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Presentation Transcript
Living Stones
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1 Peter 2:5 – ...you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

So, Peter's using a metaphor here, which is close to his heart. Jesus called him a stone. In his metaphor, then, Peter is using a metaphor of the church as a stone building. If that's the case, then, in the metaphor, we'd be the building materials, wouldn't we? So, we're all stones in this building, which is a temple. And like the temple of old live the priests in the new temple, which is the church. Our job, like the job of the priests of old, is to offer sacrifices – not animals and other things like they did, but still the kind God approves of today. These gifts – these sacrifices – we perform don't go directly to the Father, but, as Peter said, they go *through* Jesus Christ. It passes through Him. He's the High Priest.

Now, we hear sermons about our role in the church all the time. We know that we are living sacrifices, and priests, and evangelists, and Christian soldiers, and care givers, and hosts and hostesses of hospitality, bearers of powerful spiritual gifts granted by God, and we're zealous workers for God. You can just add a seemingly infinite list of other responsibilities. While we hear and read about all these things, we get up every morning and go to work or school, or we work at home – making our house a home for our families. And it's hard sometimes to keep in mind what to do every day with the list of things we're supposed to do and be as living stones.

Now, I don't know about you, but looking back on my life at the various jobs I've had and roles I've played with my family and at church and all, it seems like it took everything I had to do those things well, let alone taking time to be a living stone in the church, even though most of the time, my job was being a minister. That might be hard for some of you to grasp, but it was for me. It's hard to keep the most important things first – most of the time, even understand what they were.

So, what I hope to do today is to focus on what it means to be a living stone while being a human being with a job and a mate and children and a home. Let's start with Jesus' explanation of who Peter was. I got this from watching *The Chosen* with Elaine one night. Now I know all the scriptures, but the story it represented was very living – turns black and white to color. So, we were watching *The Chosen* and something happened that was not according to my understanding. And that may be the first time, in watching that program, that that happened that way. It went this way:

Jesus took the disciples, after John was killed by Herod, to a place called The Gates of Hell, which was a mighty cleft of rock outside of Caesarea Philippi – a Roman city and a center for pagan worship – where there were two pagan temples built in front of this massive cliff. The location of this cleft was called by the locals, The Gates of Hell. That was because years earlier a powerful spring poured out of it. And it was so much water that it formed the head waters of the Jordan River. Tradition says that a weight, which was attached to a long rope, was lowered in the spring, but they ran out of rope before they could find the bottom. It seemed to be bottomless. So, from there, the cleft began known as The Gates of Hell or the Underworld to the pagans. The Jews considered it a place of abomination, because of the pagan temples there. And that added weight, in their minds, to the name Gates of Hell as well. Well, it was in this place that Jesus delivered a powerful teaching to His disciples. He told them that He is the *Petra* – that's the word in Greek - or massive cliff on which His church is built. (There's a place over in the Middle East called Petra. It's a place of huge rocks. So, they named it after the big rocks.) Jesus is saying, when it comes to the church, "I'm the big rock. I'm the massive cliff or cleft of rock."

There's so much to this metaphor that it shouldn't be lost on us. Out of this gigantic cleft poured a huge amounts of water, which represented the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "Out of Me will pour rivers of living water." That's what He said, right? So, there they are standing in front of this big rock with tons of water pouring from it.

But my difference in understanding is something else in the scripture. Let's read that in Matthew 16:18 – Jesus says:

Matthew 16:18 – *And I tell you, you are Peter* – and the word He used there wasn't *petra*. It didn't mean a massive cleft of rock. It was *petros* and that just means a stone – a rock you could pick up and throw – and He said: *and on this rock* – on *petra* – *I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

Now, most churches teach that Jesus was telling Peter he was going to be the head of the church after Jesus ascended, but one of the points I've seen made is that *petra* and *petros* sound alike, so they mean the same thing. It's kind of like saying the word *blew* – you know, he blew the candle out – and *blue* – the color – mean the same thing because they sound alike. It's a ridiculous argument. He was talking about two different things. He Himself, as the mighty cleft – the head of the church...over and over and over again in the Bible – in the New Testament – Jesus was

called the cornerstone, the rock...it's just all over. We know He is the main, biggest rock in the church. And I believe what He meant when He said, "You're Peter – *petros* – you're a part of the church, and on this *petra*" – Himself as the massive cleft – He's the head of it.

Why did Jesus say this to Peter if it was not to designate him over others? Well, Jesus doesn't explain why He said what He said when He said it. But it is true that Peter had just answered His question: Who do you say that I am? And Peter said, "You are the Son of the Living God," which was something they all knew, but something he was the first to say. So, did this qualify Peter to be the head? Or just to be one of many other stones? Well, I think the word *petros* means a smaller stone and *petra* means a bigger stone or a cliff. And that *is* what those words mean in the Greek. So, it does change the meaning, doesn't it?

