

# *Truth for Today*

## **The Bible Explained**

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## **Pairs in Peter**

### **Living stone, spiritual house**

*[New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

#### **Introduction**

I am sure everyone who is listening to this knows the phrase 'every cloud has a silver lining.' The phrase is actually more amusing if you switch it around, that for every silver lining there is a cloud. How quickly perspective changes the outlook of what we are considering. With this phrase we can see that there are always two sides to things, and always a reminder that what is represented can be looked at differently depending on the circumstances. I would imagine, for example, that a rain cloud would be welcomed by a farmer during a drought, but the silver lining would be a reminder that the hot sun was not far behind.

There is an element of this in the subject that I am taking up in today's talk, which is the first in a new series looking at pairs in Peter's writings. The first pair is Living stone, spiritual house and is the first in a set of pairs captured in verses 5-10 of chapter 2 in the first epistle of Peter. All of the pairs offer an element of different perspectives, but perhaps there would be a case to say that there is more of a contrast in the perspectives given for this first pair by the two onlookers being considered – the world or men, and God. It is almost as if we are the cloud in this pair – if we were to take up the silver lining phrase again – where on one side we enjoy the wondrous warmth and glow of the sun and on the other, there is the darkness and shadow of the rejection of mankind.

Having said all this, there are several other things to consider with this pair, notwithstanding the great example of the Lord Jesus who is described as a living stone in the passage in question. Living stones are how believers are described in verse 5 of the passage. Although the title takes the singular title, the focus of the topic will be on the idea of each believer being a living stone built up as a spiritual house. But it is worth reading the passage to get the context of these things. Chapter 2 of 1 Peter, verses 1 to 8, reads:

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame. Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone, and "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

## **The importance of belief in Christ**

In reading this passage, we get a real sense that there are only two types of people in the passage, providing the reminder that this was written to believers. Although this is perhaps an obvious point, it does highlight the importance of the two-fold option there is, when it comes to the Lord Jesus. It is either acceptance or rejection. There are no other options presented here and, although it may not be the first thing that comes to mind when we are considering First Peter, the Gospel is nevertheless where I want to start, because it is so important. This passage speaks of rejection and stumbling for those who do not accept the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. But for those who accept His work of salvation, it speaks of them being acceptable to God.

This therefore is the key thing for us therefore as part of the Gospel message. It begins with a hopeless situation in which we cannot do anything to make ourselves acceptable to God. We are lost and without hope in this world, destined only to face the wrath of God in eternity. But the Gospel presents the solution in the Lord Jesus Christ who has provided the means of salvation by giving himself at Calvary for our sin. He gave His life in our place and was raised on the third day from the dead to show God's acceptance of that work. Having done so, everyone is given the opportunity to receive this salvation and become acceptable to God. Thereafter we can look forward to a time when we will be with our Lord Jesus forever.

It is great, good news for those of us who are saved, and we should never forget how great a work it is and what it has meant for us. But it is also terrible news for those who do not accept this Gospel. We must start at this point because sometimes when people know the Bible, they can comment on passages and know what the words are, and go through the motions, but they have not actually come to the Lord Jesus. Some continue to reject Him and as such are living without being acceptable to God. I trust that all who are listening have made that choice – and, as has already been mentioned, it is a choice between two parties – which means we are among those who have come to Jesus and accepted this great salvation. All further points about living stones and spiritual houses are irrelevant if this step has not been taken.

## **A living stone – linked with Christ**

Peter describes the Lord Jesus as a living stone which is a unique but telling title of the Lord Jesus. This title for the Lord Jesus is only given in this part of the Bible, and it seems to be directly linked to the idea of the spiritual house that God is building. The importance of it is that there is only one Saviour, Jesus Christ. As such there is only one spiritual house and that one spiritual house is all centred around its foundation and cornerstone that is Christ.

The living stone title brings to mind several aspects of Jesus' work. Living points to the resurrection of Jesus Christ which shows the acceptance and completeness of His work of salvation. He is the chosen stone of the Father in heaven, although rejected by the world. The role of this living stone is important in the structure the Father is making, and as such it is the most precious because He is clearly the one that brings and holds all together.

Because the Lord Jesus is a living stone with all of these features, all those who believe on Him are also described as living stones. In essence we are associated with Him. We are living because we too have been raised to new life with Him. We are chosen to be a part of the building work of God, and we are precious to God because of our link with Christ. We are indeed alive, dependable and essential in the structure that the living God is working on. All because of Christ. We can see why trusting in the truth of the Gospel is so important!

