**Week 4**

***Living Stones***

***1 Peter 2:1-12***

**2-3 May 2022**

**Review –** Last week we saw that Peter was emphasizing that we have a living and abiding Word. He talked about the permanence of the Word of God, as contrasted with the impermanence of the things that we typically focus on. He will pick up on that idea in chapter two and show us how we ought to live in light of the fact that the Word of the Lord stands forever.

**Things to Take Off –** Peter has used the phrase “born again” to refer to our salvation, bringing in a kind of baby imagery. Now he tells us to “put off” certain things, i.e. to take them off like we would badly soiled and smelly clothing…or a baby’s dirty diaper. We can’t wait to get them off because we can’t stand wearing them any more. Notice the repetition of the word “all” in the opening verse of chapter 2. Peter isn’t telling us to just partially clean up our lives, but to get rid of *all* malice and *all* deceit, etc. We can’t rest on “incremental improvement” in various areas of our lives and think that that is good enough. One helpful suggestion is to flip Peter’s command to put off certain things and make it read in a positive way. A positive re-write of verse one might read, *“Put ON all good will and all truth and all genuineness and all generosity and all praise.”* This gives us positive things to replace our bad habits with.

**Our Speech –** Did you notice how many of the things Peter commands us to take off refer to our speech? We want the living and abiding Word of God to replace the perishable and harmful words that we tend to use.

**Pure Spiritual Milk –** Peter tells us that we should crave “pure spiritual milk” just like a newly born infant craves physical milk. What is this “pure spiritual milk”? A literal translation of this phrase is “milk of the *WORD”*. We should crave the Word, longing for it to replace all the malice, deceit and other harmful habits of our lives. Peter tells us that drinking in the Word will cause us to grow in our salvation, i.e. our on-going salvation that is progressively freeing us from the power of sin in our daily lives. We find delicious, delightful, nutritious sustenance only in the Word of God.

**Living Stones –** Peter moves on from the imagery of newborn infants to that of stones: a living stone, a cornerstone, a capstone, and a stone of stumbling. When Peter begins this section by saying that believers are living stones being built together, he is making an obvious reference to the Old Testament temple. He is saying that the temple was pointing toward a greater truth: that Jesus Christ was the first “living stone” of many living stones who would be built together into the church. The phrase “being built up as a spiritual house” in verse 5 can be literally translated as “as a house for the spirit”.

**The Cornerstone –** Peter also tells his listeners that they are “a holy priesthood”. He wants them to understand how elevated and important their role as priests is, and he uses the various kinds of stones to make his point. He quotes Isaiah 28:16 which speaks of God laying a stone in *Zion,* which is significant because Zion refers to the new covenant God will make, as opposed to Mount Sinai, the symbol of the old covenant. Isaiah says that the stone God laid is a cornerstone, “chosen and precious”. We today know that this is a reference to Jesus Christ Himself, chosen to accomplish the work of redemption. What was the **role of a cornerstone**? The cornerstone was the first stone laid in the building process. It ensured that the building would be square. It was critical that the cornerstone be a reliable stone structurally so that the plumb lines would all be correct in the rest of the building. So Jesus Christ fulfills this role perfectly: He is the first of many, and He squares the whole foundation. The cornerstone is also the lowest stone, and consider how Jesus humbled Himself and became “obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.”

**The Capstone –** Next Peter takes his readers to Psalm 118:22, which says that the stone that the builders rejected has become the capstone. He had begun by saying that Jesus Christ was the cornerstone: the lowest stone, the first one laid, which squared the building. But now he says that Jesus is the capstone, the exalted one. He is the stone which was laid last and which keeps the structure in place. Jesus Christ is the first and the last. He is low in His humanity, and He is exalted at the right hand of God the Father.

**The Stone That the Builders Rejected –** Then Peter quotes Isaiah 8:14 to show his listeners that the Jews for the most part didn’t know who Jesus was, so they rejected Him. The Old Testament prophets didn’t know how all the pieces of prophecy about the Messiah fit together, and many of the Jews of Jesus’ day also failed to grasp it. He became to them a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. Peter wants his listeners to understand that even they do the right things, they will still be a source of offense to those around them, just as Christ never sinned and yet became the greatest offender of all to the Jews and to the culture at large.

**“…As They Were Destined To Do” –** The word “destined” at the end of verse 8 is a hard one to read. But the Old Testament prophets predicted that this is the way things would be (i.e. that the Messiah would be rejected), and that is exactly what happened. And guess what? Jesus predicted the rejection that His followers would face as well, and Peter is setting the stage for dealing with this issue. Peter wants to prepare his hearers for the fact that they will often be an offense to those around them, even when they haven’t done anything wrong.

