

**Living Stones** (1 Peter 2:4-12)

It is not often that you get a sermon beginning with an oxymoron, although it is not a true oxymoron for the purists amongst us. For those who are not sure what an oxymoron is, the dictionary defines it as

**A rhetorical device in which two seemingly contradictory words are used together for effect: “She is just a poor little rich girl.”**

So what do we have here? It is in verse 4

**“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by *people* but chosen by God and precious to him—”** (1 Peter 2:4 NIV)

Living stone. How can a stone live? Many of us have grown up with the Rolling Stones, but we do not expect when we are in the garden or walking alone the road for stones to suddenly come to life and speak to us because we know that stones are dead, not alive, not living. But here we have a description of a living stone. Verse 4 again

**“...the living Stone—rejected by *people* but chosen by God and precious to him—  
...For in Scripture it says: “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.” Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,” and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.”** (1 Peter 2:4-8 NIV)

Notice that the stone was rejected by some, in fact by all but is precious. Peter uses a word from the same root in his second letter when he says

**“Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:”** (2 Peter 1:1 NIV)

Jesus the stone, is the Living Stone and as such is precious. So firstly we do not follow a dead leader, a person who is long gone. Around the building there are various stones that have been laid with people names on it. For most people now those names are meaningless. I recognise a few of them as being Baptist forebears, ministers and such like who were giants in the Baptist world when they lived. But they are all dead. But Jesus he is alive, he has risen and so he is the living stone.

But why stone? One thing about stone was that at the time of writing it was dependable; it was thought not to rot, so it was everlasting. So we have the following things about Jesus

- **He is precious** – but is he precious to you or do you treat him with contempt. If something is precious to us we cherish it, we look after it. But, sadly even for some Christians, Jesus is someone they only turn to in times of trouble and ignore him the rest of the time. Are we ever like that with Jesus? Or is he precious to us – precious enough to spend some time with on a regular basis?
- **He is living** – do you think of him as dead, or at least act as if he is.
  - You never talk to him because he is not really there.
  - You never think of him as returning, because he is not living.

- You do not realise that he is in heaven now speaking to Father on our behalf.
- **He is dependable** – he will stick closer than a brother, a good brother that is. He is always there, he never leaves us nor forsakes us.

But there is more. Not only is Jesus the living stone, but the most important stone. The cornerstone in verse 6, the capstone or foundational cornerstone is verse 8. Jesus is the most important stone of all, one around which all the other stones in the building get their position, their trueness of position. With the cornerstone right, the walls can be made sound and true. This is Jesus, the living cornerstone of a living house where the other stones are us. I wonder if it is from this passage that we get the expression of naming someone who is totally reliable and dependable, “A brick”. Before bricks was a similar person called, “a stone”?

But not all is good news. Verse 7

**“Now to you who believe, this stone is precious...”** (1 Peter 2:7 NIV)

We have such a precious gift in Jesus, but some people will reject even the most precious of gifts. And we read again in verse 7

**“...But to those who do not believe,...”** **A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”** **They stumble because they disobey the message— which is also what they were destined for.”** (1 Peter 2:7-8 NIV)

A stone can be something that we stumble over. I can remember when we first moved to Swavesey from Nottingham. The nights in Nottingham were a little like they are here. Street lights on all night and plenty of them all round the house we lived in. The first few times we went round the back of the house in Swavesey it was pitch black to us and so it was the easiest thing in the world to trip over a stone, or the stone edge of the path, with usually painful results.

There will be those for whom Jesus is someone who points out how bad they are. They do not go further, they do not see the salvation in God, the precious cornerstone that was accepted by God for our salvation. These are described by Jesus as those who are living in darkness, so they cannot see the stone they stumble over, but that is their final destiny – to stumble into hell, and that makes me very sad. I want to see no-one go to hell, which is why I think that events like last night’s ‘Taste Around the World’ are so important in steps to bring someone to meet Jesus and have that possibility to turn a stumbling block into a cornerstone. That is why we need to help our non-Christian friends meet with Jesus, by at least talking to them. Of course, before that we have to know some non-Christians which can become increasingly more difficult as we grow older as a Christian!

So we have Jesus, but then we also have the other stones for the house – that is you and me, verse 5

**“you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”**  
(1 Peter 2:5 NIV)

So we are

- **Living stones** notice, not dead bricks. We are alive and so dynamic and so can change. Not dead, stuck in the past, fixed, rigid, never to be moved.
- **We have also come to Jesus**, verse 4

**“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—”** (1 Peter 2:4 NIV)

Notice that as we come to Jesus, he makes us into the living stones. The work begins with God, but just as a stone in the hands of a stonemason, has to be fashioned and cut and made to fit and just take it, so God may, will have to fashion us and at times it may be painful. It is similar to when Jesus said

**“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”** (John 15:1-2 NIV)

So we come to Jesus and submit ourselves to him and then we are told that we are

- **A Chosen People** – God has chosen us. Isn't that great. The God of the universe has chosen me, someone who does not deserve it, but I am chosen.
- **A Holy, Royal Priesthood** – and as such we have this direct access to God, we do not need to go through any intermediaries, we are the intermediaries! This means that we talk to God on the behalf of other people. Before my mother died I would pray regularly for her and her relationship with God and Jesus. This did not mean that she would automatically go to heaven, she had to make a decision herself on that, but I could pray that she would listen to the call of the Holy Spirit. Do we pray for our family, our friends, those who do not know Jesus as Friend, Lord and Saviour?
- **A Holy Nation** – as a Christian we are not alone, we may think we are, but in the world there are over 2 billion Christians. Now many of these may just tick the box as Christians, but just think that if it is just twenty percent then we still talking about a very large number. In this country over 40 million sign up as Christian, if as figures suggests the real number is say ten percent of this we are still talking over 4 million. We need to know that we are not alone, this is why we congregate in churches, this is why Spring Harvest and Leading Edge take place because we like being at times in large like-minded groups – we are designed to be gregarious, not solitary.
- **A People Belonging to God** – We now belong to God and he will look out for us. This is not in some heavy-handed, irksome way, but in a loving, gentle way but at times with a firm hand. God is looking after his precious stock i.e. us.
- **A People Who Live in Light** – At one time we were in darkness, but then Jesus came in and we came to Jesus and light poured into the darkness, so that we no longer stumble over the stone, but find it very beautiful, very necessary, very precious.

So what? Well we read that in the last two verses of the passage we read

**“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 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.”** (1 Peter 2:11-12 NIV)

Twice before we have had the word holy brought in

- **A Holy, Royal Priesthood**
- **A Holy Nation**

That is our part – that is the so what. The fact that we are living stones along with the Living Stone means that it must have an effect on our lifestyle, on the way we live, on who we are. Are we different from those around us? In the Christian aspects, our moral code, our ethics? Or do they look at us and only see themselves?

Notice it does not say that we should jump out of the world, but it says **'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'**. It seems, maybe, as if even in the early days because this letter is thought to be an early letter, that some Christians had stopped living in the world and only met each other, but we are to live out our Christian lives in the world around us and in such a holy, wonderful way that people will see our good deeds and so will be attracted to Christ. More people are put off coming to church because some of the people they know who go to church they do not find pleasant to be with and I do not mean challenging in the Christian sense, but who just upset them for no real reason. Hopefully we are not one of those people!