

1 Peter 2:4-8

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[0 : 0 0] I wonder how many of you have frittered away idle moments looking for Wally. Now, for some of you, that's a very strange question to ask. You have no idea what I'm talking about. And for those who are bemused in that way, it's clearly because you have not been saddled with the unfortunate name or know anybody saddled with such a name. And even if you did know somebody with such a name, you probably would have better things to do with your time than look for him. But I'm referring, of course, to Wally of Where's Wally Fame? This is a book that on each page you have this very complex picture of crowds of people. And in there somewhere, there's Wally, this character Wally, and you have to find Wally. It's very difficult to find Wally. But eventually, though it's a tortuous process, Wally will be found because he's there somewhere on the page.

Well, as we enter into the week of General Assembly in our own denomination, and also in the Church of Scotland, it's already begun. And as we cast our eyes further across the Christian Church in Scotland, we might be tempted to pose a much more sobering question. The question could be, where's Jesus? Where's Jesus? Where is Jesus in the midst of seeming, and sometimes not only seeming, but actual chaos and decline? Where's Jesus as our national church, if we can call it that, in an act of pure folly, seems set to relegate to the sidelines the very Word of God that testifies to Jesus? Where's Jesus in our own free Church of Scotland? A church that is very quick, or so we think, to talk the talk, but less eloquent when called to walk the walk. So, where is Jesus?

Does the fact that we have difficulty seeing Jesus mean that He's not there at all? To paraphrase a 1980s comedy from across the pond, is it the case that Jesus has left the building? Well, has He? Well, things are not always as they appear. This morning we are going to be considering, not only this morning, today, we're going to be considering what Peter has to say about the church of Jesus Christ. And what he says on this occasion is said, employing the image of a building or a temple, a temple made of living stones. And I want to divide what we will say in two parts. This morning we will consider what Peter says about the living stone. Then in verse 4 of 1 Peter chapter 2, as you come to Him, the living stone. What do we learn? What do we discover about the living stone? And then this evening we want to consider what Peter says about living stones. As the passage continues in verse 5, you also, like living stones are being built into a spiritual house. And he goes on. So, this morning, thinking about the living stone, and then this evening considering the living stones of which Peter speaks. And hopefully that division, though it will involve an element of overlap which is inevitable,

I hope it will be helpful in giving the time required to consider this passage that is rich in truth, that is both comforting and challenging. First of all then, this morning, let's think a little bit about the living stone. And in thinking about and in considering the living stone, we want to do two things. First of all, we want to identify and describe the living stone, or to put it in other ways, in the form of a question, who is he and what is he? Who is he and what is he, this living stone?

But then we will move on. And in second place, we want to consider where the living stone stands in relation to others. In the passage, we're given an insight as to where the living stone stands in relation to God, in relation to believers, and in relation to unbelievers. And we want to think a little bit about those relationships, if we can call them or describe them in that way.

[4 : 52] First of all then, the living stone, who is he and what is he? Now, it really isn't a difficult matter to identify the living stone, and so it need not occupy too much of our time. Peter is very clearly, very explicitly speaking of Jesus. But though that is clear, and I think indisputable, I think there is some profit, some volume in following the thread that begins with the Old Testament prophecies employed by Peter, and as we follow the thread, discover where it takes us.

And it will, of course, take us to Jesus as the living stone. And we can begin by noticing one of the Old Testament references that Peter employs. And it's a reference from Psalm 118 and verse 22.

And in that reference, it's the second of the Old Testament references that we find in our passage there from verses 4 to 8. The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. And as you'll notice there at the foot of the page in your Bibles there, Peter is making reference to the psalm, Psalm 118.

Now, in that psalm, we've sung from it, and we will sing again from it, and these verses that Peter quotes in due course. But in that psalm, the psalmist speaks of this stone, what he speaks of as a stone rejected by the builders, but that has become the capstone or the cornerstone. Now, if all that we had were the words of the psalm, this statement of the psalmist might remain something of a mystery, albeit a mystery with a messianic flavor. But, of course, we don't only have what we find in the psalm. Rather, we turn to the gospels, and we find that light is shed on what the psalmist is speaking about in the gospels from Jesus Himself. Because in the gospels we find recorded how Jesus consciously and explicitly applies this verse from Psalm 118 to Himself. He declares Himself to be the rejected stone that has become the cornerstone. And in a very clear way, He identifies Himself as that stone.

And when we turn to Peter, and we don't have time to explore that in any greater depth, simply make the point that Jesus Himself identifies Himself as this stone that the psalmist speaks of.