Now, it's always a big deal to misunderstand Jesus. But the difference of belief here isn't a big deal in one sense. What Jesus meant by the verses in question will be made clear to all of us when Christ returns. When He comes back, we will all understand what He meant. And, at that point, I'm going to learn. And if I'm wrong, then I'm going to be enlightened by others. And I'm going to drop my old understanding like a hot rock, because I will now be enlightened by the Christ! And, if other people are wrong, then they're going to be enlightened too. And I have no doubt of the people that aren't a part of the Church of God that I'm in, but are also Christians, will do exactly the same thing.

So, there's no need for me or anybody else to get self-righteous about differences like this. We should just live and let live. We're all going to get sorted out in the end. Just focus on what we have in common, like Jesus Christ and Him crucified, instead of the lesser differences. Knowing something different from somebody else doesn't make us superior to them. It just means that one or the other of us is confused. Can we all admit we're confused about some things? I should hope so.

So, after all this, the difference is not about who is the true head of the church. Everybody believes Jesus is. It was only about Peter's smaller role. But the mainstream understanding, I believe, does obscure the meaning of the word *petros* and what He was saying when He called Peter a *petros* – a stone. And that's important, because we are *all* called stones too! In the verse we just read, Peter said as much himself.

He also told the disciples that they were all going to have roles – the King James translates it *mansions*, but roles of responsibility in the church. Everybody's a stone. So, let's think about the building and the metaphor of the church. It was a temple made of stone. It's big. It's solid. It's like a rock. Jesus said He was the biggest stone – the *petra*. Notice something in Acts. Peter said:

Acts 4:11-12 - *This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

Now, do you know what a cornerstone is? When you build a stone building, the bottom layer is actually the foundation of the building. And they have to go down and touch solid base. Jesus said, “You have to be founded on rock, as well as built on it.” So, the cornerstone is one of the four corners of the building that is solid and big. And the way it is situated determines the direction and the state of the building – what parts are going to be where.

It’s also interesting, too, in the building, Jesus is *not* at the top, but He’s at the bottom! He supports all of us as our Servant. That’s just so hard for us to understand in a world where the head of the company up at the top floor. They have the fanciest office and the fanciest equipment – fanciest computers – even though they don’t need those computers as much as some of the people that work for them. But because they’re up there – they’ve earned that – they have the right to lord it over and be served by the others in the organization. But, in our picture, Jesus sacrificed His life to start His church. And He *is* the cornerstone. He’s not the top of it. He’s the head of it, but He’s the cornerstone. It’s a different kind of government. So, the entire church is supported by Him and His death and resurrection from the dead. No salvation, except through Him – and only because He was willing to give His life in our stead. And He wants us to know He is rock solid! He’s the foundation of a house. It’s built on a rock and no man can move it. And it has *always* been that way – in the Old Testament even. Let’s look in 1 Corinthians 10 – Paul said this:

1 Corinthians 10:1-4 – *For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.*

So, the One who became the human Jesus – the Rock, the head of the church – was the same Rock that poured forth water for Israel in the desert – the same One that produced a cloud in the day and a fire at night. He’s *always* been here and there. He is the I Am. And He’s I Am no matter when. So, He’s always been there. He calls Himself *Alpha and Omega* in the New Testament in the book of Revelation.

So, Peter was a stone, not the rock. If Peter was not a *petra*, but, by comparison, a *petros* – a smaller stone – where does that leave him? Well, let’s let him tell us. Let’s look in 1 Peter 2:4 – he said:

1 Peter 2:4-6 – *As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house – a spiritual temple – to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus*

Christ. For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion – see, He’s quoting the Old Testament prophets – a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

So, it’s interesting that this word that he uses in the New Testament is not *petra* or *petros*. It’s *lithos*. And this word is used for Christ, but also for members of Christ’s church. So, this usage emphasizes that we are *all* part the building – the temple. Jesus is part of it. He’s our elder Brother. And we’re part of it too. And Jesus, the head of the church, is a *lithos* – a stone – and Peter’s a *lithos* – a stone – and we’re *lithos* – or stones, also. Most of the modern translations use the term *living stones*, but in the King James, it’s translated *lively stones*. That word – no matter how you translate it – means a *vitality*. I just like that so much better. Alive? Yes, but more lively, active, healthy, involved, proactive – lively. It’s a great word.

