

1 Peter 2:4-8

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Date: 19 May 2013

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[0 : 0 0] How does it feel, how does it feel to be on your own with no direction home, like a complete unknown, like a rolling stone? Now, this will age you a little if you recognize those lyrics, but I think even the young may recognize them. They're so famous. Now, thank God that as Christians, the melancholy lines of Bob Dylan's song do not apply to us. We are not alone. We are heading home. We are known wonderfully by God. So, we are not rolling stones, but we are, and forgive this rather lame connection, we are living stones, and it is that that we want to consider this evening how we are described in this manner by Peter as living stones. I want to spend a little time considering this description of Christians, and there are three questions that

I want to pose and answer, the third of which will occupy most of our attention and time. And the three questions are as follows. What makes us living stones? We're described as living stones, but what is it that makes us living stones? And also to think about how God views us as living stones.

When God looks down upon us as His people, as living stones, how does He view us? And then, and this is where we'll detain ourselves a little longer, what is God doing with us as living stones, and for what purpose? We're living stones. Good. But what is God doing with these living stones that we are? What is He doing with us, and for what purpose? But before going any further, I want you to just pause and share with Peter something of his grateful wonder at being living stones. So, we're just pausing for a moment before proceeding to these questions, just to enjoy really this designation that we're given as living stones, that there would be this sense of wonder that there does appear to be in Peter as he addresses, as he writes this letter. Now, the sense of wonder that I'm referring to is found in Peter's language, but it's somewhat lost in translation, in the transition between Peter describing Jesus as the living stone and believers as living stones.

We have that in verse 4, and I'll identify what I'm talking about as we read these verses, or this verse, 4 and 5. As you come to Him, the living stone, rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to Him, you also like living stones. And he continues. That little phrase, you also, at the beginning of verse 5, is a transition that takes us from Peter's description or identification of Jesus as the living stone to believers as living stones. He says, you also. But that little phrase that we have in our Bibles translated as, as you also, perhaps a way of translating the language that better captures the sense of what Peter is saying is something along the lines of, even you yourselves, or even you also.

Not simply you also. Peter isn't just saying, oh, I have something else to say. No, he's saying, even you. Jesus is the living stone. But listen to this. Even you yourselves are living stones. There's a sense of wonder. There's a sense of the wonder of how amazing this is. Perhaps not amazing that Jesus would be the living stone, but that we are living stones. That is indeed wonderful in the literal sense of that word.

[4 : 0 7] He's saying to his readers something along these lines. Yes, you. Yes, you. Even you. Exiled, stranger, scattered, persecuted, but you are living stones, just like your Lord, the living stone.

Well, as we proceed in thinking about this designation, God grant that we would know an increasing sense of the wonder of it all. You and me, little you and little me, sinful you and sinful me, we are living stones. But let's move on to our question, what makes us living stones? Let's try and deal with this quite quickly in order to give ourselves the time that we need for the third question. What makes us living stones? Well, while it's not stated explicitly, the implication in verses 4 and 5, and especially in that move from Peter describing Jesus to describing us, I think the implication is clear and beyond any reasonable challenge that what makes us living stones is our connection with the living stone. Even you also, says Peter. He said, Christ is the living stone, and you also. You also are living stones. Why? How can that be? How can it be that you are living stones? Because you are connected to Christ. You are, says Peter, to use the pivotal language of the New Testament to describe the believer, you are in Christ. He doesn't say that, but that's the truth that undergirds this reality. The believers he writes to are in Christ. We are in Christ. We are united to Christ, and in Christ we are living stones. He is the living stone, united to Him, connected to Him.

We, His people, His disciples, are living stones. As we are brought in to Him, as we believe in Him, as we trust in and into Him, as we are united to Him, so we are living stones. In union with Christ, we are what Christ is. He is the living stone, and we are living stones. That then is what makes us living stones. But moving on to the second question, and as I said, these first two questions we'll try and deal with quite swiftly. The second question is this, how does God view us as living stones?