[7 : 48] But all that Peter does in our passage here is to echo, or to confirm, if you wish, the identification that Jesus makes. Now, Peter did so before he wrote this letter. He did so as he stood before the Sanhedrin in Acts chapter 4. Maybe we can just very quickly notice what he says there in Acts chapter 4 and from verse 8. Peter and John are standing before the Sanhedrin. This is just soon after Pentecost. And we read there, then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, Rulers and elders of the people, if we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel.

It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone or the cornerstone. And so Peter there, as he was before the Sanhedrin, he reminded, no doubt of the words that he'd heard Jesus speak, when Jesus identified himself with this stone that the psalmist spoke of. So Peter echoes that. He confirms that in his own preaching or in his own speaking before the Sanhedrin. So he had done so then. And now as he writes this letter, some 30 years have passed.

And yet here, as he writes to the people of God scattered across the nations, he once again, with equal conviction, declares that Jesus is the stone rejected by the builders that has become the cornerstone. So the rejected stone of Psalm 118, this cornerstone that Peter speaks of, is Jesus Christ. But we can develop this a little further and ask another question, in some ways a more fundamental question, and it is this, but who is Jesus? Okay, we've identified that on the basis of the evidence before us that Peter very clearly, when he speaks of this rejected stone that's become a cornerstone, he's speaking about Jesus, good and well. But who is Jesus? Well, another of the Old Testament passages, as employed by Peter, speaks very eloquently in this regard.

We read already this morning from Isaiah chapter 8, and we can turn back to that passage very briefly, because there it's very interesting in the psalm, when there is reference to this stone, this rejected stone that becomes the capstone or the cornerstone, from the psalm itself.

And if we had only the psalm, it would be very difficult to identify who or indeed what that stone was. But in the passage in Isaiah, the situation is very different. There, in the very passage, it's very clear who the stone is. And let's just notice there in Isaiah chapter 8, and we can just reread not the whole passage, but if we just limit ourselves to verses 13 and 14, that should be sufficient for our purposes. So, this is the passage from which Peter is quoting there in his letter. And notice what it says, the Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy.

[11 : 26] So, it's very clear who has been spoken about. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy. He is the one you are to fear. He is the one you are to dread. Continues to speak concerning the Lord Almighty. And He will be a sanctuary. But for both houses of Israel, He will be—and who is He? The Lord Almighty—He will be a trap and a snare. Many of them will stumble. Sorry, I've jumped a line. But for both houses of Israel, He will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. So, in the passage itself, there in Isaiah, it's very clear that when Isaiah speaks of this stone, the stone that will cause men to stumble, Isaiah very clearly is speaking about the Lord God Almighty. He's speaking about Yahweh. He's saying, Yahweh is the stone that I am speaking of. He is the one who will cause men to stumble. And Peter has no difficulty, as we've already noticed, even recently, earlier in the letter, in identifying the Lord of the Old Testament, Yahweh, the Lord God

Almighty, with Jesus. The living stone is Jesus. But we can say further, on the basis of the Old Testament references that Peter employs, that Jesus is the Lord. He is the Lord God Almighty.

Well, having established who the stone is, we turn to what He is in terms of our passage, limiting ourselves to what the passage declares. As we were thinking a little with the children, the very image of a stone, it does convey the truths concerning what Jesus is like. The picture of a stone speaks of that which is permanent. It speaks of strength and solidity. He is, in the words of the hymn, our rock of ages, rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee. So, the image itself reveals truth concerning what Jesus is like. But of greater interest and of greater importance in the context of our passage is understanding the significance of the image used of a living stone as we appreciate what this stone is being employed for. So, not simply to take the picture of a stone and say, oh, well, a stone tells me this, it's hard, it's strong, it's permanent. That's, of course, all true. But of greater interest is, how is this stone employed? What does Peter say about the use that is given to this stone? That is of primary interest to us? It's not just any stone. Rather, it is the cornerstone. And the cornerstone was the critical foundation stone with which the process of construction began. In the absence of a cornerstone, there could be no building. So, Jesus is a stone, but He's not just any stone. He is the cornerstone. Which rather leads on to another question. We say, okay, He's a cornerstone. A cornerstone is used in a foundation. The foundation is but a building. Well, what building?

Of what building is Jesus the cornerstone? Well, the language that Peter uses in these verses in the second chapter of his first letter is language that is replete with allusions to the temple, the Old Testament temple, the temple that was familiar to his readers in Jerusalem, replete with allusions. The language of the temple is found throughout the passage. But the temple that he is now speaking of, of which Jesus is the cornerstone, is not a physical structure, not the physical temple that folk could see and touch and go into. But rather it is, we are told, a spiritual house.