Notice what Peter says in verse 9 of 1 Peter 2:

V- 9-12 – *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles – while we’re walking through our own desert, trying to find our way through – I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God – not immediately, but – on the day of visitation – in the resurrection.*

So, now we’re down to the point of this presentation – about how to be a lively stone in the temple of God. Do you remember the list I presented in the beginning – priests, evangelists, soldiers, care givers, hosts and hostesses of hospitality, living sacrifices, bearers of powerful spiritual gifts, zealous workers for God – all these things lively stones are supposed to do and be as a lively stone. Then we juxtapose that with holding down a job, raising a family, going to school, all the cares of this life. Just two things we have to do to be a lively stone. You don’t have to worry about anything else. We’re going to explain why in a minute. Just two things that we have to do to be a lively stone. Peter mentions them in what we just read. If we do these two things, all the other stuff will just fall into place. And that peace, which passes all understanding, will be a part of our thinking and feeling. We won’t worry about stuff like that.

So, what are those two things we just mentioned? Well, I’m going to read them to you: *proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*. There are lots of ways to proclaim the excellencies of God, but Peter connects that with when God called us, doesn’t he? That’s what he said. *Proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*. So, how do we get all that together? Well, there are lots of

ways to proclaim the excellencies of God, but do you have a story – a way that you can talk about when God called you? When was the last time you told that story to somebody?

When you tell that story, if you're in the right context while you're being a parent, or a friend, or an employer, or an employee, see, it's when we're doing these things that we're proclaiming the excellencies – the first thing Peter told us to do. You are an evangelist while you're telling that story. You become a God magnet when you tell that story. The people that God is calling will hear it, be interested in it. And the others? It will be of no import whatsoever.

Jonathan Roumie – the man who plays Jesus in *The Chosen* – has become quite popular. People want to know what it's like to play Jesus and how he came to play Him. So, he tells a story. He tells a story about being a struggling actor a long way from home, isolated in Hollywood. And he'd run out of jobs. He'd run out of money. He was discouraged. He didn't know what to do. He was at his wits' end. He got down on his knees and told God, "I've tried to do what I know to do to serve You, and I'm completely out of resources, strategies, next steps, plans. I have no where to go. So, I am, as You told me, casting all my cares on You. You can have my maxed out credit card, and my empty bank account, and my lack of employment, and my discouragement." And then he got up and went out to take care of some errands. When he came back, he checked his mail and found four checks – money for jobs he did not expect to be paid for. And then, later in the week, more checks kept rolling in, until he was out of debt with enough money to go forward for a while. So, pretty neat, huh? Well, that's not the best part. It wasn't long after this event that he received the call from Dallas Jenkins – the creator of *The Chosen*.

So, what's your story? How do you proclaim the excellencies of God in your calling, or in your life? If you have one, and you share it when the context is right, you are a God magnet to the people God is calling – wherever you go – an evangelist, a living stone, a lively stone in the temple, where is the body of Christ and the Church of God, proclaiming the excellencies of Him who called you – in that context – the context of your calling.

The second one – what was the second one? Well, here it is: *keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable*. So, in the church, we have a hard time doing that, because we're like a family and we know everybody else's faults. They know ours. But among the Gentiles – the people who aren't converted and we don't know as well – live the Golden Rule in your heart toward those people. As Peter mentions, we are to *offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*. And Paul explains what those sacrifices are. Let's read about them in Romans 12:1:

Romans 12:1-2 – *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice – so, Christ's sacrificed for us, now it's our time to sacrifice for Him – holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship – or your reasonable service, it's called in other translations. Do not be conformed to this world – okay, this is what we're supposed to do – not to be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your*

mind – renewal of your mind. How does that happen? Well...*that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* We all make mistakes. And while we're doing that, we're testing the limits of what God wants for us. So, this is a project for people who are not perfect yet. So, we're seeking out what is perfect, and in doing that, we're trying to set a good example for people who don't understand God yet.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by your experience with God living in you to know and follow God's will. Be a good Christian when at work, while at church, while at school, with your kids, with your mate. Notice that being a living stone is not something we do instead of being a parent, an employee, a homemaker, a church member. It's something we do intentionally *while* we are doing all these things. It's the *way* we do them.

Now, it takes a little additional time because we do the living stone thing while we're doing the things of daily life, and sometimes, it takes some provision for those things. It takes prayer. However, it won't happen if we don't do as Paul said: set our minds on the things above. That's where our main effort is – to set our minds on the things above. Don't do it the way of the world, or the way *you* would do it, the way you've done it in the past. Think about how God would want you to do it and how He would do it. We do these things as we pray and listen to God – looking for answers.

So, being a lively stone in the temple of God is not an impossible responsibility. It would be if we did not have God the Father and Jesus the Christ living in us. But they *are* there. With their liveliness, their values and their loving outlook, if we tap into that, if we set our minds on them and on their things, God and Christ promised us that we can be lively in the same way they are – lively stones in the temple of our God.