

1st Peter 2:4-10

Coming to the Living Stone

To whom coming as unto a living stone – v. 4

These verses in 1st Peter 2 reveal Christ to us in a way that you don't find in other places of the Bible. He is called in v. 4 *a living stone*. In v. 6 He's called a *chief corner stone*; In v. 7 He's a *disallowed stone*; V. 8 – *a stone of stumbling* and in a similar vein *a rock of offense*.

The image of stones can bring a number of things to mind from the Bible. It seems most often you find reference made to the use of stones for the execution of a criminal. In such a case you can picture men picking up large stones but not so large that they can't be lifted; and you can envision them lifting such stones over their heads with both hands and then hurling them at the criminal who was condemned to die.

In another instance you can think of a larger stone still – a stone large enough to cover the entrance into a grave which itself could be carved out of an even larger stone. So in the case of Christ we read of the women coming to His grave with the intention of taking Christ's body that they might embalm it and as they draw near to the grave they're perplexed over a matter: *Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?* – they ask in Mk. 16:3. Evidently such a stone was too large and too heavy for the 3 of them to handle.

When you think of the temple in Jerusalem, you can envision it as a structure built with stones. As Christ and His disciples left the upper room and made their way to the garden of Gethsemane the disciples pointed out to Christ how the temple was adorned with *goodly stones* to which Christ replied by prophesying that not one stone would be left upon another when the temple would be give over to the destruction of the Roman army.

I'm reminded of the stone in Daniel 2 cut out of the mountain, made without hands, which smites the image of gold and silver and bronze and iron and completely demolishes it, symbolizing the glorious truth that Christ's Kingdom prevails in the end and lasts forever. Or how about the 5 smooth stones that David takes from the brook and with one of them brings down the giant Goliath. So extensive is the use of stones in the Bible that among the collected works of Spurgeon can be found a series entitled *What the Stones Say* with the sub-title: *Sermons in Stones*.

Now when it comes to the connection to Christ and a stone, we're not left in doubt about what that connection means. Peter is drawing from two different verses in the Old Testament in the verses we've read from 1st Peter 2. The first quote is from Isa. 28:16 *Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner [stone], a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.* The other reference is to Psalm 118:22 *The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.*

Christ Himself would quote this verse to His adversaries and Matthew, Mark, and Luke would recount Christ's use of the verse. And Peter in Acts 4 would cite the verse following the healing of the lame man when the Jewish leaders would seek to suppress the preaching of Christ. A contributor to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia notes with regard to corner stones that there appears to be two concepts behind the idea. It can refer to a foundation stone upon which a structure rested. This same contributor makes an interesting observation about the pagan practices of corner stones, how it would be the practice in pagan rituals to put the remains of human sacrifices under these foundation stones as a means of consecration to their false gods. It's been suggested that this barbaric and pagan practice may have been one of the contributing factors that led God to pronounce a curse upon anyone that would rebuild the city of Jericho.

The other concept behind the corner stone has to do with such a stone being a capstone which would hold two tiers of a building together. In either case the corner stone or the head stone would serve an essential foundational purpose and would therefore be a fitting emblem for the Messiah. What I want to focus on this morning are the reasons we come to Christ, the living stone. Have you come to Him? Will you come to Him? Do you come to Him? Our text speaks of coming to Him in His capacity as a living stone – *to whom coming as unto a living stone.*

And so the question I want to raise and then answer is simply this:

Why Do You Come to Christ as Unto a Living Stone?

I. Because Christ is A Sure Foundation

When the Lord drew near to Job near the end of Job's sufferings, the Lord interrogated Job and called on Job to give account. I can't help but remark every time I think of the end of that book how throughout the book Job has the desire to call God to give an account and many who read the book of Job do so with a wrong sense of anticipation as if to say that God needs to explain Himself or give account for what He subjects His creatures to. The very opposite is what happens when God draws near. It's God who call on Job to give account.

