

Living Stones in a Spiritual Temple

Devotional Reading: Galatians 3:23-29

Background Scripture: 1 Peter 2:1-17

Today's Scripture: 1 Peter 2:1-12

I. Sanctified People

1 Peter 2:1-3

1 Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

1. In this letter's first chapter, Peter described what it means to be "born again," the eternal condition of believers in Christ Jesus (1 Peter 1:23). Now he pivots (*wherefore*) to teach about the implications of this new condition: one of having been "purified" (1:22). Changes in behaviors and attitudes are vital.

Those in Peter's original audience had to outgrow the attitudes and behaviors of unbelievers. What comes next in the letter is called a "vice list." There are about two dozen such lists in the New Testament. *Malice* carries the sense of evil actions in general. Such actions can be motivated by greed, spite, jealousy, or other moral failings; the resulting action intends to harm another person.

Guile is an orientation of general dishonesty. *Hypocrisies* characterize a person who will play whatever role is most beneficial to him or her. *Envies* characterize

a bitter, restless spirit that begrudges the success or possessions of others; envy is the opposite of gratitude, of contentment with what God has given.

Evil speakings reflects a word that is translated as "backbitings" in 2 Corinthians 12:20. Such behavior results from the previous three: a deceitful person who feigns friendship yet works behind the scenes to damage the reputation of others.

2. As there are different levels of spiritual maturity, different foods are appropriate for those levels. There is nothing wrong with the *milk of the word*; it is necessary and desirable for those who are spiritual infants. But its ingestion should lead to something important: *that ye may grow thereby*.

3. Having *tasted* the goodness of God and having realized how *gracious* He has been should motivate the desire for change (compare Hebrews 6:5; Psalm 34:8). This could be something of a self-evaluation: if Peter's original readers were not craving more of God's kindness, had they even tasted it in the first place?

II. Spiritual House

1 Peter 2:4-8

4 To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,

5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up

a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

6 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,

8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

4. *To whom coming* speaks of those who approach Jesus in obedience and worship. Based on what God has done in Christ, believers have the privilege of approaching the throne of God in worship, praise, and petition. Thus, Peter has transitioned in his line of reasoning, with the focus now shifting from the believers to whom Peter was writing to the Lord himself.

As the focus shifts, so does the metaphor: from infants needing milk to a *stone*. *Living stone* is a metaphor for Christ, the one who conquered death. His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension form the foundation of the Christian faith. The resurrection confirms Jesus as God's *chosen* Messiah. The word *precious* indicates high value.

5. As rapidly as Peter shifts the focus away from his readers, he turns back to them. One stone does not make a building, and God's spiritual house requires numerous other *lively stones*. Their identity is not in doubt, as witnessed by the opening phrase *ye also*.

The Greek word translated "living" in the previous verse is the same word translated *lively* here. Thus, "lively stones" can

also be said to be "living stones." Peter intended for his readers to envisage a *spiritual house* built of active believers in Christ.

This spiritual stone house is like a temple, where *spiritual sacrifices* are made, and Christians make up the *holy priesthood*. The concepts of priesthood and temple have not been done away with; instead, they have been transformed. Christians do not need the kind of priests the ancient Israelites did, because we now are priests ourselves as we serve under the great high priest, *Jesus Christ*.

6. Peter demonstrated the value of *scripture* as he began to weave together several Old Testament texts. The passage quoted here is Isaiah 28:16. The quote doesn't read quite the same in our English version of Isaiah because Peter quoted from the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint.

7. Here, in a quotation from Psalm 118:22, we see the second of the two uses in today's text of the cornerstone concept, worded as *head of the corner*. The two occurrences are entirely consistent in identifying this cornerstone as Jesus.

This second usage comes with a darker tone. For those who are *disobedient*, Jesus is *disallowed* as that cornerstone. Their faith is misplaced and mistaken. They are like the man who built his house on the sand rather than the rock (Matthew 7:24-27).

8. The first two phrases are parallel expressions from Isaiah 8:14. In Hebrew poetry, parallel lines often describe one thing by using two synonymous phrases. Thus, the *stone of stumbling* and the *rock of offence* are the same.

III. Special People

1 Peter 2:9-12

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew

forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

9a. The phrase *chosen generation* draws on the Septuagint version of Isaiah 43:20. The church has not been granted that status because of its accomplishments but because God selected it to be *a royal priesthood*. In ancient Israel, those of royal lineage were separate and distinct from those in the priesthood. That changed in the New Testament era. Christians are royalty because of our relationship with King Jesus. Christians are also priests in that we intercede for one another.

9b. These descriptions speak of the church as a collection of believers rather than individuals who share the same beliefs. The wording comes from promises given to Israel that God's covenant people were to be unlike any other people in their dedication and service to Him and in His favor to them (Exodus 19:5-6).

Implied in being a *holy nation* is the obligation to maintain a holy lifestyle. The word *peculiar* is used in an older sense, "unique possession." The church is the Lord's special, prized possession.

9c. The characteristics just described come together in their purpose: to show *praises* for the mighty deeds of the Lord. Peter emphasizes the personal nature of

God's actions in that He has *called* people *out of darkness into his marvellous light*. When Christians fail to use that light to *shew forth the praises of him*, the counter-cultural power of the faith is lost.

10. Peter draws on Hosea 1:6, 9-10; 2:1, 23. These speak of faithless Israel's spiritual adultery. The Gentiles, for their part, had never been God's people just by definition. But in Christ, the reversal for both is completed: followers of Christ are *the people of God* and recipients of His *mercy*. In light of that, no persecution or suffering at the hands of enemies of the cross can ultimately prevail. God's forgiving mercy has allowed rebellious people to be restored so they can minister for the Lord and His church.

11. As *strangers and pilgrims*, Christians are temporary residents of this world. Given this fact, why indulge in the world's *fleshly lusts, which war against the soul*? Because our citizenship is in heaven, immoral rules and standards of the world are not to be embraced.

12. The word translated *conversation* is an older word that means "behavior" or "lifestyle." The idea is to give no ammunition to outsiders who want to attack the church for the hypocrisies of its members (1 Peter 2:1). Peter's expressed concern is for the church's reputation and its members in the eyes of *Gentiles*. He does not mean Christians of Gentile background, but Gentile unbelievers and pagans. They should see only the *good works* of the church. If they are fair-minded, their disdain will change to admiration, attributing proper conduct to the Lord's influence.

The day of visitation may refer to something like the Old Testament's "Day of the Lord," a day of judgment. But another possibility is that it refers to the day the Lord visits an unbeliever with conviction driven by the Holy Spirit.

Involvement Learning

Living Stones in a Spiritual Temple

Into the Lesson

One dictionary defines *metaphor* as the following: “A figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them.”

Write your understanding of what a metaphor is and does.

Today we explore a passage where the apostle Peter used various metaphors to describe and illustrate vital concepts.

Into the Word

Read 1 Peter 2:1-12 and list all the metaphors in the text.

What is the significance of these metaphors within Scripture and in a broader Christian context?

What insights do these metaphors provide about Jesus’ role in our salvation?

How do these phrases shape our understanding of Christianity’s mission and identity?

Key Verse

To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

—1 Peter 2:5

Into Life

What responsibilities come with being a living stone?

What does God expect living stones to give and to give up?

What are some things believers can do to guard against following what the world and sinful desires encourage?

Thought to Remember

Live as God’s chosen people.