

1 Peter 2:4-10

Easter 5, May 7, 2023
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As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—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.

⁶ 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.” ⁷ 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,” ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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.

If you ever find yourself traveling in southern Romania, you’ll want to be sure to make a pit stop in the small village of Costesti to see the Trovants. These large, boulder-sized stones are unlike any other rocks on the planet—they’re alive! It sounds like something out of a bad sci-fi movie: strange stones that grow when it rains and move from one place to another without any assistance. But these stones are not a work of science fiction, they are very real. The Trovants of Romania are a geological phenomenon. Composed mainly of a hard-stone core with an outer shell of sandstone, these incredible rocks absorb the rain’s minerals which combine with the chemicals in the rock to create a reaction that builds pressure inside the stone, resulting in large, globular growths. And it really makes it appear as if the growing, moving stones were actually alive.

In God’s Word for this morning, the Apostle Peter writes about a different kind of living stone—actual living, breathing spiritual stones that the world often rejects as fake and foolish, but which are found to be invaluable to God Almighty. The theme we’ll be considering this morning is:

God’s Living Stones: Jesus and You

- I. Rejected by men as fraudulent
- II. Chosen by God and precious

In order to gain the context of Peter’s words before us this morning, we need to go back to the very first verse of this letter: ***“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.”*** (1 Peter 1:1) When Peter addresses the “dispersion,” he’s referring specifically to Jewish Christians who, for a variety of reasons, had been scattered beyond the land of Israel into the many various Greek and Roman cities where they now resided. And those dispersed people were having a tough time.

It's hard to live away from your homeland, isn't it? If professional or personal reasons have ever caused you to move, you know what I'm talking about. You miss your family, your childhood friends, the familiar scenery, all the comforts of home. Well, it's hard enough to move even to a different state, try moving to a different country with a completely godless, pagan culture! That's where the dispersed Jewish Christians were living. I'm sure they felt like out-of-place loners living in that Greek and Roman world. I'm sure they missed their families, their culture, the familiar hills of Judea, the

temple in Jerusalem. I'm sure they missed home. And on top of all that, many of them were being persecuted for their faith in Jesus as their Savior.

So, this Spirit-inspired writing from the Apostle Peter is a letter of encouragement to those homesick, persecuted Jewish Christians who felt out of place in an unbelieving world. Maybe you can relate to them. Does your faith ever make you feel like you're all alone?—scattered abroad in a land of godless, cynical people? Do you sometimes feel like a stranger in your own country? Well, if that's the case, then the Apostle Peter has a special message for you today.

First of all, if there are people in your life who look down on you because of your Christian beliefs, you're in good company. As one of God's Living Stones, you can expect to face worldly rejection, because Jesus faced the same! Our text begins by reminding us that *the* Living Stone, Jesus Christ, was also rejected by mankind as a fraud. Peter describes him in verse 4 as ***"The living Stone—rejected by humans."*** Again in verse 7, he quotes from Psalm 118, speaking about Jesus, ***"The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."***

Since ancient times, builders have used cornerstones in their construction projects. A cornerstone was the largest, most solid, and most carefully constructed of any stone in the building. And it was placed in the corner, of course, in order to serve as the foundation and guide for the rest of the building. Once the cornerstone was set, it became the basis for determining every measurement in the remaining construction. Everything was aligned *to* it.

And Jesus Christ is indeed the most important *Living Stone*. His person and work *is* the cornerstone of the Christian faith. The entire Bible points to Him as the central figure in all of world history. And so for thousands of years, God sent prophets to the people of Israel to prepare them for Christ's coming, but when He arrived, He was rejected. From the very beginning of His earthly life, Jesus was rejected as a fraud.

When the wisemen came from the East with news of the birth of the newborn King, evil King Herod's first response was to try to murder the baby boy. Later in life, the Apostle John tells us that Jesus' own brothers rejected who He was and the notion of what He was here to do. Finally, when Jesus began His ministry at the age of 30, He was immediately faced with opposition from Israel's religious leaders who ultimately condemned Him to be crucified. His supposed crime? Blasphemy—claiming to be the Son of God—which of course, He was! Yes, for His entire life, Jesus was ***"A stone that caused people to stumble and a rock that made them fall."***

Not much has changed today, has it? Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthians that ***"Christ crucified is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks."*** (1 Corinthians 1:23) The unbelieving world has only two opinions of Jesus Christ: either He was a fraud, or He was a fool. And the same goes for those who follow Him. To the unbelieving world, Christians are either charlatans and con-artists or gullible and stupid. That's the kind of rejection the Jewish Christians were receiving from their pagan neighbors. Is that something you can relate to?