And the way God does that is to ask Job a lot of searching questions about who can do what, and where were you when I did this, or that or the other thing. So in Job 38:4 we read *Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. 5 Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? 6 Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof.*

The emphasis here is on God being the Creator and Ruler of the world. He laid the foundation of the earth. God laid the corner stone thereof. And He did so with a foundational purpose in view which was to display the glory of His grace in redemption. So there's a sense in which Christ is the foundation of all creation. This world was created

for Him. *For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, Paul writes in Col. 1:16 visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.*

He is the foundation of the world. You cannot understand the purpose for which this world exists without coming to Christ, the living stone. He is the One who gives meaning and purpose to this world. And apart from viewing Him as that foundation stone of the world, your worldview or the way you view everything in this world is going to be defective. And that is the case with many even with most in this present world. Christ-rejecters either have no sense of purpose or they have a distorted sense of purpose. Even among those that may adopt for themselves a charitable purpose who devote themselves to humanitarian causes – even their worldview is distorted. It's distorted because it's shortsighted. It can see no further than this present world and so they're devoted exclusively to the here and now.

When you come to Christ, however, as unto that Living Stone, you see in Him the purpose for which this world was made and you're able to affirm with Paul in Rom. 11:36 *For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.* It's interesting to note how the worship of heaven focuses on Christ as that headstone or cornerstone. So we read in Rev. 4:9-11 *And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, 10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

Christ as the focal point of the ages comes into even sharper focus when you read into the next chapter of the book of Revelation; for in that chapter the focus shifts from Creation to Redemption and it's certainly with regard to redemption that we come to Christ as that Living Stone which is the head of the corner. So we read in Rev. 5:9,10 *And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; 10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.*

Now the purpose of the ages comes into very sharp focus and the foundational purpose of this world is Christ, not just as the Creator of the world and the focal point of Creation but as the Redeemer of this world, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world it says later in the book of Revelation. Listen to what Paul writes to the Ephesians in Eph. 2:19-21 *Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:*

Now I think it's important to remember the condition of the Christians that Peter is addressing in this epistle. He's writing to suffering Christians. He's writing to those who were undergoing fiery trials. There was a price to be paid for following Christ and those Jewish believers especially were paying that price. And Christians throughout the world today are paying that price. And you and I may soon be called on to pay such a price for identifying with Christ.

The temptation in such circumstances is to focus exclusively on what is immediately before you. Peter would have his readers see the bigger picture and the Holy Spirit by inspiring and preserving Peter's epistle would have Christians in every age see the bigger picture. The bigger picture, you see, recognizes Christ as foundational to all that has taken place and to all that will take place in this world. He is the Living Stone, you see. He is that chief corner stone. He is that foundation stone that goes way beyond your immediate circumstances. His purpose of redemption transcends your light and temporal afflictions and extends to every land as well as to every generation throughout history and into the future until time is no more.

So catch the vision. That's what Peter's teaching us to do. Catch the vision of the purpose of the ages by coming to Christ as unto a living stone, as unto that chief corner stone because in so doing you will avoid being confused or confounded. You see what he says in v. 6? *Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.*

The word *confounded* means to be put to shame. The one who believes in Christ will not be ashamed. The quote is different here than the Hebrew of Isa. 28:16. There it says that the one who believes in Christ *shall not make haste*. I like the comment of Jameson, Faucet, and Brown who bring both ideas together and say that the meaning of the verse is that the one who believes in Christ will not flee in sudden panic covered with the shame of confounded hopes.

Now before I leave this point of coming to Christ as unto a living stone because Christ is a sure foundation I need to at least mention one other sense in which this is true. I've set before you the truth that Christ is the foundation or the focal point for Creation. He's also the foundation for Redemption which is the same as saying that He's the foundation of the Church. You'll notice in v. 6 that Peter makes reference to the Scripture: *Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.* It's worth noting in connection with Scripture that Christ is the foundation or the focal point of the Scripture also.

The book is about Him. *Search the Scriptures* Christ says in Jn. 5:39 *for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And beginning at Moses we read in Lk. 24:27 and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.* If you lose sight of the grand theme or the grand design of Scripture it can become easy to twist and distort the Bible in order to make to say about anything you want it to say. And this kind of distortion is readily seen in our day by politicians who

want to use the Bible to defend their political policies or even by sinners who want to use the Scriptures to defend their sin. To understand the Bible aright you must understand the over arching theme of the Bible which is the redemption of this sin cursed world by the blood atonement of Jesus Christ.