Now, at the risk of weighing down on the little phrase there, you also, or even you yourselves, there in verse 5, at the beginning of verse 5, at the risk of weighing down that phrase with more significance than perhaps it is intended to carry, I think we can say that the phrase serves to imply that God the Father views His living stones in the same way as He views the living stone.

We've just been told in verse 5 that the living stone is chosen by God and precious to Him. And then Peter says, you also, you also like living stones. And it seems reasonable to deduce from that that as the Father sees the living stone, His Son, as precious, so also He views us, believers, Christians, living stones, as precious. We noticed this morning as we spoke of the living stone in relation to God, we noticed how that relation is explained by or described by Peter as the living stone chosen by God and precious to Him. And of course, these things are true of us also as living stones. We are chosen by God and we are also, and on this we focus our attention particularly, precious to Him. We are precious to God.

[8 : 09] In Christ, you are a living stone, and in Christ, you are precious to the Father. Now, this is something that we do well to get a real grip on and a real grasp of and be very clear on in our own lives. There's a lot of talk these days about the problems that flow from a lack of self-worth or self-esteem. And without entering into that whole discussion, and it's quite a complex one in terms of how you understand that phrase, and there are all kinds of ideas that revolve around this matter of self-worth or self-esteem, and we're not going to enter into that discussion. But what we certainly can do by simple observation is appreciate the very sad and bitter harvest that can come from a sense of worthlessness.

When somebody considers that they are of no value, when somebody comes to the view that they are worthless, worthless, that has very sad implications. What can come from it or what can flow from it? We're not going to go in and talk about how that can reveal itself or that harvest that can follow from a sense of worthlessness. But as we recognize that it is a real matter and a real issue and a real problem, and as we are reminded that we in the sight of God as living stones are precious, we are able to see that as believers our self-worth or our self-esteem, if we want to use the language, is not grounded in how clever we are or how beautiful we are or how successful we are, how popular we are. It is grounded in that which is richer and deeper. We are precious to God. And to know that that is so, and to be persuaded that that is so, and to understand ever more richly that that is so, grants to us a sense of worth that can withstand the difficulties and the problems that life can throw at us. We are precious to God. The living stone is precious to God, and we living stones are also precious to God.

Well, let's move now to the third question, the one that I said we would spend more time on and concentrate on with more attention to detail. And the third question is this, what is God doing with us as living stones and for what purpose? There's really two questions in one there. What is God doing with us as living stones and for what purpose? Now, Peter answers that question, and he does so in a few choice and carefully chosen words there in verse 5. He says, you also, like living stones, and here we have the answer to the question, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. What is God doing with us as spiritual stones?

Well, He is building us into a spiritual house. That's what He's doing. Why is He doing? With what purpose is He building us into a spiritual house? Well, there we have the answer, to be a holy priesthood. So, in these few words, in very concise language, Peter gets across these two very important truths, what God is doing with us as His precious stones, and for what purpose? He's building us into this spiritual house, and He's doing so that we might be a holy priesthood. So, we want to think of these two aspects of it, and we'll do each in turn. We'll look first at what God is doing. Well, we've noticed already what it is. He's building us into a spiritual house, and as we think a little bit more about that, there's a couple of matters to consider, the second of which is fundamental. The first is, I think, important, but really to lead us into the second. Two aspects of this work that God is doing with us as spiritual stones as He builds us into a spiritual house. And the first thing I want us to just notice and to comment or to stress is that there is very clearly in what Peter is presenting an indication of the absolute necessity to be part of the house. We need to be part of the house that is being built. Then we'll look at the nature of the house. There we'll spend a little bit more time. This house that is being built, what's it like? We'll think about that in a moment. But first of all, we want to just stress the necessity, the absolute necessity, for living stones to be part of the house that is being built.

You see, the picture here that is being painted of believers as living stones captures a very beautiful biblical balance. We are individuals, each of us. We're living stones. Each of us is a living stone. We're individuals. God knows us as individuals. He calls us by name. We have our own personalities, and we're all different. We're individuals. That's what we are, and that's good.

