

Theme: Faith in Exile

Title: Living Stones – I Peter 2:4-8

Aim: See ourselves as living stones aligned w/Christ, the Cornerstone.

Intro: There was a song written in 1971 by Norman Whitfield & Bennet Strong & made famous by the group “The Temptations” – “Papa Was a Rolling Stone.” The words to the chorus are “Papa was a rolling stone. Wherever he laid his hat was his home. And when he died, all he left us was alone.” Quite sad & all too common. By definition, a rolling stone is “a person who is unwilling to settle for long in one place.” Even before that song was written there was a British rock band called “The Rolling Stones,” formed in 1962 – I never really liked them (my favorite of that time was Creedence Clearwater Revival). Now the Rolling Stones probably could be called “The Rolling Wheelchairs.” There is also an American monthly magazine called “Rolling Stone,” focusing on music, politics & popular culture. I confess, I’ve never read it. But I wonder is the Christian exiles to whom Peter wrote felt like they were reluctant rolling stones, not settled down since they were uprooted & scattered by persecution, no longer having a place to call home, away from family. Even as believers, perhaps they felt like they didn’t belong, wherever they were. In reality, dispersed by God for the purpose of spreading the gospel & the Kingdom of God. But did they feel like unstable rolling stones, w/no sure foundation for their lives? Maybe you feel like that sometimes - unsettled, no firm foundation, unsure, unstable. Peter tells us that if we are in Christ, that’s simply not true. Theme: Faith in exile. Christians have been dispersed by God throughout the world for the purpose of spreading the gospel, being His ambassadors. Though we are scattered exiles, we are not alone, nor w/out foundation. I Peter 2:4-8 [READ]. As Peter exhorted these exiles to love one another & love the Word of God, he reminded them of God’s goodness, which they had experienced. Sometimes we need such a reminder also. It’s easy to lose sight of God’s goodness in the midst of the struggles of our lives but we must always go back to it. Realign, realign, realign. Peter wanted those exiles to remember who Christ is & understand who they were in Christ.

We need to know the same. I) **Remember who Jesus is.** “As you come to Him...” In every phase of life, in every situation, we need to come to Jesus. When things are good, come to Jesus w/praise & thanksgiving. When things are tough, come to Jesus in prayer. When you need direction, come to Jesus for wisdom. Come to Jesus. He is a “**living stone.**” No rolling stone, but a living stone. “He’s alive, alive, alive hallelujah, alive forever, amen!” No rolling stone, but a cornerstone. A cornerstone is a larger stone, used in building a structure, from which the foundation is aligned. Two walls can & must be aligned w/that cornerstone. Everything in that structure depends upon that cornerstone. Jesus is our cornerstone, our foundation stone, upon which we can & must build our lives (or allow the Master Builder to build our lives). Those exiles were not w/out foundation. Jesus was their firm foundation. It may be that everything seems to be crumbling all around us/you, but if you have Jesus, you have a firm foundation which will not crumble. Hold fast to Him. It was also important for those exiles to remember that Jesus was “**rejected by men.**” Isaiah wrote prophetically about Jesus the Messiah, “*He was despised & rejected by men, a man of sorrows & acquainted w/grief, as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, & we esteemed Him not*” (Is.53:3). John wrote of Jesus, the living Word, “*He came to His own, & His own people did not receive Him*” (John 1:11). Just like they had been rejected, so Jesus was. They were not alone in their struggle. Neither are you. Come to Jesus. Remember also that tho Jesus was rejected by men, in the sight of His Father God, He was “**chosen & precious.**” He was God’s chosen Messiah, sent to carry out His redemptive plan. “*There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*” but Jesus (Acts 4:12). He also is God’s precious Son. Precious means to be held in honor, prized. When Jesus had died on the cross & been raised from the dead & ascended into heaven to the Father’s side, we’re told by Paul that He was “*highly exalted*” & “*bestowed on Him*” was “*the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...& every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...*” (Phil.2:9-