Have you ever faced rejection like that? Have you ever been accused of being a liar or deceiver for telling others about your faith? I know I have! Or perhaps, more often, you've been dismissed as naïve

and simple-minded for believing in the absolute authority of an old book. I've heard that too, and I'm sure you've experienced that as well. And that shouldn't be surprising. The fact is, if a person rejects *the* Living Stone that is the cornerstone of the Christian faith, of course they're going to reject the other living stones that are built upon Him! But as Jesus told His disciples, ***"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."*** (Matthew 5:11-12)

I once heard a story about a young seminary student who lived many, many years ago who was studying to be a pastor. When it came time for him to graduate, he had become well-learned in the Bible, but he hadn't been able to overcome his deep fear for public speaking. The faculty had no choice but to inform him that they could not recommend him for the public ministry at that time. The young man was crestfallen. And he describes how he wrote a one-word letter to his father back home. All the letter said was, "Rejected." But it wasn't long before he received a reply. His father's short response read: "Rejected on earth. Accepted in heaven. Love, dad." That young man's name was George Campbell Morgan, who went on to become one of the most impactful preachers of 19th Century England.

Rejection, when we face it, is rarely permanent. And as God's Living Stones, we can expect to be rejected here on earth among our peers. But that doesn't matter! God's Living Stones are chosen by *Him* and are precious *to Him*.

Twice in our text, Peter refers to *the* Living Stone—Jesus Christ—as God's chosen and precious one. God the Father chose His own dear Son to be our Savior. This was His eternal plan. Jesus Christ was the only cornerstone that could possibly be strong enough, that could possibly be perfect enough, that could possibly be reliable enough for all Christianity to be built upon! So, the Father chose to send His precious child to suffer on our behalf—to go to the cross to lay down His life as the foundation of our faith. He did all this simply because God had chosen us—because we are precious to Him!

Peter says near the end of our text: ***"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession."*** In a world full of sin and rejection, God says: ***"I choose you."*** And it floors me every time I think about it. How could God possibly choose to love me when I am so unholy, unworthy, and unlovable? The answer is *grace*. God's undeserved love is given to each of us because of Jesus.

And in our text for today, Peter wants lonely, homesick believers to know that the world's rejection of you *means* nothing and changes *nothing!* Remember who you are! Remember who you were! As Peter says, ***"Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God."*** By nature, we are disconnected from God, sinful from birth, hostile to God's Word and will. And so, all humanity bears this horribly accurate description: "Not the people of God." But *NOW* you have received mercy. *NOW* you are the people of God.

When Word and Sacrament worked conversion in your heart, things changed. When your cold, dead heart of stone came to life by the working of the Holy Spirit, things changed! When you—a living stone of God—were placed on the foundation of *the Living Cornerstone*, things changed. Your status

before God changed. God now sees you clothed in the righteous robes of His Son and proclaims about you: *“You are MY people. Not guilty!”*

In Christ, the Living Cornerstone, **you are a *chosen* people.**

- God so loved not only the world, but He so loved *you* that He sought you out and brought you to faith. He chose you!

In Christ, the Living Cornerstone, **you are a *royal* priesthood.**

- You are both adopted into the royal family of heaven *and* anointed into the holy priesthood of God. That means that you have full and free access to communicate with God, needing no other mediator than Jesus Christ. He commissions you to a lifelong spiritual ministry of love and service.

In Christ, the Living Cornerstone, **you are a *holy* nation.**

- You are a part of the great army of believers. And despite what the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh try to convince you, you are not alone! Your fellow soldiers are right here with you—just let us know when and how we can fight for you and support you.

And in Christ, the Living Cornerstone, **you are *God’s* special possession.**

- Remember, He chose you and made you precious to Him. He sacrificed His most precious Son to acquire you, so He’s not about to quit on you now.

So don’t quit on Him either. As living stones of God, you have a job to do, as Peter says: ***“Declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”*** Don’t shy away from worldly rejection. It only means you’re on the right track. Instead, let God’s grace in Christ fill you with a living and giving spirit—always eager to tell others: *“Look at what God has done for me, look what He wants to do for you.”*

Yes, as **God’s Living Stones, both Jesus and you** will continue to face human rejection, but don’t let it bother you! God says, *“Rejected on earth. Accepted in heaven. Love, your Father.”* You have been built on the solid foundation of Christ the Living Cornerstone. As such, this Church of God cannot be shaken, just as Jesus Himself told Peter years before he wrote this letter: ***“On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*** (Matthew 16:18) Thanks be to God, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Amen.