

The Stones That Cry Out - 1 Peter 2:4-12

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[0 : 00] Stone, rejected by humans, but chosen by God and precious to him, 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. For in scripture it says, see, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious, but to those who do not believe, the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone that causes people to stumble, and a rock that makes them fall. They stumble because they disobey the message, which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.

Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans, that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. Let's pray. Father, thank you for the privilege of approaching your holy throne in worship and to bring to you our concerns and our cares. We ask that you would help us to leave our troubles at the door this morning, Lord, and simply enter into your holy of holies to elevate our worship to you. Be with us, Lord, as we look at your word. And may you be speaking this morning through your Holy Spirit. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. I was reading during the week about this church in California that decided to sell its building and open a brewery.

And the church's pastor was interviewed about this. And let me quote him just so I don't, so I'm not unfair to the guy. I thought to myself, wouldn't it be great if a church could figure out a way to make a product where they split the profits with local community groups? We love beer.

Why not do a brewery? I'm not making this up. I promise this is a real story. He went on to say, my sermons get better after a few beers. You might need a few yourself when I'm done telling you about them.

[2 : 58] They also do this thing called Faith on Tap, which I quote from the website, is a discussion group for people of all religious, political, and social affiliations to engage in respectful dialogue over craft beer and wine, which is exactly what you want people drinking when they're talking about politics and religion, beer and wine. By the way, one of the local community groups that they split the profits with, local abortion clinics, one of which is on the floor above where the church meets.

And the church's name is Greater Purpose Community Church. Greater Purpose? Really? Making and selling beer to fund abortion?

Is that really what Jesus had in mind when he said, I will build my church and then died for his church? You see, guys like this so-called pastor bow to the pressures of the world around them, which tells them the church has to look like the culture.

The church needs to get with the times, adapt, integrate, or else sit down and shut up. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, it was a magnificent scene.

Throng of adoring crowds lining the roads and shouting, Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. And the Pharisees said to Jesus, shut them up.

[4 : 39] They're making too much of a racket. But Jesus said, I tell you, if they stay quiet, then the stones will cry out. Because God will always get the glory that is due to him.

And that's the name of our sermon this morning. The stones cry out. Because you see, friends, God's purpose for the church is not to bow to a world system that tells it to sit down and be quiet.

Peter tells us this morning that we are living stones. And because we, the church, are alive, we are living, we have two great purposes.

Two main ways in which we, the living stones, cry out to the living God. If you have one of the sheets in front of you, you'll see that the two ways are vocal and visible.

The church needs to be vocal and it needs to be visible. So let's dive right in verses four and five.

Let's have a look. As you come to him, the living stone, that's Jesus, rejected by humans, but chosen by God and precious to him, you also, that's the church, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

[6 : 04] My brother is a stone cutter. He does monuments, headstones, that kind of thing. And last year, he designed and built this World War I monument in Middleton.

It's absolutely beautiful. It's basically an enormous limestone plaque, thick, several meters long, engravings, poetry, and it's got all the names of the fallen soldiers from the Middleton area on it. And people flock to see this thing. It's stunning. It's an example of wonderful craftsmanship. And people admire the engravings and the poetry and reflect on the sacrifice of the brave men whose names are on the stone.

But at the end of the day, impressive and all as it is, it's just a lump of stone. Because you see, it's dead. It's inanimate.

It doesn't have life. It'll last for a time, but then, ultimately, it will fade away. But Jesus is the living stone, Peter tells us.

[7 : 07] You come to him not to admire something made by men, not something made out of rock. You come to him, the living stone, the rock of ages, because he is the beautiful savior.

He is the secure, immovable, permanent, rock of ages. And back in the gospel accounts, when Jesus asked Peter, who do you say I am?

Peter said, you're the Messiah. You're the son of the living God. And Jesus told Peter that this revelation, this knowledge that Jesus is the Messiah, is the son of God, is the rock, Jesus said, on which I will build my church.

And look at verse 5. Not only this, but verse 5, we, the church, are living stones that are being built on top of this rock to form a house.