[13 : 35] We are stones in the plural. I don't know how many stones there are here. I don't know if we've got a hundred stones here this evening, but we're individuals, and that's good, and that's right, and it's proper to recognize that. But, and this really is what we want to stress, because in many ways, this is the bigger truth that comes through in the language that Peter is using. Though we are individuals on our own, we will not. Indeed, we cannot fulfill our God-given purpose. We must be part of the house. What God is doing is building a house. He's not building a multiplicity of beautiful stones. He's not a stonemason who is making something beautiful out of these individual stones. No, He's bringing the stones together into a house, and if a stone isn't in the house, then it's useless.

It's not fulfilling its purpose. It's absolutely necessary for these stones to be built up and to be brought together into this house that God is constructing.

Just to, in a way, just to emphasize what I've just commented in terms of illustrating the work of a stonemason or God as a stonemason in the sense of how Peter is using this image. I don't think we should think of God on this occasion as this image is being used so much as a stonemason chiseling away at an individual stone to make it smooth and pleasing to the eye, but rather God is the builder who takes the stone, whatever its shape, and places it just where it belongs, together with all the other stones in the house of God's design. The individual stone by itself may not be particularly pleasing to the eye.

It might not be chiseled just in the best way, but as it's brought into the house and as it's placed where it's meant to be, where God would have it be, there it fulfills its purpose. You see, there is no place in the Christian life in the manner in which the Bible very clearly presents who we are and what we are. There's no place for lone rangers, for some solitary Christian existence. No, we are living stones who are being brought into this spiritual house. So, let's just be very clear on that. But let's move on to what perhaps is even more fundamental, and that is to consider the question of the nature of this house. Peter is clear we are being built into a spiritual house, but what is that?

What is this spiritual house that we are being built into? Now, I mentioned this morning that Peter uses language in these verses replete with allusions to the temple, and the temple, of course, served as the dwelling place of God in the Old Testament. God dwelt with His people in the temple. This was not in an absolute sense, as Solomon, who built a wonderful temple for God, as Solomon rightly recognized, even as he contemplated the work that he was doing. What did Solomon say? Well, we read in 1 Kings 8 and verse 27, but will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you, how much less this temple I have built. Solomon was clear that God wasn't in any way imprisoned in the temple.

[17 : 14] But though that is true, and though it is right that Solomon recognized it to be true, we can say that in a real sense, the temple was God's house. God so established that it should be. It was in the temple that the people, through the priests, could meet and do business with God. And as we follow the history of God's dealings with His people, we remember how the glory of God filled the tabernacle in the desert. We remember how it filled Solomon's temple in all its splendor. But as we fast forward through the centuries, we also remember how His glory departed in the days of Ezekiel, and how it was left to Haggai to point forward to a day that was coming, as we've read in Haggai chapter 2, when the latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former.

Haggai points forward. He says, God no longer dwells in the temple as He did. He's departed in a real sense. But there is a day coming when the latter glory will be greater even than the former, even than in the glory days of David and Solomon. Well, it was a long wait. 400 years passed, and the Lord returned.

And He returned not to occupy the temple in Jerusalem, though there was a fleeting visit while He, even as a child, as He was brought there by His parents. But that was not why He came, to occupy the temple.

But He came as God's new temple. The language in John's gospel in chapter 1 is very significant in this regard. We read there in John chapter 1. We'll just quickly turn to that. I have it here in my notes, but I haven't got the reference, so I just want to see the actual verse. So, it's in John chapter 1 in verse 14. What do we read there about Jesus coming, of His coming into this world? What does John say about that? He says, the Word became flesh, and then he says, and made His dwelling among us.

We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. And I'm sure you've heard how it's been explained that the language that is used there by John that is translated, He made His dwelling among us, is the language of He tabernacled among us.