There in verse 5, but you like living stones are being built into a spiritual house. The foundation of that house has as its cornerstone Jesus Christ, the living stone. And He is the cornerstone of this foundation of this spiritual house, of this spiritual temple. It is the church of Jesus Christ, a church built on a foundation that enjoys as its pivotal and permanent cornerstone Jesus Christ Himself. He's a stone. He's a cornerstone. And He is the cornerstone of the foundation upon which is built a spiritual house. And as we appreciate that, that maybe sheds a little light on the question that we posed as we began this morning, where's Jesus? If we can't see Him, are we to conclude that

[16 : 41] He's left the building? Well, listen well and listen good. He can't leave the building, as He is the very cornerstone of the building. The cornerstone can't leave the building. He is integral to the building. Be assured that Jesus has not left the building. The church is the church of Jesus Christ.

It is built on a foundation where He is the cornerstone. And as is the case with foundations, they're unseen. But the fact that they're unseen certainly doesn't mean that they're not there.

Now, we'll return to this matter of the church as the new temple of God this evening when we think of ourselves as living stones, as we're so described by Peter. And there we will have opportunity to consider more this picture and this reality of this spiritual house of which we form a part. But that is something that we'll have to return to, as I say, this evening. So, as regards what we're seeking to cover this morning, we've concluded our first task, which was to identify and describe the living stone.

The living stone is Jesus. He is a living stone. He is a cornerstone. He forms the cornerstone of this spiritual temple. But the second task is to consider where the living stone stands in relation to God.

And we could develop that a little, though the language isn't used in our text, but it's reasonable to develop it in saying how He stands in relation to God the Father, how He stands in relation to believers, and also how He stands or where He stands in relation to unbelievers. So, first of all, where does the living stone stand in relation to God? Well, what does Peter say of the living stone there in verse 4? He says, "...as you come to Him, the living stone rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to Him." Chosen by and precious to. These are the two key truths that Peter identifies as he relates the living stone to God. In what sense is Jesus chosen by God? Well, this reference is surely to the redemptive mission that Jesus is given by the Father. In eternity, Jesus was chosen to become flesh. In eternity,

[19 : 20] He was chosen to dwell, to tabernacle among us. In eternity, He was chosen to be rejected by men, and to shed, to use the language of Peter, to shed His precious blood on the cross in the place of sinners. In eternity, He was chosen to be raised triumphant from the grave and to constitute Himself as the the cornerstone of the new spiritual temple of God. Jesus, the living stone chosen by God, chosen as the one eminently suited for the mission commended to Him, but chosen also as the only one able to carry out the mission that was commended to Him. Jesus Christ, the living stone chosen by God.

But Peter also says that Jesus, the living stone, is precious to Him, precious to God, precious to the Father. Now, the language is beautiful language, and we can scarcely do it justice. It is true that the Son has ever been precious to the Father for all eternity, a concept that we are unable to grasp, but for all eternity, the Son has been precious to the Father. There has never been a time when the Son was anything other than precious to the Father. But, and here we must tread carefully, there is a sense, is there not, in which the Son became even more precious to the Father was rejected by men, as He shed His precious blood. As the Father gazed down from heaven in fatherly love and admiration at His obedient Son, whose face was fixed on on Jerusalem and on the cross. And as the Father gazed down and declared, as He did on more than one occasion at His baptism at the transfiguration, this is my Son, whom I love. With Him I am well pleased.

This is my Son, He is precious to me. And why is He so precious to me? Because He is obeying my command to go and to die in the place of sinners. This is my Son, precious, so precious to me. The Father testifies how precious Jesus was in His sight and estimation. The living stone, Jesus the Christ, chosen by God, precious to God. This is where the living stone stands in relation to the Father, in what Peter shares with us. But Peter also speaks, and he speaks quite extensively, of where the living stone stands in relation to believers. What about believers? How do we stand, or where do we stand in relation to the living stone? Well, many things are said about us, and I'll mention them and briefly comment on them, but these are things that we will, in a measure, return to this evening. One thing we can certainly say, as we simply look through the verses before us, that as believers, we are those, as the name implies, we are those who believe in Him. Verse 7, now to you who believe, this stone is precious.

