when we engage in it.

⁸ *And, "He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall. "They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them.*

Again I raise the question, how are you going to know what God's Word says if you never read it let alone study it?

We are going to undergo some major changes as a church. It's early in the planning and preparation stages but you need to know that the Kingdom of God is here on the earth now and that God works through those that keep His Word and live it daily.

Somehow many people that frequent the services of churches like ours have created a theology that allows them to act no differently than the world around them. I am quite sure that some of you may get tired of hearing it and that may be bad news because I am convinced that for me to stay and lead this church will require deepening the spiritual journey and walk of those that claim to be Christ-followers.

All of us that name Christ as our Savior are going to have to seek to understand what that means. The fact is that you have been handpicked by God to serve Him on this earth. You are a stone that fits into the building not made by hands but a building being framed by God.

You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. John 15:16 NLT

All of humanity was handpicked or chosen by God to love and to save. Did God send His Son to die so that we could just receive free tickets to heaven and not change our lives on this earth? Absolutely not!

I am sure that there may be weariness in some of you from hearing this message over and over but I am going to keep it up as long as God lets me keep standing here in front of you. It's not my message it's His. It wasn't my idea that all Christians should be holy like God is holy it was His idea.

We are to be living stones connected to the Cornerstone, which is Christ. One more time let me remind you to not think of this as a ceremonial cornerstone. The corner stone is the stone by which all other stones/blocks or bricks will be set in reference to. If Christ is to be our Cornerstone, or the first block in our spiritual house everything about us will be set or referenced to Him and the Word of God.

There's a story about a king of Sparta in ancient Greece who boasted to a visiting monarch about the mighty walls of Sparta. But the guest looked around and didn't see any walls, and finally he said to his host, "I'd like to see those walls. Show them to me!" The Spartan ruler pointed with great satisfaction to some disciplined and well-trained troops, part of Sparta's mighty army, and exclaimed, "There they are! Those are the walls of Sparta!"

Just as each Spartan soldier was viewed by the king as a brick in his mighty wall, so we are viewed by God as "living stones... built up a spiritual house"

Paul used this same imagery in Ephesians 2:19-22, "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

Back in the days when the old West was being settled, there were a lot of pioneers who made their way over the Oregon Trail. When they got to the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains, they found a stream a little too wide to cross in one step. So they "two-stepped" across by using an ugly lump sticking up out of the water in the middle of the stream.

As the years passed, other pioneers settled in that area, built their cabins, strung fences and plowed the fields. One man built his cabin near that same stream. But he had a problem -- his door flapped in the wind. To solve his problem, he found a heavy lump in the middle of the stream. So he carried it to his front step and it became a doorstep.

More years passed. Railroads were built across the nation, more people pushed west and modern cities sprang up. A nephew of the old pioneer went east to study geology at a large university. He returned home during vacation. Lo and behold, on the front porch of his uncle's cabin by the stream, he found not just an ugly lump, and not just a heavy lump, but a lump of pure gold, the largest gold nugget ever discovered on the eastern slopes of the Rockies! It had been there for three generations, but everybody saw it in a different light, some as an ugly lump, some as a

heavy lump, but only the nephew saw it for what it really was -- a lump of gold.

The same thing is true of Jesus. The same Jesus whom others have seen as a stumbling rock was actually a very precious stone. The foundation is the most important part of any building. The chief cornerstone is the most important stone.

The cornerstone was the major structural part of ancient buildings. It had to be strong enough to support what was built upon it, and it had to be precisely laid, because every other part of the structure was oriented to it. The cornerstone was the support and the unifier of the entire building. That is what Jesus Christ is to God's building, the church. The whole building ties together because of the cornerstone.

We are to be living stones in God's Kingdom here on this earth right now. If that is not enough for you Peter left us one more understanding of who we are through Christ.

3. We are to be holy priests:

Humbled by God

Some have called this the priesthood of believers. In fact, this understanding that we don't need a priest to act as our go-between in our relationship with God is a foundational truth of the Protestant Reformation. When Martin Luther stepped away from the doctrines of the Catholic Church this was the one that was most powerful in its ramifications. It is the one that often distinguishes Protestants from Catholics.

⁸ *And, "He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall. "They stumble because they do not obey God's Word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them.*

⁹ *But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light.*

The priesthood began with Aaron in the Old Testament. It was Aaron who stood before a holy God on behalf of a sinful people. He functioned as an intermediary between God and the world. Because of this Old Testament order of priesthood the priests were more intimately acquainted with God.