[19 : 45] Just as God dwelt in the tabernacle in the Old Testament, so Jesus comes and He tabernacles among us. He is God's new temple. He doesn't come to occupy the physical temple in Jerusalem. He is God's new temple. Jesus is the new and better temple of God. But, and this is where we get involved in God's great and condescending love, He determines to incorporate us into His new temple. And this is what Peter is talking about when he speaks of us being built into a spiritual house. This spiritual house is the new temple of God, a temple no longer restricted to Jerusalem, but one that extends to the ends of the earth, wherever God's people, wherever the disciples of Jesus are to be found.

And the promise of Jesus comes to mind, for where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them. Where believers gather, Jesus is. And where Jesus is, the temple is, the temple is, God's new spiritual house. But of this spiritual house that is being built, Peter says something else, and we've just said it. It's being built. What we have today is not yet the finished article. This house is being built. That's what he says. But you, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house. The foundation has been set in place, the cornerstone.

We were able to identify the cornerstone. Peter does so for us so clearly. Jesus is the cornerstone of the foundation of this spiritual house. The house has been built. Living stones, all of us who are trusting in Jesus as our Savior, as living stones, are being built into this spiritual house. But it is a work in progress. The house is still being built. There are new stones that are being incorporated even today around the world. New stones have been taken by the master builder and brought into the house that is being built. But there will be a day, of course, when the house will be finished.

There is a day when the temple of God will be completed. That is a day that we await. But there is that day coming, a day of glorious consummation when Christ returns, and the new heavens and the new earth will constitute one glorious cosmic temple. That is something that yet awaits us, something to look forward to. So, in some measure we have answered the first part of our final question. What is God doing with us? Well, what God is doing with us is He is building us into a spiritual house. But there is a second part of the third question, and it is, for what purpose? Why is He doing that? For what purpose is He building us is He building us into a spiritual house? Well, we already identified what Peter says, to be a holy priesthood. That is the purpose, to be a holy priesthood. Now, this is a remarkable thing that Peter is claiming. Peter is saying that we are not only the stones of the temple. That is very clear. The language is so clear. We are living stones being built into this spiritual house. We are the stones of this new temple, living stones, spiritual stones, but stones nonetheless. But now He says that we are also the priests in the temple. So, we are both the stones that make up the temple, but also the priests who minister in the temple. Both of these things are true of us, and that truth leads into God's purpose, that we would be a holy priesthood. We are to serve God as priests. All Christians, without exception, form part of God's holy priesthood. No longer is there to be a special priestly cast in God's new spiritual temple. All are priests. Now, this is a doctrine found very clearly in the pages of the New

Testament, but one that was lost as the church developed over the centuries, but recovered. Among other precious doctrines at the time of the Reformation, what we speak of as the priesthood of all believers. Of this, Peter is speaking. He is saying all of us as believers are living stones. All of us form part of this holy priesthood. This is God's purpose in building us into a spiritual house.

[24 : 44] And what do priests do? We're priests. Good. Fine. But what do priests do? Well, Peter tells us, like living stones are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. That is what we are to do as priests. Unlike the priests of the Old Testament, we don't bring animals to sacrifice at the temple.

But rather, we are to bring spiritual sacrifices. What are spiritual sacrifices? What is that? I think the Apostle Paul provides the most comprehensive understanding of what spiritual sacrifice is. We find that in a verse that I'm sure is familiar to many of you in Romans chapter 12 and verse 1. Romans chapter 12 is where Paul moves on from all the great treatment of deep doctrinal themes, and he moves on to the practical application of them. And he begins that chapter with these words, Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. And in these words, Paul very clearly explains that everything we do in the service of God can be and ought to be understood as spiritual sacrifice. It's not that coming to church on a Sunday, well, that's spiritual sacrifice, and what we do

Monday to Friday, well, that's another matter altogether. No. We are to offer our bodies, we are to offer our lives, we are to offer everything that we are as a spiritual sacrifice.

The lives we live, the praise we sing, the gifts we exercise, the good that we do to and for others, the possessions that we share, all acceptable to God as we bring them as His priests through Jesus Christ.