**Our New Identity in Christ –** Peter now tells his hearers that they are “a chosen race and a royal priesthood”. Remember that he is addressing converts from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds, and he is saying, “You (the body of believers) are Israel!” This was a shockingly new idea for these believers. Keep in mind that there is a distinction between *ethnic* Israel and *spiritual* Israel.The Old Testament priests were a chosen group (the Levites) within another chosen group (the descendants of Abraham). So Peter is telling his listeners that they are the “chosen chosen”. They are also a holy nation that follow after God and a people “for His own possession.” It is as if God has labelled each one of us with a sign reading, “This person belongs to the Lord Most High.”

**The Ramifications of Our Identity –** Knowing that we are a chosen race should imbue us with a great deal of gratitude and awe. Knowing that we are a royal priesthood has huge implications with regard to the responsibility that we carry. The Old Testament priests were reconciling man to man AND man to God as they offered the sacrifices. We, too, are called to be peacemakers, both on the horizontal plane and on the vertical plane.

**A Holy Nation –** There are two ways we can wrongly apply this concept today. We may think of our home country as “a holy nation”—or at least as a nation that once was holy. Or we can think that we are fine on our own, doing our own spiritual thing. The first problem is thinking of “a holy nation” as something *bigger* than the church or *different* from the church. The other problem is having no sense of a holy *nation* at all. Neither of these concepts is in line with what Peter is teaching here. Our holy nation is a *spiritual* one, not a literal one. We don’t place our hope in a government; we don’t place our hope in an earthly ruler. Our living and abiding hope is seated in Heaven. But we also do not alienate ourselves or isolate ourselves from other believers. We are all citizens of this nation together.

**Our Purpose: Proclaiming His Excellencies –** Peter says that we have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light—which reminds us of Genesis 1:1, when God spoke light into existence. Second Corinthians 5:17 tells us that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. God has looked into your darkness and has spoken into it, “Let there be light!” Where there was once nothing, now there is something, and it is something marvelous. Peter continues this “once nothing, now something” idea as he continues, “Once you were NOT a people, but now you are God’s people. Once you had NOT received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” [Edie’s note: Verse 10 is a reference to Hosea 1:6-9, contrasted with Hosea 2:23.] In verse 9 Peter is quoting Exodus 19:5-6, when God speaks to the Israelites through Moses…but the Israelites were not able to do what God had said. But because Jesus Christ DID, Peter is able to address his listeners and say, “This is who you are!” *We are part of something eternal, the sum of which is greater than its parts and is built on a sure foundation.*

**More Descriptions –** In verse 11Peter reminds his readers that they are in a spiritual battle. He has previously described them as exiles (people who have been kicked out of their own home country), but now he adds a new description, *sojourners* (someone who is passing through to another destination). When we are traveling, we carry only the essentials with us, and we don’t invest time and energy in redecorating our hotel room because we won’t be there that long. We won’t spend our time and energy investing in perishable things. Peter also calls these people *beloved*. It is an unusual word for Peter to use, and it shows how much he cares about his readers.

**Abstaining from Sinful Passions –** Peter rightly warns that these passions and wrong desires are *warring* against our souls. We can give in to them, or we can take the route of abstaining. Peter wants to spare his readers the pain of learning from their own mistakes and wrong choices, when they could learn from the mistakes of others, so to speak.

**Setting the Stage for Submission –** In verse 12 Peter begins to prepare his readers for the next topic he will discuss at length, *submission*. He tells them to *keep* their conduct honorable among the unbelievers around them, implying that it will take a sustained effort on their part to do so. He lets them know that they *will* be accused of evil doing—it is a certainty—but that God’s name will be glorified when their good deeds are revealed to all at the return of Christ.

**Echoes of the Sermon on the Mount –** Jesus had told His followers to let their light shine among unbelievers so they would see our good deeds and glorify God in Heaven. (Matthew 5:16) Christ’s remark came right after He had discussed how we should influence the world around us by acting as salt and light. Similarly, Peter has just said that we have been called out of darkness into the kingdom of light, and now he wants us to *be* light in our dark world. But our world won’t like having its darkness exposed, just as insects hiding under rocks want to remain in the darkness and scurry away from the light.

**Rock Imagery –** Peter has used the image of rocks at length in this section. It is an image that was personally meaningful to him. Remember in Matthew16:13-19 how Jesus responded to Peter’s statement that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus responded, “Yes…and *you* are Peter—a pebble—and on this rock I will build My church.” This is a kind of joke, because Peter was no strong rock on which to build a church. **But Jesus Christ can take a pebble and turn it into a living stone, which, when joined with other living stones, can form a habitation for the very Spirit of God to dwell on earth in such a way that light might shine into darkness.**