Now, I don't know if you've ever built your own house. My brother has, with the help of the other brother, the stone cutter, and it's a great exercise in patience and working together and, not my brother, as you understand, they're not patient or anything like that, but it's a great exercise in patience.

[8 : 24] That's what they tell me. But this is not a literal house that is being built. This is not a community center in Carragalline. This is a spiritual home, one that is based on the reality that Jesus is Lord.

That's what a church is. Not a building. Not an organization. It's a group of sinners saved by grace being built onto the rock of ages.

Sinners saved out of darkness, Peter tells us, to be a holy priesthood. Now, you remember what holy means, right? Holy means set apart from sin.

Separated from sin. Separated from the lusts and desires of this world. And in the Old Testament, God set aside priests for himself who would make sacrifices for the people.

Lambs, goats, turtle doves, that kind of thing. They would make these sacrifices and then atone for the sins of the people. Most famously, once a year, on what the Jews still call Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest would go into the Holy of Holies in the deepest part of the temple and make atonement for the whole people.

[9 : 42] Now, these priests, they were sinners themselves. Just like you and me. All people are. We know this. So, they didn't just need to atone for the sins of the people.

They needed to atone for their own sins as well. And in that sense, those priests, the Old Testament priests, represented people in front of God.

Before God. But we live on this side of the cross. We live on the side of the cross where Jesus became the complete sacrifice to appear for us in God's presence and atone completely for our sins.

We don't need priests to enter into a building made by men. Because Jesus, unlike those priests, he didn't have any sins of his own.

He didn't have to atone. For his sins. And because of this, Peter tells us, we are a priesthood whose sins have already been forgiven. So, we don't make sacrifices for other people.

[10:48] We don't represent other people before God. The reason we're a priesthood, friends, is we represent God in front of other people. Not the other way around.

And so, the sacrifices we make are not animals. You'll see this quote if you have the notes in front of you. The writer to Hebrews says this, Jesus suffered to make the people holy through his own blood.

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise. A sacrifice of praise. The fruit of lips that openly profess his name.

See, the purpose, friends, of the church is to be vocal in its praise. We, the living stones, we cry out because the great rock of ages made us alive.

The purpose of the church is to be vocal in its praise. And this sacrifice that Jesus made shows that lambs don't belong in altars. They belong in slow cookers. Take a bit of garlic and rosemary.

[11:55] Try it sometime. It's lovely. Keep it away from the altar. We, the living stones, we cry out in the praise and worship, the sacrifice of praise and worship, the spiritual sacrifice.

And we continually offer this sacrifice, Peter says. Now, I don't know about you, but I find that challenging. Oftentimes, frankly, we just don't feel like it.

Whatever's going on in your life. Are there times you don't feel like it? There are times I don't. How about things like this? You're late getting out the door on Sunday morning because the kids knocked over a vase.

Or the baby needed a nappy change. Or the dog made a mess on the carpet. I don't have a dog. I have a cat. She looks after herself. How about this?

You just had a fight with somebody in the car on the way to church. Your wife, your kids, whoever. Or how about this? When you don't like the songs the musicians pick, or you don't like the fact that we're sitting over here now and not over there.

[13:08] None of you would ever think that, of course. But friends, this is not about us. This is not about us. This is about Jesus. Look at verse 6.

Jesus is the cornerstone set in Zion, God's holy city. Literally, the hill Jerusalem is built on. Figuratively, and to us, the church.

Jesus is the cornerstone of the church. He is the foundation of everything we do here. Regardless of how we feel. Regardless of what kind of mourning we've had. And on this foundation, look at what Peter says, we are being built to sacrifice ourselves in humble adoration of what he has done for us.

Being built. This is not once and done. This is a lifelong pursuit. This is not something we're going to get right straight away.

And that's why we don't sing about how perfect we are. We sing about how perfect Jesus is. And not only that, look at verse 9.

[14:16] The church is a chosen people. There's that word again. Chosen. Deliberate. Not an accident. Just like Jesus was chosen, the church is chosen.

