

PURIFIED UNTIL WE LOVE LIKE BROTHERS

Part 3: Livingstones, I presume?

1 Peter 2:4-10

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January 22, 2012

Welcome

Psalm 34:8

Taste and see that the LORD is good;

Here's a stone, what adjectives come to mind when you see it?

What are the characteristics, or uses of a stone?

The Apostle Peter wrote a letter to a group of scattered Christians, so inspired, it's become part of our Bible.

verse five of the second chapter of that letter is one of those "memory verses" I've been talking to you about.

1 Peter 2:5

you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

He called us "living" stones

Of all the things we might think about stones, "living" is not one of them.

To call us "living" stones is a huge contradiction, but, by the time we finish today we should see it's an accurate description.

Several people commented last week's message should have included some visual aides

So I thought about bringing in a big chocolate **cake**,

Jackson's signature chocolate cake, tested and tweaked over the years by

Doris Jackson Carnahan,

and eat it in front of you!

Wasn't the sermon about **envy**?

1 Peter 2:1-2

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. 2Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,

Wouldn't eating chocolate cake in front of you cause you to confront your feelings of envy?

Actually, the message was not about envy,
it was about holiness.

Envy is one of the attitudes that prevents our experience of holiness that expresses itself in loving each other.

1 Peter 1:22

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

It's important to keep that in mind because today we are going to end this celebration in a way that may be different from anything you've experienced but totally in-line with what the scripture has called us to do. At the end of the message we're going to have an extended greeting time dedicated to some practical ways of fulfilling the command in v. 22.

But let's remember:

Just at the message Sunday was not about chocolate cake,
it was about holiness.

The message this week is not about loving each other,
it's about holiness.

The central call of this scripture,
of what we do today
of all we do is:

1 Peter 1:15

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

Loving each other is a response to our higher calling,
to be like our heavenly father who has called us to be like him,
and he is holy.

I. The call to stones



Before we get into the Word today,
Let's do a little exercise to see how we identify with it.
Everyone stand.

I'm going to ask you "where you are from."

If you are like me, that's hard to define since I've lived all over
but I identify most with Maryland or Washington, DC,
so that would be my answer.

You can be seated if you are from
(start with states closest to VA)

The noticeable thing about this church
is we are from all over.

Today we're going to return to the letter Peter wrote to people
just like us who were from "all over."

1 Peter 1:1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,

They were strangers and aliens in the lands where they lived.
Just like today the native residents of those lands had
plenty of names for these strangers.

So did Peter including

5 you also, like

living stones, *are being built into*

a spiritual house *to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

9 But you are

a chosen people,

a royal priesthood,

a holy nation,

a people belonging to God..

1 Peter 2:5 & 9

Instead of "a people belonging to God"

the KJV uses the phrase "**a peculiar people.**"

That would make an interesting sign on a church lawn.

“Come on in, we are a peculiar people.”

Instead of a church

visitors might come in looking for the
two headed man and the bearded lady.

A had a friend who reacted to anything strange that happened
at church by saying “well, we are a peculiar people.”

But if you understand the original language,
you understand Peter was not trying to insult anyone,
or say anything negative.

He admitted they were strangers, but
did not think they were strange people.

In reality all of these names have a positive connotation.

Every one of them is something constructive.

This is important to people who love good news because
last week he pointed out some negative things in their lives
where they were not living up to their potential.

Peter also had just as high of expectations of them
as God has of you strangers and aliens today.

To people who are strangers in the world,
and even strangers to each other,

Peter gave the command to love one another, deeply

1 Peter 1:22

*Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your
brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.*

and some may feel it's an unreal expectation

because we are also “from all over,” or

our situation may be like the little girl who wrote a letter to God:

Dear GOD,

I bet it is very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world.

There are only 4 people in our family and I can never do it.

-Nan

<http://www.catholic-pages.com/grabbag/letters.asp>

But it is possible.

Even if there are more than four in your family.

Even if there are more than forty in your church.

Our ability to love each other has less to do with
where we are from than

than it does with the good news God gave through the prophet Ezekiel
Ezekiel 11:19

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from
them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.

Today,
in this hour,
in this room

God is calling us to give up our rock hard stone hearts
so we can love each other as he has called us to do.

So today,
in this hour,
in this room

God's term for us is no longer "heart of stone," but
1 Peter 2:5

you also, like living stones, a

re being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual
sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

II. The characteristics of stones

So let's think a little bit about the usefulness of stones
eventually we'll come to an understanding of our call to be
"living stones."

A. Stones are permanent

They've been around for so long when we talk about something old
we say it goes back to the "stone age,"
as if there is nothing older.

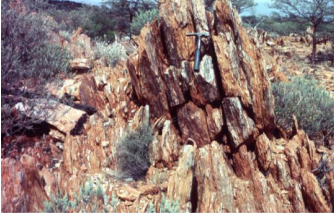
There is even a "stone museum" in Stone Harbor, NJ.



As the years slip by and you still haven't seen it yet,
don't worry.

It's not going anywhere soon, stones are permanent.

