

Session 1

April 14, 2024

BUILT ON CHRIST

1 Peter 2:1-12

My first paying job was picking up little red wagon loads of stones from the yard and dumping them in the driveway. My dad paid us 10 cents a wagon load. I learned that they were sharp, dirty, and heavy; fun to throw at things, but not much fun to pick up. Yet stones are useful. Roads (and driveways like mine) are paved with them. Buildings are made with them. Some are craggy and some are smooth. Some are impervious and some are porous; some are precious, and some are worthless. Some are ugly, yet others can be carved into beautiful sculptures or formed into kitchen countertops.

This week's lesson is all about stones. Peter knew something about stones, since Jesus called him one in Matthew 16:18. Here, the apostle used the name Jesus gave him to teach us about Christ and His church. Three specific "stones" are mentioned.

Living stones (vv. 1-5). After the apostle pointed out the *human side* of church life, which is distinct from secular life, being nurtured and matured by the word of God, he mentions the more *structural* aspect of the church. Indeed, believers are babes in need of nurturing (v. 2), but they are also stones (vv. 4 and 5). The contrast is severe! One is the most vulnerable part of nature. The other is the most enduring. I was always amused by a video clip of "Earth First" hippies mourning the loss of old-growth trees in the mountains of North Carolina. One young lady pointed out a rock that "has the most incredible life." Such a claim is so ridiculous as to be laughable. Rocks and stones are inorganic; incapable of having life. Yet that's what Peter calls Christ-followers. And that's the point! Peter attributes the qualities of natural stones to believers when he calls us living stones. Christ is our example. He was cast aside as ordinary by the people of His day (see John 1:11) but He was "chosen and valuable" from God's point of view. And just as stones were used to build the physical temple, living stones are used to build the "spiritual" temple. What God wanted for Himself was not a physical temple to host ritual ceremonies that could not take away sin (see Heb. 10:4), but a spiritual temple; a congregation of priests offering living sacrifices. For reflection: *Read Romans 12:1-2. How do you think "living sacrifice" fits into the discussion of "living stones?"*

Corner stone (vv. 6-7). Here, Peter refers back to Christ. The quote is found in Isaiah 28:16 where it brought hope of the coming Messiah. Jesus of course, fulfilled that prophecy. Three important features are notable. First, Christ is the chief cornerstone (v. 6). Architecturally, the cornerstone was a carefully cut stone laid flat and square. That stone then became the reference point for the rest of the structure; the point from which all measurements were made, and all angles squared. Ceremonially, the cornerstone was often set with solemn celebration. It symbolized the beginning of something new. Second, that cornerstone (Christ), was originally rejected by His own people. Third, those who trust in Him (as builders would trust the integrity of the cornerstone) will never be ashamed (see also Rom. 10:11). For reflection: *The word "ashamed" is also translated "disappointed." Which word seems to fit the context better? Why?*

Stumbling stone (vv. 8-12). Christ always divides. In Luke 12:51 ff, He said He would divide households and families. In our Easter lesson, His cross stood between the believer and the

unbeliever. Here, Peter used the metaphor of the stone to illustrate another division: Christ the rock will either set you straight (as a cornerstone), or trip you up (as a stumbling block). Verse 9 distinguishes those who are set straight from those who fall. "But you..." is in contrast to those who disobey in verse 8. I always warned my students to be cautious in applying Old Testament promises made to Israel to the church (simply put, Israel is not the church!). But here it is okay to do so, since Peter does it, by claiming the promise made to Israel in Exodus 19 and applying it directly to the church. The promise is clear: God has chosen the church to be His people (v. 10). For reflection: *Read verses 11 and 12. How is the church's behavior supposed to distinguish it as God's chosen people?*