Just like Calvary was God's plan, the church is God's plan. Not dependent on you and me getting all of this right all of the time. Because, man, are there days where we get this dramatically wrong. because we're all people. I said to someone at home group the other night, at some point over the next six weeks, if I haven't done so already, I'm going to say something that you're not going to like. Or you're going to say something I'm not going to like. Because we're people. And that's what we do. We get upset with one another. And it's why we don't sing about ourselves. It's why we sing songs about Jesus who came into this world.

So that regardless of what way we are, regardless of how we're feeling towards one another, we know that the church is the chosen people of God.

[15:23] And not just chosen. Not just a priesthood. But look at what Peter says. We are a royal priesthood. You know what that means? Because Jesus is the king and we are the holy priesthood in service of the king.

we share in the inheritance of the king. We get to experience when we go to be with him the same glory that he has with his father.

And despite all of the things happening to us in this day and age where it can be really difficult to be a Christian and sometimes just really difficult to be a human, we can look forward what we talked

about in week one to this living hope of the assurance of sharing in God's glory.

Peter says we belong to God as his special possession. And here's the reason to declare the praises literally the excellencies the greatness of the God who called us out of darkness and into the light of eternal life.

The purpose of the church is to be vocal yes in our praise but also vocal in our witness to other people. The stones cry out in worship and they cry out in declaring the gospel to talk it up to actually open our mouths and tell people about what Jesus has done for us.

[16:52] Now those of you who are new enough to this Christianity thing maybe in the last year or something like that why are you here? Why are any of us here?

My guess is that at some point somebody maybe you're sitting next to or somebody else in this room or somebody else in a different church that person my guess is told you about the gospel told you about why they go to church on Sundays told you about the nature of sin told you about their own struggles with sin and then told you that God sent his son into the world so that those sins are paid for that if you simply believe on the Lord Jesus that your sins are forgiven God called you out of darkness Peter says by putting someone in your life who has declared to you his excellencies and now as part of the church we are to do the same thing that's our purpose also we're born again because we heard the good news and our purpose in being born again is to spread the good news not just to show up and be part of a club or an organization but to actually declare the excellencies of the one who called us out of darkness and into the light do we do that are we actively engaged in telling others about their need for Jesus am I are you things like this maybe you ask how well when you take a coffee break at work in fact when you take your coffee break tomorrow

I work at home at the moment so my coffee break is by myself but you might be with other people tomorrow when you take your coffee break your go to conversation is it the results of the world cup final or is it last night's prayer meeting when you're gathered around the table maybe you're a student in a student center UCC CIT wherever you are and your friends are all talking about how the planet is going to be dead soon because of single use plastics do you join into that or do you tell them you know I was dead once and I came back to life because Jesus made me alive is your social media platform Facebook Twitter whatever the case might be is that something you use just to spread more outrage and more gossip or to debate whether Kanye West is really a Christian or not or do you simply use that platform to point people towards the tender love of Jesus every opportunity you have friends is an opportunity to declare the excellencies of the one who called you out of darkness because the stones cry out because we're alive just think of that image stones are dead inanimate objects that are given life by the rock of ages when Jesus said that if they stay quiet the stones will cry out

I don't think that was just hyperbole he really meant I will get glory no matter what happens the rest of the world friends you see it's dead in its sin and our purpose the church is to declare to that world the praises of him who gave us life we were not God's people Peter says and because of God's mercy not anything we've done because of his mercy he made us a chosen people for himself we ought to be vocal in our praise and vocal in our witness it's not just about Sunday morning it's about the rest of our week too so we are to be vocal and secondly and finally I only have two points today normally I have three I don't know what to do with myself finally the church's purpose is to be visible look at verses 11 and 12 dear friends

I urge you as foreigners and exiles abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us immigration is in the news a lot these days isn't it you know we all know the tragedy of the lorry container in Essex with the people from Vietnam we saw large protests in Ucderrard and Galway this summer people protesting against a direct provision center for asylum seekers and I'm not going to go into it but much of what's said and reported is just ugly it's just not nice there will always be a segment of the population in every country including this one that just wants to say go home you don't belong here this is our home that's how the world views Christians you don't fit in here you need to adapt the world is changing you need to integrate keep your religion to yourself recognize you don't belong here and you know what in one sense they're absolutely right we don't belong here and that's what