Focusing on the first part of the verse only. Now to those who believe, we believe in Him. The language of trusting in Him is also used there in verse 6, when Peter quotes from another Scripture, 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. We believe in Jesus. We trust in Jesus. We believe in what He has done on our behalf, and we believe in Him, in His person, as the Savior, as our Savior, as our Lord. We trust in Him. That is where we stand in relation to Him. We believe in Him. We trust in Him. Do you? Do you believe in Jesus? Do you trust in Jesus? Are you trusting in Jesus this morning? Have you deposited your trust in Him as your Savior, as your Lord? Peter is clear. That is what believers do. They believe. They trust. We also come to Him, and there is great overlap in these concepts, but there at the very beginning of our passage, as you come to Him, the living stone, we come to Him as we put our trust in Him. We come to Him as we pray to Him. We come to Him as we worship Him as our Lord and Savior. We come to Him. We're built up by Him. And this is certainly something we'll return to this evening.

Verse 5, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. We can also say that we are safe in Him. Now, that's not language we find in the text, but the truth is there, but especially there in verse 6, that quote that there is that Peter employs from Isaiah chapter 28, 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. This language of never being put to shame, the sense of this language is to emphasize, to stress the impossibility of ultimate disappointment for any who trust in Jesus. The impossibility of us ever discovering that our faith is in vain. That is simply not a prospect. We will never be put to shame if you put your trust in Jesus. Maybe you're uncertain as to whether that is something that you want to do or are prepared to do. You're uncertain as to what the future will hold if you put your trust in Jesus. What will happen? What will tomorrow hold?

[25 : 22] What will others say? Well, let me tell you that here you have the promise of Scripture. You will never be put to shame. You will never be disappointed. You will never discover that ultimately your faith was in vain. Yes, we may well go through ups and downs and periods of doubt when we imagine that all is in vain. But ultimately, there will not be disappointment for those who put their trust in Jesus.

What about you? What about you? Do you believe? Do you trust in Jesus? Will you come to Him? If you have yet have not come to Him, will you come to Him this morning and put your trust in Him, the living stone? If you do, you will never be put to shame. You will never be disappointed.

Ultimately, your decision and God's calling of you will be gloriously vindicated. So, this is something of where believers stand in relation to the living stone. We believe in Him. We come to Him.

We're built up by Him. We're safe in Him. But we can't leave unconsidered what Peter says concerning unbelievers, because in these verses he deliberately paints a contrast, and it is a solemn contrast that he portrays between those who believe and those who do not believe. And the inescapable reality is that not all believe. And Peter also speaks of such and where they stand vis-à-vis the living stone.

It's worth noting as we enter into just commenting on this that Peter is speaking of unbelievers rather than to unbelievers. He's speaking to believers, but he's speaking about unbelievers, and in a moment I hope it will be clear why that's important to note.

[27 : 24] Well, what does Peter say of unbelievers in relation to the living stone? Well, in many ways, it's the other side of the coin to what we've said concerning believers. They do not believe.

Verse 7, now to you who believe, this stone is precious, but to those who do not believe, this stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. They don't believe. They don't put their trust in Jesus. They choose to live their own life and to trust in themselves or anything else other than Jesus. They don't believe. They reject Jesus. The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.

And this language of rejection is language that speaks of a conscious and deliberate decision. Having considered something of who he is, they say, not for me. They reject Jesus.

Rather reminds me of the words of the subjects who hated the appointed king in the parable of the talents recorded for us in Luke chapter 19. What did they declare? We will not have this man to rule over us.

We will not have this man to rule over us. He won't be my king. I'm not going to bow down before him. Others may. Not me. The stone the builders rejected. Unbelievers do not put their trust in Jesus. They reject Jesus. They will not have this man to rule over them. But Peter goes on. He speaks of how they stumble. They stumble because they disobey. There in verse 8, they stumble because they disobey the message.

[29 : 04] And here the word that Peter uses, disobeyed, can have the sense of active and entrenched disobedience. We might call it rebellion. And the form of the expression, they stumble because they disobey, suggests that many who reject Jesus do so because of disobedience to God in their lives.

That disobedience to God causes them to stumble as they consider the cost, the implications of following Jesus. Well, if I'm going to follow Jesus, then these are things I must put to one side.

And they stumble because of disobedience to God in their lives. Is this you? Does this describe you? And if it does, what must you do? Or perhaps the question is rather, what can you do?

Because what Peter says rather begs the question, can you do anything? We have to make reference to it and try and understand the sobering and difficult words that are said of unbelievers by Peter in this passage. There in verse 8, they stumble because they disobey the message.

But then what does he say? Which is also what they were destined for. These are difficult words. What are we to make of them? Do we say, well, there's nothing they can do if this is what they were destined for? Well, it's important to be clear on what Peter is saying and what he is not saying.