Consider for a few moments the impact of this truth in light of Israel's history. He calls us royal and holy (v.5) and inducts every believer into the priesthood. Simply put this means that every authentic Christian is the ultimate insider. We are not merely representatives of God's place in the world but we serve as God's priests before the world.

Listen and look at this final summation:

¹⁰ *"Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy."*

Peter starts off his letter by referring to the Christians he wrote to as exiles and foreigners but now he reminds them that they are not outsiders but in God's kingdom they are the ultimate insiders.

You and I ought to also find strength in these words if we are living the way that Peter describes Christians living.

The closing words of verse 6 and the opening words of verse 7 should be an encouragement to all of us that trust in Lord today as our Savior and Cornerstone.

“And anyone who trusts in Him will never be disgraced.”⁷ Yes, you who trust Him recognize the honor God has given Him.”

Jesus is the Cornerstone and we have two choices: accept Him and consecrate our lives to follow Him 24/7 or reject Him. If we accept Him our whole life will be transformed from the inside out. If however we choose to reject Him we will stumble and fall.

What you and I do with Jesus means everything to our standing and identity before God. Jesus Christ is the lone expression of God in this world. By His sacrifice He offers to bring us close to God and to allow us to be His functional body.

Shortly before His death Jesus stood outside of Jerusalem and wept for the people of his own day. From his vantage point He could see the stone city gates. He saw the temple mount and yet He knew that He would be rejected by most.

What will you do with Christ? What have you done with Christ in your life?

Are you a part of the Kingdom of God? Do you relinquish yourself every day as a stone oriented to the Cornerstone? And are you serving as a royal and holy priest in the world around you? Or are you bogged down with things that ultimately aren't going to matter when you come to end of your life. Do you know what's going to matter? It won't be your title or your education or your position that was so impressive. It won't be the house you live in or the car you drive or how many toys you have. It will be did you surrender your life and allow God to work through you as a holy vessel to daily change the world around you?

Ryan Johnson, from Glen Elder, Kansas, shares this story:

I was heading north out of Salina, Kansas when I saw him. His name was Charlie.

Charlie was sitting in the ditch with large army bags.

The cold misty rain was drenching him and his bags.

He wore his Vietnam jacket proudly. It laid over his 400-pound body like a tarp.

I pulled over and asked if I could help. He asked if I would load his bags (and man did he mean

bags) on the car and drive them to the gas station that was a hundred yards away, he would appreciate it. I did. He limped along following them behind my car. For a few fruitless hours I tried to talk him into going to a rescue mission. I prayed with him and left.

I continued to travel North on HW 81 to my home. That's when Jesus started in. I said "Jesus, I can't take him home. He could kill me. And Jesus, he really stinks...Jesus there is no way I am letting him stay the night... Now Lord, I prayed with him. I helped him."

I felt the words he said, echoed from Matthew 25, "When you welcome me in...not if you prayed with me..." So, I made a U-turn on Highway 81. I pulled up next to Charlie at the gas station. I said, "Charlie get in!" Charlie said, "Getty up!"

For the next hour and a half, I rode with this 400 lb. man in my small car. I had to crack the window to be able to breathe through the stench. I heard the story of how a veteran becomes a misfit. It was the common dilemma of needing medicine to get a job and a job to get the medicine.

We got to my place. I laid a sheet on the couch. I washed his clothes and belongings. The next morning I took him to the police station as part of the ministerial alliance agreement to get him a free motel room and a hot meal.

Later that day I received a call from the local hospital's Social worker. She said that Charlie has been admitted and wouldn't speak to anyone but me. I walked into room 104 and said, "Charlie what do you want. I've done everything."

He said, "I don't want anything. I just wanted you to know that they told me my heart is bad and I am dying. They want to ship me to Wichita. But I can never hitch a ride out of Wichita, so I want to stay here to die. Last night was the first home I have stayed in in over 20 years. Because of that I felt welcomed. And I know Jesus is asking me to get my real heart right. I just want you to know. I want you to help me accept the Lord."

I am convinced that the devil doesn't care how much we go to church or how awesome we look when we get there because we aren't doing anything to stir up his domain. But if we could just get serious about our faith like we will wish we would have when we are laying on our death bed and thinking about answering to God we would see the lives of those we live around and love change.

⁹ But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for He called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light.

Prayer: