

“Biological Architecture”

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As living stones, we are a chip off the old Rock.

1 Peter 2:4-12

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Pastor Bob: Living Stone and Living Stones

Pastor Paul and I both like to listen to other preachers as we prepare our sermons through the week. We both agree that British preachers sound smarter.

A Scottish preacher I listened to this week used the phrase “Biological Architecture” about today’s text. I Googled it, and it’s really a thing – an integration of architecture and living things. You can get a degree in biological architecture at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, so maybe that’s where he got the idea.

I wonder if the university got the idea from Bilbo Baggins and the Shire. But even the Hobbits can’t claim credit. In the first century the Apostle Peter uses a phrase that really should sound very strange to our ears: “living stones.”

If it doesn’t sound strange, it may be because we’ve heard it so often in church. Or maybe we’ve seen talking rocks in The NeverEnding Story, Noah, or Frozen 2.

As we come to our text, it seems like Peter takes a sharp right turn. The focus of last week’s sermon was to “do the next holy thing.” One of those holy things is to “crave pure spiritual milk” now that you “have tasted that the Lord is good” (2-3).

In verse 4 Peter shifts to rocks – the living Stone and living stones that make up a spiritual house. Mother’s Day helps with this connection. Talk of babies implies a family, and another word for family is “household” or even “house.”

Peter wants to remind the scattered Christians in Turkey that they're not alone when they're trying to do the right thing. It takes a village to learn to do the next holy thing. The more you try to do it alone, the less successful you are likely to be.

Verse 4 emphasizes that the heart of this life of holiness is not coming to church. During this particular season most of you can't come to church anyway. Peter says the "coming" is not primarily "coming to church." You "come to *Christ*," he says. He has chosen you but you must come to him.

When you come to him, you are coming to a "living Stone." There's our biological architecture. Neither biology nor architecture is adequate by itself to express who Jesus is or what the church is.

A rock is solid but it's dead. You can't talk to a rock. Well you can, but it won't talk back. For a while, pet rocks were a fad, but you can't have a relationship with a rock, even a pet one. A rock is durable, strong, and dependable. But if you want a relationship, you want something living.

The problem is that everything living is also fragile. We saw that last week when Lydia Carlino, one of our worship leaders, looking otherwise healthy and vital, was whisked away in an ambulance and we wondered if she would be alive or able to function. Thank God she's home and doing well, but it's a reminder how fragile life is.

A "living stone" conveys both strength and vitality. Peter reminds us that Jesus is solid like a rock, but he's alive. As the old hymn says, "And he walks with me and talks me and he tells me I am his own." Yes, he died 2000 years ago – but he rose again so you can have a living relationship with him. He's the Solid Rock.

Not only is it our part to "come to him," it is our option to reject him – as he was rejected by those in his generation. Our rejection doesn't change his relationship to God. To God he is "chosen and precious." Peter will return to that shortly.

Verse 5 introduces themes that Pastor Paul will take up in verses 9-12, so I won't spend a lot of time here. I find these themes very encouraging. Not only is Jesus a "living stone," but Peter's readers are, "like living stones."

Why is that encouraging? First, because Peter reminds us that these living stones are "being built." Church is never a finished product. Honestly, I prefer finished products. I've just started a new project at home – repairing and recoating my deck. What I start, I want finished. I tend to become impatient with the journey, longing for the destination. Honestly, I prefer to pastor with stability. I like stable systems – regular schedules, predictable worship services, settled routines. How's that workin' for me?

Peter encourages me because this thing called the church is not done yet. If you say, "Our church is not what it's supposed to be!" I will (hopefully) not be defensive. I

will say, “You’re right. We are being built.” No Christian is yet perfected. We are being built. It helps us with patience toward one another.

The church should never settle into hardened habits. Right now God is calling us to question everything we do and why we do it. Even before this pandemic, the Church needed to be asking proactively, “How do we adjust to a different world?” Now we’ve had to. Peter is encouraging us by saying that we are “being built.” Maybe by God’s grace we’ll be better than ever!

