

What Makes You Different?

1 Peter 2:4-10 (Easter 5 - May 10, 2020)

As you come to him, the Living Stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious, you also, like living stones, are being built as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, in order to bring spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it says in Scripture: See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who believes in him will certainly not be put to shame. Therefore, for you who believe, this is an honor. But for those who do not believe: The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and, a stone over which they stumble and a rock over which they fall. Because they continue to disobey the word, they stumble over it. And that is the consequence appointed for them. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people who are God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. At one time you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. At one time you were not shown mercy, but now you have been shown mercy.

Every one of us is different. I may not be able to see you and you aren't really able to see each other, but if we were all able to gather in the same place the differences would become quite obvious. We would see that we are all different ages and ethnic backgrounds. The differences would be seen in physical details such as the color of our hair and eyes, our height, and our weight. We might notice that each of us has different tastes when it comes to something like coffee - hot coffee, iced coffee, black coffee, coffee with cream and sugar, or no coffee at all. Each one of us may be different, but in one particular way we are the same. That sameness makes us different from the rest of the world. So we ponder this question today: What makes you and I different? It all has to do with what stone one's life and hope are built upon.

As Peter writes these words, we can't help but picture in our minds the construction of a building. Every building has to have a good solid foundational starting point. That would be the cornerstone, the very first stone of a building's foundation to be laid. Cornerstones are very important to the building's stability. In Bible times the cornerstone was essential. It was a rather large stone. It was carefully cut and carefully laid because the straightness of the building's walls both horizontally and vertically were determined by this one stone.

When one's life is built on the proper cornerstone, their life is built on a solid foundation. That stone is the one we have come to, the Living Stone of Jesus. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, Peter shows us that he is the stone God has laid for our salvation. **"See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who believes in him will certainly not be put to shame." (vs. 6)** God has placed this "stone" as the cornerstone of sin's forgiveness, life, and salvation. The Risen Lord Jesus serves as the foundation of God's plan of salvation through his death and resurrection. Jesus is the stone for all stones to build their hope of heaven upon.

A man by the name of Edward Mote was going to work one day in 1836. As he was going, he had the refrain of a new hymn down and by the end of the day he had four verses written. Then Edward was told by a man he knew that his wife was very ill. This man asked if Edward would come and see her. As they were getting ready to sing a hymn, this man couldn't find his hymnal. So Edward pulled out of his pocket the words he had written while at work, a hymn the sick woman loved so much that she wanted a copy of it. You've heard the words before and probably have sung them many times. Edward's original words go something like this. "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; midst all the hell I feel within, on his completed work I lean. On Christ the solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand." That hymn

comforted this woman who was seriously ill reminded her of the hope she had in Jesus and only in Jesus. Are we any different than Edward or that sick woman he visited?

Our hope is built on Jesus, the Living Stone, the stone God laid for a solid cornerstone. That is what makes you and I the same and yet different than the world around us. Through faith we are built on Christ, God's chosen and precious cornerstone. Built on him we will never be put to shame. By believing in Jesus and building on him, we share in his victory over sin, death, and Satan. We are not dead but alive in Christ. It is Jesus who makes us, who have come to him, to be living stones built together into a spiritual house.

When something is living it isn't just alive, it is active. Hearts beat, lungs breathe, and eyes blink. There is activity in what is living. As living stones, yes, with hopes built on the Living Stone of Jesus, we are alive. We have life in heaven, but as living stones we are active together as a holy priesthood offering up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God.

In Old Testament times, sacrifices were offered up by the priests on behalf of the people for their sins. Those sacrifices pointed to Jesus. When Jesus sacrificed himself on the cross, no more sacrifice for sin was needed. Now all believers are priests who offer up spiritual sacrifices to God. So the sacrifices of which Peter speaks that living stones, believers offer up are sacrifices of praise. They are words and actions that express love and thanks to God for his laying a solid cornerstone for us and placing us on that stone. Such words and actions are sacrifices that God accepts.

Without faith in Christ, a person cannot offer anything up that pleases God. But when a believer says or does something to the glory of God out of love for Christ, God is delighted with such sacrifices. For Jesus' sake, God counts the believer and everything he says and does according to God's will as acceptable in his sight. "For you who believe, this is an honor," Peter says.

Yet just as many believe in Jesus and build their hopes on him as their cornerstone, their solid foundation, there are many in the world who do not believe. That's what sets us apart from the world as different. They examine the Living Stone and reject him, toss him aside building on nothing more than a crumbling foundation. Instead of a stone to build on, Jesus becomes for them what Peter quotes again from the prophet Isaiah, "**A stone over which they stumble and a rock over which they fall.**" (vs. 8) To the unbeliever Jesus is an offense. Though Jesus died for them and paid the price for their sins, they will not believe. Their unbelief is the worst kind of disobedience. They bring on themselves the punishment their sins deserve. It isn't what God wants but because of their unbelief. Doesn't that make us wonder why? What makes Jesus such a stumbling stone for them?

It's because they are offended by the teachings of Jesus. His death for sins and his resurrection to declare the sinner not guilty before God, are foolishness to them. Trusting in and building on the cornerstone of their own works that they think can save them, they refuse to build on the only solid foundation which has been laid. They reject the stone God has laid in Christ the cornerstone. Not only have they placed their hopes in and built on a different stone, they have built on stones that crumble. For there is no other way except to build on Jesus. Jesus said to his disciples, "**I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.**" (John 14:6) In the end they will have to face the eternal consequence of their rejection.

But that isn't you and I. We are living stones built on the Living Stone of Jesus. Our hopes are built on him, the precious cornerstone God has laid for the certainty of our forgiveness, our salvation, and our life. We know that through Jesus we have a wondrous home prepared for us. The world may think those who build on

Jesus as misguided fools, but God has a different opinion. In contrast to those who “stumble” in unbelief, you and I are special in God’s eyes. Peter says, **“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people who are God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous. At one time you were not a people, but now you are the people of God. At one time you were not shown mercy, but now you have been shown mercy.” (vs. 9-10)**

What beautiful titles God places on us. As God’s people, we were chosen by him to be his people even before the creation of the world. It is by his grace that we are a special people among the peoples of this world. As royal priests we have direct access to the throne of God’s grace. Nothing stands between us and God. We may be different from one another in race, ethnic background, gender, and social status, but spiritually we form one holy nation, a people set apart from the unbelieving world bought with the blood of Christ.

Christ is our cornerstone. On him alone build our hopes and our life. As we continue to build on Jesus, the Living Stone, that makes our life’s focus and purpose different from the world. We who bear these special titles cannot and will not sit back just thinking about the great honors bestowed on us by his grace and mercy. We cannot help but proclaim the wonders of God and letting our light shine through our words and actions. Fellow living stones built together into a spiritual house on the Living Stone of Jesus, that is our chief purpose in this world - to live lives that praise not ourselves, but God our Savior all our days. Amen