So that's the first reason, then, that you come to Christ as unto a living stone – because Christ is a sure foundation. He's the foundation stone, the chief corner stone and *other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ* (1Cor. 3:11). But let's think next on the truth that we come to Christ as unto a living stone:

II. Because Christ is Our Vitality

And here is where the imagery gets a little challenging. You come to Christ *as unto a living stone* Peter writes in our text. But tell me – have you ever seen a living stone? A stone, or a rock is an inanimate object. I wanted to be sure I was using that word *inanimate* correctly so I looked it up. It's defined as *not having the qualities associated with active living organisms. See synonyms at dead.*

Now the Scripture makes use of stones or rocks even in this inanimate sense to convey glorious truths to us about our Savior. Ps 18:2 *The LORD [is] my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, [and] my high tower.* And later in that same Psalm in v. 31 *For who is God save the LORD? or who is a rock save our God?*

Here is an instance (and there are many of them) in which the truth conveyed by the image of a rock or a stone is something that is unmovable and is fixed and steady. The rock of Gibraltar comes to mind which (if I'm not mistaken) an insurance company uses as a logo in order to convey the notion that this company is solid and sure. How much more is our salvation fixed and certain and sure. *He is the Rock*, we read in Deut. 32:4 *his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.*

The Psalm upon which Martin Luther based his hymn *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* is Psalm 46. In that Psalm the steadfastness of God our Rock is conveyed in the opening words *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; 3 Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.* Christ as our Rock is more fixed and sure than the mountains that shake or the waters that roar.

As our refuge He shelters us even from the fury of God's wrath. That wrath fell on Him and He endured it and prevailed against it and thus became our refuge, our shelter, our high tower to save us from the judgment that sin calls for. So these aspects of Christ conveyed by the image of a stone or a rock is not hard to grasp and should indeed thrill your soul.

But again I come to the dilemma of the image which is a living stone. How do you envision a living stone? You've perhaps seen cartoon fairytales in which the trees of the forest come alive and talk. A scene from the Wizard of Oz comes to mind in which Dorothy and her company pick apples off a tree only to have that tree address them and call them out for the rudeness in picking apples off a living tree.

Is that what we're to think about now with the imagery of a living stone? Albert Barnes comment is helpful. He writes:

The phrase "living stone" is ... unusual, and is not found, I think, except in this place. There seems to be an incongruity in it, in attributing life to a stone, yet the meaning is not difficult to be understood. The purpose was not to speak of a temple, like that at Jerusalem, made up of gold and costly stones; but of a temple made up of living materials — of redeemed men — in which God now resides. In speaking of that, it was natural to refer to the foundation on which the whole rested, and to speak of that as corresponding to the whole edifice. It was all a living temple — a temple composed of living materials — from the foundation to the top. Compare the expression in #Joh 4:10, "He would have given thee living water"; that is, water which would have imparted life to the soul. So Christ imparts life to the whole spiritual temple that is reared on him as a foundation.

Barnes' comment is certainly reinforced by the words of Peter himself in the next verse — v. 5 *Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.* The point being under this heading that Christ is not only our refuge and high tower and defense — but He's also the source of our spiritual vitality.

And if the idea of a living stone is too hard to come to grips with along with you being lively stones then perhaps Christ's words in Jn. 15 would be easier to grasp where Christ refers to Himself as the vine and we as the branches. So we read in Jn. 15:5 *I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

Under the imagery of a living stone two ideas come together — Christ our rock or refuge or strong tower as well as Christ our source of spiritual vitality. Christ Himself said *I am the way, the truth, and the life.* He is the source of all life and He is the provider of your spiritual life. And because we come to Him as unto a living stone, we come to one who is strong whose resources are infinite in terms of His being able to provide all that you need for life and godliness both in this world and in that which is to come.