[22:47] Peter is saying this is actually the third time in the letter so far that Peter has referred to Christians as foreigners strangers exiles all means the same thing we don't belong here this is not our home we're just passing through on the way to something greater Paul put it another way we're

not citizens of Greece or Rome or Ireland or the UK or the US we are but not really Paul says our citizenship is in heaven and so Peter says because we're just passing through because this is all temporary don't integrate don't adopt the world's customs and practices do stand out instead he says abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul have you ever done this maybe you go to another country and you're going through immigration and the border guard says what is the purpose of your visit he normally doesn't smile when he says it and you say travel business shopping watching the spring box hammer England whatever the case might be what they're really asking is this if I let you into this country are we going to have any trouble how are you going to conduct yourself if I let you across this border basically they want you to enjoy your trip and then go home preferably after spending lots of money and stimulating the economy in essence they want you to be invisible no trouble keep yourself and that's what the world wants to know about us friends how are we going to act you say you're a

Christian Dan what does that mean what does that look like and Peter's answer the Lord's answer is to live such good lives among the pagans among those who don't believe that they actually see our good deeds they don't just hear us talk about them we don't keep silent but we don't stay invisible we cry out by being vocal and we cry out by being seen by being visible to other people now we're not necessarily talking about housing the homeless feeding the hungry clothing the naked although those are all good things and we can and should and must do those things but what Peter means here is our conduct our conduct the way we live our lives ought to be done in such a way that people can actually see when they look at us yes they actually do abstain from the sinful desires of wage war against their souls and literally abstain apeko in

Greek means hold back from you might say be distant from something think of it another way fast from something just don't eat it just don't ingest the sinful things the world does every day and you say okay fast from what well have you ever heard people talk like this and I apologize if anyone this is what your name is I'm not talking about you I just pluck these out of nowhere did you hear about Jane she's married to Pat but I heard she's carrying Joe's baby I don't have any holidays left so I'll just get a doctor's note and go out sick they won't know and I need the time off anyway I'm not going to finish this assignment by the deadline so I'll just make up a sob story for the lecturer and get an extension for a week abstain from such things don't participate in such things the things the world does without even thinking about them gossip deceit cheating the world has enough to throw at us as it is and boy does it throw stuff at us all you

Christians you're just ignorant you're just narrow minded homophobic they say we're in a cult that we only want your money they say that we talk a big game that we say we're Christians but they look just like us there's nothing different about them so let's look like it let's be different visibly different radically different from the world around us let's cry out not just in our praise not just in our evangelism but by the way we live our very lives in our homes at university at work at the shops wherever we go live our lives in a way that points to God honest humble respectful because Peter says and take a look by seeing our conduct our good deeds the unbeliever might glorify

God on the day he visits us that they might say you know what there actually is something visibly different about these people that they might see these stones that were once dead but are now alive and are overflowing in a visible crying out of godly living and if we do this friends it's not just for our own sake because here's the point if we do this if we visibly look different from the world around us we're pointing to Christ we echo Christ Christ who came into the world but didn't look like the world we didn't bow to Satan's temptations bow to me I'll give you all the kingdoms of the world throw yourself off this ledge if you're really God he'll save you if not I'll save you Jesus didn't do that he followed the will of God his very life and his manner of conduct the way he lived that life his brief life on earth pointed to God pointed to the father and we ought to mimic and honor that example in how we live our lives so that even for those who hear our message and reject it and there always will be plenty of those even for those people who reject our message that on the day of judgment they might stand in front of the father and be without excuse that they actually really did see us pointing to

[30 : 05] Christ living out this Christian walk with love and honor and sacrifice that the very way we lived our lives pointed them to the rock of ages who made us alive so we're the living stones who ought to cry out in our praise in our witness in the way we live our very lives in the minutia the details of every day and we're going to finish but let me just say this first in case you didn't already know most people really don't like this message just look back at verses 7 and 8 there's a reason I

skipped them verses 7 and 8 Jesus while he's a precious stone to us you might say he's like a gemstone he's like a ruby a sapphire he's the keystone he's the cornerstone he's the first stone that's put down and then everything else is built on top of it while we see him as that