In 1983 a group of geologists and geophysicists from the Australian National University in Canberra discovered what may be the oldest rocks in the world:



They estimate these rocks to be 4.2 billion years old,
and they are still here.

<http://sciencelay.com/earth-sciences/geology/the-oldest-rock-in-the-world-a-missing-link-in-a-billion-year-gap/>

You've no doubt seen church buildings made out of stone.



The choice of stone as a building material was not because
it was the best looking material,
or even the cheapest construction.

Using stones was a way the church said to its community,
we're not going away, we're here to stay because
stones are permanent.

Even Jesus used stone construction to signify permanence
Matthew 16:18

... on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

B. More useful together

It's worth noting that Peter doesn't call you a stone.
 He is talking, not about a stone, but about many stones
 We've all discovered the irritation of a single stone.
 Whether it's in your garden or in your shoe,
 a stone by itself doesn't have much use
 but they are more useful together.

If you look at the areas of your life that seem unproductive,
 even useless you will discover they are areas
 that are not mutually depended on other believers.

One stone is insignificant



many stones help keep time.
 One stone gets in your way



Many stones provide security
 One stone is easy to overlook



Many stones together become a one of the wonders of the world.
 One stone can be ignored



Many stones get your attention.
 If somebody tracked a single stone into the church
 and dropped it on the carpet, we would throw it out.



Many stones construct a cathedral.
One stone doesn't make us think much.



Many stones help us remember.
One stone can damn things up



Many stones can be a bridge.
One stone is ugly



Many stones, together can be beautiful!
So it's no wonder that Peter,
who calls these stranger Christians to learn how to love each other deeply
compares them to living stones because
it's when stones are combined for a shared purpose
that stones become useful.

A stone that might have otherwise been useless
becomes a part of something that is valuable and useful
when it works together with other stones.

God has shaped each one of us for a particular purpose,
which can no more be accomplished alone,
than a single stone can make a bridge or a cathedral.
However, when a lot of people discover their God given purpose,

their unique ministry,
then each individual stone becomes a part of something greater.

So whether your ministry is at helping hands,
music, children, teens, facilities, kitchen, whatever
it's critically important to the rest of us because
nothing ever great ever was constructed with just one stone.
It is working together that stones make something!

Similarly, another characteristic of stones is

C. They build each other up

For four years I lived in Massachusetts where it was common to see,
whenever the snow melted,



stone fences.

Theses fences were often built by farmers who
would remove individual stones from their crop fields,
and pile them up to make fences.

The interesting thing about these fences is they have no mortar.



Eketorp castle in Sweden was made the same way.

This type of construction is called “dry stone masonry”

Another example is Dunlough Castle



In Ireland

No mortar, cement or any other soft wet medium is used to

hold the building together.

Even bridges can be constructed



with dry stone masonry.

They don't need mortar because the stones hold each other up.

In your personal Bible study have you noticed the letters in the New Testament were either written to a group, by a group,

or about a group of believers?

That's because the Bible has no concept of isolated believers.

The Bible always talks about Christians working together,

worshipping together,

praying together,

caring for one another.

The term "living stones" fits because we can hold each other up.

D. Are valuable when they are refined

We use stones to adorn rings, necklaces,

and other kinds of jewelry because of their beauty.

Probably every woman present today is wearing some kind of stone that has been cut and polished.

But if you saw those stones before they were refined



they wouldn't look like much of anything.

But once a gemologist cuts, heats, oils, polishes, etches, waxes, or fills a stone, its value is improved.

So once again “living stones” is a great term for the church because we might not start off as much but our value is improve as the Holy Spirit cuts, heats, oils, polishes, etches, waxes, or fills into something beautiful.

He has called us to be not just stones,
but of living stones.

We are to be

III. A church of living stones

I’m sure there are more characteristics of stones that apply to strange people who are called to love each other deeply. But I want to move on to two applications of our call to be living stones. Followers of Jesus who are permanent, more useful together, who build each other up, and are refined can be used to construct

A. A spiritual house

1 Peter 2:5

also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house *to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

To understand this concept let me show you what members of Somers congregational Church of Christ found when they arrived for church on New Years’ day
People arrived and this is what they saw...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yp6B4LYLQLE>

Their building had burned to the ground.

You can imagine their despair as they wondered where they would meet,
where they would pray,
or how their church would continue to function.

This is the same thing experienced by people in Peter’s day when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed.

To stop the Jews from rebellion against foreign rule Roman soldiers destroyed the Jerusalem temple.
The loss of the temple was their version of 9/11

The temple had been the center of their life.

It was the place of God's presence among his covenant people and, through daily sacrifices,

the temple was the place where all Jews everywhere, both in Palestine and those scattered across the empire had access to God.

With the destruction of the temple, major changes occurred:

the Sanhedrin was suspended,

sacrifices were terminated,

temple-feasts ended,

the temple land was confiscated.

The fires lit in the destruction was so hot,

the stones used to construct the temple were turned to powder.

All that was left was one exterior wall.

Peter is trying to help these "strangers and aliens" realize their spiritual strength did not depend on a pile of stones in Jerusalem.