After all, we, like Jesus, are “biological architecture.” That’s another encouragement. We are dynamic but solid as a rock. Peter’s mind has undoubtedly returned to Jesus’ words: “You are Peter (Rock), and on this rock I will build my church.”

Peter’s mind has also returned to his own spiritual childhood that was so intertwined with the Jerusalem temple – glorious, immense, beautiful. This new thing called the church is like that, but different. Not just different but better. Herod’s temple was a hundred years in the making. As Peter writes in the decade of the AD 60s, work had just been finished. It would all be destroyed and dismantled by AD 70.

Peter is suggesting that living stones are even more durable than limestone or granite. We’re seeing that today. Here at Corinth we have one of the most beautiful and imposing church buildings in western North Carolina, but our strength was never in rock or steel or stained glass or organ pipes.

The reality we are now living – that we can’t get together on Sunday mornings or Wednesday nights – is exactly like the rest of the week even when we can “come to church.” Living stones disperse to display the strength and vitality of our precious Jesus wherever they are. Scattered stones can display Jesus better and wider.

We are a chip off the old Rock. We would like to be together, but Peter is telling us to be little Jesus’s while we are apart. It’s always been his design.

In verses 6-8 Peter returns to Jesus as the first example of biological architecture. In typical ancient style, he proves his point from three Old Testament quotes. The Jewish rabbis called it “stringing together like pearls.” For some this implies Peter is writing to Christians with a Jewish background, but I don’t think that’s necessarily the implication. Almost everyone listening to me today is from a Gentile background, but as a Christian you learn the Old Testament fairly quickly.

In verse 6 the quote from Isaiah refers to a cornerstone that is both “chosen and precious.” Palestine is full of rock because it’s on a fault line, but it yields no “precious” stones. Those have to be imported. Jesus as the cornerstone was unlike those giant rocks that formed the temple foundation. He’s sent by God, chosen by him and precious to him. Those who trust in him will never be put to shame.

Verse 7 quotes from Psalm 118, the last of the Hallelujah Psalms. We use this one on Palm Sunday: “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD” (25-26). That same Psalm reads, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” (Some translations say “capstone” but don’t let that distract you. For Peter the commonality is the living stone, not where it sits.) We who believe get Jesus, but not everyone does.

Verse 8 quotes from Isaiah again (8:14). In the same story where Jesus called Peter a rock, he rebuked Peter: “Get behind me, Satan. You are a stumbling block (skandalon) to me.” It’s the same word here. A rock functions both as a way to step higher and a way to trip. Peter has called his readers “the elect” (or chosen) in 1:1, but now he reminds them that not everyone is chosen for life.

Some are destined to trip over the living Stone. Those are hard words. We like it when Scripture says we are chosen, but that means others are not. Remember, though, there is this biblical balance between God’s sovereignty and our responsibility. Don’t overthink it. They aren’t chosen because they don’t come. They don’t come because they aren’t chosen.

Peter actually doesn’t want you to stay there long or to question whether his readers are chosen. In verses 9-12 he assures them that by coming to Christ they display their true identity and destiny. Pastor Paul will pick it up there.

Pastor Paul: Capable of Greatness

As we transition to verses 9-12, Peter reminds us of the beginning of Chapter 2—because you are this, this is how you should act. Verses 9-12 are about what our capabilities are now because we have been called by the Lord.

Capability is an interesting thing. I am amazed at what our dog is capable of. He is capable of greatness and terribleness. Our dog knows two words—walk and ride. We have to speak in code about what we are doing because our dog will go crazy if he hears those words. He is capable of understanding words, and he is a dog. On the other hand, he has peed on our comforter. Our dog is capable of greatness and terribleness.

We are the same way. Peter is going to touch on the two extremes—greatness and terribleness. In verse 9, Peter talks about priesthood. It’s a Jewish reference. He calls us “royal priests, a holy nation.” The Israelites had a priesthood. They were people born into a family that trained to be priests. Everyone in the nation depended on them to perform priestly activities.