Jesus the stone image is rejected by the builders rejected by the builders now who are they Jesus meant the Pharisees in fact Peter understood this because Peter was standing next to Jesus when Jesus called the Pharisees the builders that rejected the cornerstone but it's not just them it's not just the small group of Jewish leaders in ancient Palestine who were the Pharisees they were the ones who said we have built the way to God by our own deeds by our own righteousness we have a way to get to God don't worry about this Jesus chap you don't need him he's just a troublemaker who does he think he is I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through me we are the builders we'll tell you how to get to God those are the builders anybody who thinks well I'm okay

I'll be able to get to God I'm a good enough person in my own right this stone this Jesus that causes them to stumble Peter says it's a rock that they fall over that they trip over other translations say it's a rock of offense the Greek word is skandalon you can guess the English word that comes from that it's scandalous this gospel is scandalous telling someone that they're a sinner is scandalous in an age where we just tell everybody follow your heart do what makes you feel good do it your way and telling them that because they're a sinner they need a savior is scandalous and telling them that you won't find hope in all of the other stuff that's going on out there at the moment

I was at a health food shop recently and there was a little booth outside and they were selling angel tears that's what they call them angel tears they say they're the tears of angels that fall to earth and become stones and somehow I don't know I don't understand what it is but anyway they say these things point you towards something greater if you have this in your life you'll be fine or if you have Buddha in your life you'll be fine if you had Mohammed in your life you'll be fine or even if you have nothing in your life you'll be fine because all people are basically good and telling people that Jesus is their only hope for being in a right relationship with God is absolutely 100% scandalous and offensive the gospel message friends is scandalous because it tells people that their only hope of life after death is in

Christ and in Christ alone he really meant it I am the way the truth the life no one comes to the father except through me and that's a rock that causes people to stumble is Jesus tripping you up are you trusting in the work of your own hands are you sitting here right now and maybe you've been coming to church for years maybe you say I am a Christian but are you sitting here right now confident that you can stand in front of God because of the work of your own hands stand in front of this judge and the judge will declare you righteous do you think God will understand I'm a good person if that is you friend I've got news for you no person is good enough for

[35 : 19] God on their own strengths you know that old saying why do good things or bad things happen to good people the best retort to that I heard was a theologian who said that happened once and he volunteered when Jesus came the only one good enough to be the rock on whom the church could be built he was the only one good enough your strengths won't save you only Jesus can so do you understand the gospel do you understand that Jesus came so that regardless of who you are what you've done how old you are it's never too early it's never too late do you understand that you can have your sins forgiven if you just come to Jesus and believe because Jesus said anyone who comes to me I will not cast out this doesn't have to be something like you've got it all right before you come to

Jesus you don't have to be from the right country you don't have to be from the right background you don't have to have all the doctrine together and all of this kind of thing you simply have to come to Jesus and believe that Jesus is Lord and on the cross he cried out it is finished my work is done he cried out in response if you haven't already done so will you cry out to him amen I'm going to call the musicians back up as they're on their way let's just pray gracious father we thank you that we are not a passing moment in human history but that we are a chosen people a royal priesthood your special possession that you have called out of darkness into light and help us Lord in those moments where we simply don't feel like it because of the cares and challenges of this world help us to cry out in worship and praise of you for all the things you've done for us and give us boldness to witness this gospel to other people through our words to the people who we see we see every day but not just our words by our deeds as well help us to be living our lives in such a way that they actually are an echo of the life of your son

Jesus and point people to him be patient with us Lord when we fail because we can do and will fail but give us the strength to keep going and Lord for those who hear this message and they're not sure where they stand or they don't know you if they're listening right now please please be imminent to them because all of this is shifting sand if we're not here to declare the excellencies of you who call us out of darkness and to be the witnesses of your gospel so please save those who don't yet believe for those who don't believe in our families in our workplace wherever we go please use us as imperfect vessels as we are to save those and bring them into your perfect Zion your holy city built on a hill be with us as we finish in songs of praise help us to elevate our worship and declare the glories of who you are we ask this in Jesus name amen would you please stand and we'll sing our last song oh lord our god how much you