It would be their love for God, and deep love for each other

would transform them into living stones

which God could construct into a new spiritual house.

They would be an improvement all of the things previously accomplished by the temple because they would be alive.

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, and exclaimed,

"There they are! Those are the walls of Sparta!"

Just as each living 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"

He doesn't need a temple in Jerusalem any more,

he has us!

As you look around you at this physical building,
 you can imagine not so very long ago,
 it was nothing but a bunch of scattered pieces.
 There was a stack of two-by-fours in a lumberyard.
 There was a pile of nails in a hardware store.
 There was a roll of carpet in somebody's warehouse.
 There was concrete that hadn't even been mixed.
 Then with planning and a lot of hard work and expertise,
 all those pieces and hundreds more have all come together and
 have been joined together to make something
 that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The same thing is true of God's building, the church.
 Many of us who are now a part of this were at one time
 separated into different pieces.
 Pieces that had little in common:
 different interests,
 different economic situations,
 different religious backgrounds,
 from different parts of the country,
 different ideas about what church should be.
 But when we decide to love each other deeply,
 the master architect put us together,
 into a spiritual house that does everything the original temple did
 but cannot be destroyed by any outside force!

Because we are living stones, this spiritual house we're building
 is permanent!
 Because we are living stones, this spiritual house we're building
 holds each other up!
 Because we are living stones, this spiritual house we're building
 we're more useful when we get together
 Because we are living stones, this spiritual house we're building
 is being refined.

Sure we've gone through some hard times lately.
 I chose to believe those hard times are refining us.
 The gem master of the living stones is knocking off the rough edge,
 chiseling a piece here,
 sanding a piece there,
 smoothing it out,
 heating us, waxing, us, oiling, us, grinding us and when he's done
 each stone will fit it into place in this spiritual building.
 When he's done there will be nothing out of place,
 no defective or inappropriate pieces
 holy as he is holy
 and our main contribution to the process will be
 loving each other deeply.

B. A holy priesthood

1 Peter 2:1-5

1Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. 2Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. 4As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—5you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, *offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

We just celebrated the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.
 a great man who was named after the father of the protest reformation.
 Martin Luther was a Roman Catholic priest who's study of the Bible
 lead him to the conclusion the "priesthood" belongs to all believers.
 He called it the priesthood of all believers,
 and it was a great concept: every believer a priest.

That doesn't mean we all dress in robes
 chant, light incense, and preside over animal sacrifices.
 The priesthood of all believers means all followers of Christ
 have a unique role to play in bringing others to Christ.
 Here in our church we have some people who minister in

very public ways.

John with the teaching, Teena with the café,
Peggy with the children's quizzing, Kay with Helping Hands,
are visible and valuable parts of this spiritual house.

But when you add in the idea that this spiritual house
is made of living stones you begin to understand
we are all part of this spiritual priesthood.
So the person who takes out the trash on Wednesday night,
the person who sorts clothes at Helping Hands,
the one who was upstairs this week, patching walls,
the person who sets the thermostats,
the person who gives a young parent a break
by taking a Sunday in the nursery,
are all part of the spiritual house God is building,
all doing the same thing the priests used to do,
bringing people into the presence of God.

IV. Challenging the stones

The stones outside in the yard cannot get up and do these things.
The privilege belongs to you living stones.

Therefore, everything you do for the Lord,
in this community is part of the deep love for each other
that he is using to turn us into a priesthood of living stones.
A priesthood that is permanent,
more useful when it works together,
a priesthood that holds each other up,
and a priesthood that being refined, and being made more valuable and
it all depends on our willingness to

1 Peter 1:22

... love one another deeply, from the heart.

So today we're going to end with a challenge.
This will be different than any way I've ever ended a church service.
I've never liked that phrase "church service" because

I couldn't figure out who was being served.

If we just sit around staring at the back of the head in front of you.
or listen to me preach while filing the sermon in that long list of
sermons you never did anything about,
it doesn't each other, and it certainly doesn't do anything for God.
If we are going to be living stones we have to be alive, active
so the challenge today is to take five minutes and
actively love one another.

This will be similar to the "greeting times" we've had in the past,
but will be an opportunity to go deeper.

Here are some suggestions:

1. Cheryl will have some cards addressed to people who've been absent.
You can love someone by writing a note telling them they are missed.
2. There are prayer requests on the altar,
you can love someone by taking one of those and praying for the request.
3. You can take five minutes to really find out what's going on in
someone's life, letting them know you care about them.
4. Here is the nursery sign-up sheet.
You can love some parents by signing up to take a turn
5. If you know someone is hurting
this would be a great time to offer to pray for them,
just simply, where ever they are.
6. I have some index cards of ministry opportunities.
None of them are glamorous.

But you can sort through them, looking for one you can do.

So on the outside this will look like a greeting time,
but those of you who understand the call to be living stones
can use this time to take loving to a higher level.

Please stand

Let me give you three ground rules before we get started

- A. We'll come back together in a few minutes so don't run off.
- B. I don't want anyone to feel obligated or manipulated so if anyone sits
down let's take that they're done.

Living stones, ready?

Sources

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