Peter says, “The Israelites had a priesthood—you are a priesthood.” You as a believer, as a living stone, as a nation of priests, you have the opportunity to come right into God’s presence. Paul says in Romans 12:1 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and

sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.”

You were chosen by God by grace, and you are sustained by grace. How you got there was by grace and mercy. What keeps you there is by grace and mercy as well.

Regarding our priesthood, we are not all uniform priests. We have unity in the truth of the gospel but we have diversity in how we look. We are diverse in every nation, tongue, and creed across the world. We are bonded by the blood of Christ.

Verse 10 is beautiful. It comes from the Old Testament prophetic text and applies to the church scattered. You used to not be a people. You used to be scattered and nameless. You were part of this world which is passing and going away. Even your identity was temporary but now you are a people. You have been chosen. And why have you been chosen? By God's great mercy.

Verse 11 reminds you of who you are now, your truest identity. The most real thing about you is who you are in Christ. Your real identity is now found in him.

He then contrasts it with evil. Evil—the things of this world—should be so foreign to you that you truly perceive it as your enemy. You are at war with evil. Evil is not a part of you. You are so separate from it that when it comes into your presence, you say that is not me. Evil is not welcome here. You live in this world but who you are and where you live are two different things.

The chief concept of verse 12 is the word 'honesty'. 1 Peter 2:12 "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."

Do your words match up with your deeds? Or are you trying to be dually aligned with God and also with this world? You cannot be dually aligned. Your truest identity is God, and you are in Christ. Do your deeds match up in following him?

The audience of our good deeds is typically seen as God but now Peter tells us our audience is much bigger than that. Your audience of the deeds that you do—good or bad—is the world. The world is looking to see: do the things that you do with your hands match the things that you say with your mouth? Are your values and your works and deeds together? There is a great audience. The audience will see one thing or the other. Will they see your true identity in Christ, or will they see that you are trying to be dually aligned and say that you belong to Christ but in reality live by the ways of this world?

The world is watching. Be your true self. We often say be yourself but that's a mixed message. Be your true self. We are born again in Christ. Our life is found in Jesus Christ. Live like him and honor him.

In verses 9-12, we see the tightrope that the Christian walks. We must be honest about what we are capable of in Christ. What are you as a believer in Christ capable of? You are a nation of priests but you are a resident here in an evil world. That is not your nationality. It's not your identity here in this evil world. Who you are and where you live are two different things.

Part of it is to understand who we are as a people. We are capable of greatness—great godliness and great evil. We walk that line for the rest of our lives. We are a nation of priests living in a fallen and depraved world. What lengths would you go to, to live and do great godly things knowing that you as a nation of priests can come right in the presence of God and ask him for it?

Imagine going back 2,000 years and telling the Israelites “You don't need a priest anymore. You don't need someone making sacrifices for you. You can now come directly into the presence of God. Praise him. Petition him. Ask for forgiveness.” They would respond that you have to go through this step and this step. Peter is saying you can go straight to the Lord. That is a capability. You are capable of going right into God's presence. How are you using that capability to go right into God's presence?

There are people that inspire us but they are people that have grasped their capability not in what they can do but in what Christ has done and that they can come right into his presence. I think of Bob and the Faithful and Welcoming ministry. Bob would say “It's not me. I just understand the capability I have because I can come right in the presence of the Lord.” You too have this capability. What are you using it for?

There is a sobering reminder in Verse 11. To what lengths would you go to avoid evil knowing how dangerous it is and how capable you are of being corrupted by it? Evil is at our doorstep. We are capable of great evil and corruption because we are surrounded by it.

A believer is going to live life forever in the tension of two things: I am capable of greatness because of what Christ has done, and I am also capable of great evil. Am I holding on to the Lord keeping evil at arm's length?

Remember the reason we are nation of priests is because of grace. When we fall and give in, we are also sustained by grace. In that tension, we have a glorious humility when we strive for incredible things for the Lord but we humbly admit that we are nothing and can do nothing and are completely dependent on his grace and mercy. Amen.