[30 : 39] And let me just remind you of what I said a few moments ago, that here Peter is speaking to believers. His purpose is to encourage believers to help believers. And so, what he says has that in mind? And that leads us in to comment on what he is saying. Certainly one of the things he is saying when he declares that the disobedience, the rebellion, the rejection of these unbelievers is what they were destined for. What he is saying is this, and he may be saying other things, but he is certainly saying this, that believers ought not to be discouraged in the face of opposition and hostility. They ought not to be discouraged when they are surrounded by those who reject the gospel and who reject them as those who believe the gospel. They ought not to be discouraged when they are surrounded by those who live in rebellion against God. And why ought they not to be discouraged?

Because the very rejection of these men and women, this very rejection that leads them to live in rebellion against God, their very rejection of the living stone is not only predicted by God in the Old Testament, but the Bible. And the references there make that very clear. It is planned by God, planned by God in eternity. They do what they were destined for. And this is Peter's great or primary purpose in recognizing that unbelievers were destined for unbelief, to serve as a source of comfort for God's people. God will not be taken by surprise. Things won't escape out of God's hands as the enemies multiply. That which they do, and which they are morally culpable for doing, predicted by God, known by God, yes, even destined by God.

So, that's what he is saying. He is seeking to bring comfort and encouragement to believers. But notice also what he is not saying in declaring that this rejection, this disobedience, is that what they were destined for. He is not saying that those he speaks of as destined to not believe, to stumble, to disobey, because I think reasonably the reference of being destined applies to all of these things that precede it. He is not saying that such are without hope. The verse leaves open the very real possibility of repentance for the unbelievers it talks about. All three verbs in verses 7 and 8, not believing, rejecting, stumbling, disobeying, all of these verbs are in the present tense. It's what they are currently doing, these people that he speaks of. The verse affirms that their present rebellion and disobedience has been ordained by God. And difficult though that may be for us, that is what clearly Peter is saying.

But they can change. They can repent. In fact, Peter explicitly affirms his hope that many of the very unbelievers he is speaking about will come to faith. Notice in verse 12, we'll return to this on another occasion, but for the purposes of this point, notice what he says in verse 12. He's speaking, continues to speak to these believers, surrounded by those who reject God, who live in disobedience, who stumble, and what does he say? Live such good lives among the pagans, these very people that he's been speaking about, that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. Notice what Peter is saying. He's saying, yes, their present disobedience, their present rejection, their present stumbling, destined by God.

Mysterious and difficult for us to understand, I grant you. But he says of these same people, that as the Christians live out their lives in the manner that they are called to by God, these very same people can come to faith in Jesus Christ, can repent of their sin, can turn from their disobedience, and be embraced into the family of God.

[34 : 44] So, where do unbelievers stand in relation to the living stone? They don't trust in him. They reject him. They stumble because they disobey. But though that is true, they are invited to come to repent, to put their trust in Jesus.

Where is Jesus? Where is the living stone? Well, he is where he has been laid or established by God as a stone in Zion. He is occupying his place as the cornerstone of his spiritual temple, and he is from that place holding up and building his church. As Jesus left the building, he is the building.

He is the cornerstone. General assemblies come and go. The enemies and even the professed friends of Jesus will often fail and rebel against Jesus, as they were destined to do. But Jesus Christ remains, and the church built upon the cornerstone that is Jesus Christ will never fall. And so, let us all come to him. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we come to you, and we do thank you for who you are and for who your Son, Jesus, is. We thank you that he is indeed the living stone chosen by you and precious to you. And we pray that he would ever be precious to us and increasingly precious to us as we consider not only what he has done, but what he continues to do as he upholds the church, his church, of which he is both foundation and head. We thank you that that is so, that though we fail, though we fall short, though we look around and see much that is awry and indeed much that is awry, nonetheless we can rest secure in the knowledge that you are the one who governs, that your Son,

Jesus Christ, is sovereign over his church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's close our service by singing from that psalm that Peter quotes from in Psalm 118.

We'll sing from verse 15. We'll sing from verse 15 through to verse 24. Notice the words there in verse 21 and 22, You answered me, I will give thanks. Salvation comes from you alone. The stone the builders had refused, has now become the cornerstone. Psalm 118 verses 15 to 24. We'll stand to sing.

[37 : 45] Psalm 118 verses 15 to 24.

Psalm 118 verses 15 to 24.

Psalm 118 verses 15 to 24.

Psalm 118 verses 15 to 24.

Psalm 118 verses 15 to 24.

[40 : 15] 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.