Why, then, do we come to Christ as unto a living stone? We do so because He is the foundation of the ages and He is the source of our spiritual vitality. There is another perspective that we have to consider to round out our study. It's the negative side of the equation, so to speak. Consider with me finally that we come to Christ as unto a living stone:

III. Because to Do Otherwise is to Stumble and Disobey

Note the words of vv. 7,8: *Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, 8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.*

You'll notice from these verses that the two things that are contrasted to each other are belief (or faith) and disobedience. It's a fitting contrast because unbelief really amounts to disobedience. You're commanded to believe. The word given to the Philippian jailer was *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house* (Acts 16:31).

To those that refuse to obey, it's not as if they haven't been left with many infallible proofs. Luke writes in Acts 1 that Christ *shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.* When we studied the books of Acts many years ago I pointed out from this verse that the thing that rendered the Lord's proofs infallible were not simply His resurrection appearances, or the miracles He performed. Those were certainly powerful testimonies to the eyes of the Apostles but the thing that rendered those proofs infallible was the fact that they aligned themselves with what the Scriptures taught.

O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken, Christ said to those Emmaus road disciples 26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? 27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself (Lk. 24:25-27). His resurrection appearances by aligning with the Scriptures made His proofs infallible.

And such infallible proofs render unbelief inexcusable. But why is it that men don't believe today? Why is it that Christ's kingdom has not yet brought every nation under gospel dominion? The answer is supplied by our text. Men refuse to believe because instead of coming to Christ as unto a living stone they instead stumble over that stone and they stubbornly resist that stone and are offended by that stone.

They trip over their pride. They trip over the very notion that they even need a Savior. They are offended by the doctrine of man's sin and man's depravity. And so they stubbornly refuse to believe. Whenever I think along these lines, John 9 comes to mind. There you have the account of Christ healing a blind man. And you see the concerted effort that's put forth by the Pharisees to deny the miracle. They demand an explanation from the healed blind man and then they demand an explanation from the blind man's parents. And then they interrogate the blind man again. And throughout the course of the narration it becomes very apparent that they're desperately searching for a way to deny the miracle because if they admit the miracle they would have to admit the ramifications of the miracle which would be that the Messiah was surely among them.

So when the healed blind man asks them if they would become followers of Christ they become enraged and offended and put him out of the synagogue. And Christ-rejecters have

been doing the same thing ever since. Anything but admit that Christ is the promised Messiah and the Savior of sinners. It's in this connection that Christ issued a solemn warning in Mt. 21:42 *Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? 43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. 44 And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*

Do you see the alternative, then, to coming to Christ as unto a living stone? This is especially true for those who have been taught the gospel. You will either come or you will stumble. You will either believe or you'll disobey. Now before we close this study I should at least clarify the statement in v. 8 that speaks of Christ-rejecters being appointed to their doom. Notice what it says there beginning with v. 7:

Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, 8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

Do you see what it says with regard to their unbelief? They were appointed to it. We have to be careful not to read more into the passage than what God intends. I don't believe we should view the order of decrees in such a way as to suggest that God needed people to damn and so he created sinners for the purpose of damning them. I believe a right view of the decrees must presuppose sin before it takes into account God's dealings with sin.

But do you see what Peter is doing by saying they were appointed to their disobedience? He's stripping them of being able to glory in their rebellion and disobedience. There's no place, even in hell, for rebels against Christ to say *I could have chosen Christ but I didn't. I chose to defy Him and I glory in my rebellion.* To which Peter says in effect – no, you were passed over and therefore appointed to your rebellion.

And so would you have passed over and so would I have been passed over but by God's sovereign grace you were chosen – chosen to believe. *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (v. 8).*

And so this morning I wonder – have you come to Christ as unto a living stone? Will you come to Him? Do you come to Him as a matter of practice? If you do then you have cause to glory in Him today. Thank Him for His grace and mercy and make sure that your present brief and temporal afflictions don't rob you of seeing the big picture. Things could have been so much worse for you. You could have been appointed to your disobedience. You could have stumbled over that living stone but instead you came. You cause for thanksgiving this morning. And to those who stubbornly refuse to come – you should beg God for mercy. You should seek Him for the faith that's needed to save your soul. May the Lord work in each and every heart this morning.