11). The message I believe Peter intended, born out by the words which follow, was “you are chosen by God & precious to Him, too!” He wanted them to II) **Understand who you are.** Just like Jesus, those in Christ are “**living stones.** Not rolling stones, but founded upon Christ. We are alive because He is alive – not just physically alive, but spiritually, connected w/God the Father, our Father because He is Jesus’ Father. We are part of His family. And because Jesus is the cornerstone, we who believe & follow Him are living building stones, being “***built up as a spiritual house.***” One stone, even the cornerstone, does not make a house, but many stones brought together, aligned w/the cornerstone, built w/a purpose, built w/order & form. That’s what makes a house. How important for those exiles to understand, “You’re not alone! And you’re not w/out purpose!” And that’s vital for us to understand as well. We’re being built together by God the Master Builder to be His house, His temple. This magnificent structure fills the whole world, wherever God’s people are. We are the Church, God’s household! Those exiles needed to understand they were part of something big, greater than themselves. They were part of what God was doing. We need to remember the same. There’s only one Church & we’re but an outpost, yet part of the whole. How important is the Church! You can’t be a building block if you never darken the door of the church. You can’t be a building block if you isolate yourself or never participate. Peter was saying to those exiles, “love one another, love the Word of God & work together for God’s purposes. That’s why you’re where you are.” He wanted them to understand that they were “**to be a holy priesthood.**” Maybe those exiles were missing the security of the Jewish priests who offered sacrifices on behalf of the people & represented them before God. But they didn’t & we don’t need any other mediator between us & God but Jesus, our great High Priest. Because of Jesus we can enter the very throne room of God & always find welcome & mercy & grace to help in time of need (Heb.4:16). Come to Jesus, come to the Father thru Jesus! Peter was also saying that we – all who are in Christ – are a holy priesthood! We are priests unto God – male & female, mind you. We

can come into His presence. We are called to His work. We can “*offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*” What does that mean? The 1st spiritual sacrifice is the acceptance of & obedience to the gospel, not depending on ourselves or our good works for salvation but wholly leaning/resting on Jesus & what He has done. Not depending on religion but relying on relationship w/God thru faith in Christ. Then is the sacrifice of self – surrendered to the Lordship of Christ. Then is the sacrifice of praise (Heb.13:15) – rejoicing in the saving grace of God & worshipping Him daily & together, even when you don’t feel like praise. There is also the sacrifice of service, of prayer, of love, etc. – giving yourself away to serve God in any way because you love Him & love others in His name. Every sacrificial gift to God in faith is acceptable to Him & pleasing to Him. III) **Recognize & enjoy the blessing.** Peter gave the Scriptural basis for his encouraging exhortation by quoting Isaiah 28:16 [Read vs6]. Notice that the description is the same, “chosen & precious.” As we have said before, a number of times, God had a plan from before the beginning, to gather a people of His own & build a temple of His own & establish an eternal kingdom. The cornerstone was always to be the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became the Son of Man to carry out the plan. In Psalm 2:6, God said thru the Psalmist, “*As for Me, I have set My King on Zion, My holy hill.*” The promise is, “*whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.*” Maybe those exiles felt a sort of misplaced shame in being scattered. Maybe they felt that God did not accept them. Maybe you feel that way because of some circumstance of your life. You think you should be doing better, being better. Peter assures us, “No, w/you God is pleased, because you have believed & embraced Christ as Savior/Lord.” Yes, we may well feel like outsiders when most of those w/whom we work & those who live around us & much of society consider us odd because we believe & follow Christ. But there is honor in faith in Jesus. We share the preciousness of Christ in the Father’s eyes. We will not be put to shame when Jesus comes, but we shall share in the Kingdom; we shall inherit the earth made new. It is

as commentator Adam Clarke wrote, “the honor of being in this building, and of having your souls saved through the blood of the Lamb, and becoming sons and daughters of God Almighty.” (Clarke) Those who reject Christ are those who will be put to shame, who will be crushed by the very stone over which they stumble. Only faith in Christ will lead us to eternity. Pray for those w/out Christ. Be a witness for Christ. Let the Church be the Church, a people accepted & used by God for His kingdom’s sake. It requires faith – faith in exile.