And we must, of course, bring these sacrifices through Jesus Christ, for only in Christ are we qualified to be priests of God. These are the spiritual sacrifices that ascend to the very presence of God as a continual, sweet-smelling savour that brings Him delight. This is what God does with living stones, He builds us into a spiritual house, and He does so that we might be a holy priesthood.

[27 : 30] This is God's doing. This is what God does, and it is marvelous in our eyes. But I want to close with a question for us to ponder on. Are we passive in all of this? Peter is speaking of what God does. He's speaking of God building, of God taking these stones and building this spiritual house. Are we to sit back and let God do His work? Well, certainly as priests, as we thought just very fleetingly of of who we are as priests, as priests, we are far from passive. But even in the matter of being built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, we have a happy duty to perform. And that is laid out for us in the very first words that we find there in verse 4. Because what does Peter say as he introduces this great truth of what God does with living stones? What does he say? He says, As you come to Him. As you come to Him, the living stone rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to Him, you also like living stones are being built into a spiritual house, and so on.

What Peter is saying is that in order for you to be built up by God in the manner described, it is necessary that you come to Him. And the language carries the idea of as you continually come, so you are continually built. This is not a one-off piece of work on the part of God. No, God is doing this work with us throughout our lives, but what do we have to do? Well, we have to come. And as we come, so He builds. We come, He builds. And so, let us come. Let us come to Him, the living stone. And as we come to Him, so may God build us into that spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we come to Him. Heavenly Father, we come to Him. Heavenly Father, we come to Him. We do thank you for all the good things that are true of us as your people, for the good things that we enjoy, for the wonderful status that is ours. We thank you that we are indeed living stones as we are united to your Son, Jesus Christ. We thank you for this work that you are doing in us and with us as you are building us into this spiritual house, this spiritual temple, that we might be your holy priesthood.

And we're conscious that there are so many implications, so many wonderful implications of these truths that we've perhaps only scratched the surface of. But we pray that in a measure we would have gained understanding that would encourage us, but also that would challenge us, that we might be who we are, that we might live as those priests of God. Help us to bring in this week that has begun. Help us to bring our lives as a spiritual sacrifice to you. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, let's close our service this evening by singing in Psalm 48a. Sing Psalms. Psalms. Psalm 48a. We'll sing verses 1 to 3 and then verses 12 to 14. Psalm 48a, verses 1 to 3 and 12 to 14. And we'll sing to the tune Southwark.

[31 : 22] Great is the Lord who rules on high, with praise His temple fill, within the city of our God, and on His holy hill. As we sing these words, and indeed as we sing in the Psalms, many references to Zion and to the temple and to Jerusalem. We can do so in the light of what we've heard about this evening, that we are the new temple. We are the new Jerusalem as God's people. And so, the truths that we find in the Psalms we can apply in a special way to ourselves. So, Psalm 48a, verses 1 to 3 and 12 to 14. We'll stand to sing.

Psalm 48a, verses 1 to 4 and 12. Psalm 48a, verses 1 to 4 and 12. Great is the Lord who rules on high, with praise His temple fill, within the city of our God, and on His holy hill.

Mount Zion, with its graceful heart, gives joy to all the air. The breaking city fire excels, the mountains of the north.

God's presence is revealed. Within her sins a thousand times, God's presence is revealed. For He has shown Himself to be, her fortress and her shield.

His oohs, I have seen Seism and his Sabbath Rocky IV INTO II. That's why the Holy serait pal. The Holy ised the name of the little auch was Für, we are not Thou, son 57.

[33 : 30] That's why the King of the Hope was brought in. So that in the Holy, the King of the habl RCVam. The King of the Wolf of the Werman clip, Viewed theOOOO to Fo anyway, King of the Yuzer 3 to 30. judgments of the song come that opened, the eyes left with themi there, to whom honor the Lord.

But he heard the-to-like power before the Lord. our God forever will abide. He is our God forevermore, and to Thee and Thy guide.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always. Amen. Amen.