## **A living stone – rejected as Christ**

Of course, there is a further aspect of Christ as a living stone that we are to be associated with, and this is emphasised by the quotations from the Psalms and Isaiah in verses 7 and 8. These tell us of the rejection that the Lord Jesus faced here on earth. This is where my thought of a cloud came from earlier on. We see here the reality of what Christ suffered and what we will also face in

this world. The living stone is either the means of salvation, or it is rejected by men. Jesus warned His disciples of this in John chapter 15 verse 20:

Remember the word that I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

When Jesus walked amongst men all those years ago, He was utterly rejected. He was not the Messiah they were looking for, and He brought to light their hypocrisy and sin. People are still like this today. The Gospel message that we present is not what people want. It requires men and women to realise their need of salvation and their need to acknowledge that they are indeed sinners. The Lord is described as a rock of offence, and indeed the Gospel is offensive to people because it challenges everything about the lives they are living. People would rather be told that God is pleased with them, but our message says the opposite. Therefore, how we live and the message we present will cause the same response from the world around us.

We see this more and more today. Ways of living that used to be accepted as normal and proper are now seen as dangerous and naïve. Christians are accused of being intolerant, indoctrinating and of presenting foolishness to people. The Christian message is rapidly becoming an unacceptable message to people in the UK and as such we are indeed likely to be rejected by men. We are to expect the same rejection and suffering that Christ Jesus experienced in this world.

### **A living stone – used by God**

But this should not put us off. We may be rejected by the world, but not so by God. Let us consider what the “living” aspect of a living stone brings out again. We have been made alive through Christ Jesus. We have new life; we have been raised out of spiritual death. The opposite of a living stone is a dead stone. We should let that truth sink in. A dead stone is certainly of no use to God. It is utterly rejected and reserved for judgement. But a living stone is useful to God and will ultimately bask in the victory that has been won through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 6 may seem to end with a contradiction in that it says,

He who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.

We have just been talking about how we will be rejected like Christ was. Rejection in this world means shame for us in many respects. But this verse is a long-term view, as well as our current position before God. Paul says he counted everything as loss compared to what he had gained in Christ. This is a bold statement, but it is something we should try to grasp for ourselves. The long-term view is far more glorious than anything that this world has to offer. We should indeed rejoice that we have been made worthy to be of use to God.

### **Spiritual house**

This allows us to move onto the second of our pair, the spiritual house. We are now in the silver lining as it were and considering what is on the other side of that cloud now. If we can be used by God, we see in the spiritual house what God is going to use us for.

Where I live, I have seen the changes and developments of the city. There have been numerous new high buildings that have vastly changed the skyline. Whatever people’s view of high buildings may be, especially glass ones that many don’t like, the fact remains that such things are somewhat impressive to see as you pass by them. Mankind has always been building and reaching for the sky with grander and more impressive structures. But all of this is ultimately going to have one outcome and that is decay, judgement and destruction.

God has an ongoing master building project, and remarkably He uses every living stone made available to Him. His building project involves every believer placed exactly where they are supposed to fit into the spiritual house, all tied in to the Lord Jesus, the chief cornerstone. The purpose of this building project is to bring together the Church as a single entity that God can dwell in and enjoy that relationship with His creation once again as it was always supposed to be. We learn this from the last few verses of Ephesians chapter 2 (verses 19 to 22) which state:

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

As we read these things about the great building project of God there are features that should give us great encouragement. Firstly, there is the eternal nature of this. The world has rejected the Lord Jesus, preferring its own plans and ideas, and we have seen just how fragile these things have become over recent years. This project is one that is designed to last. It is to be the dwelling place of God, and as God is eternal and outside of time, it makes sense that His building project is as well. What a reassurance it is to know that what God plans and makes using us as living stones is something that will last!

We also have the assurance of being accepted by God. How often in society do we see outcasts and those who no place is found for. Indeed, the Lord Jesus was treated in this way when He walked on this earth. But there is no suggestion that there is any living stone that is not used by God. There is always the right place for each one. Each one will fit perfectly into the structure. We need never feel rejected and unwanted when considering the building of this spiritual house.

There is also the assurance that we are precious to God. It is a key building project for God. Now let us consider this for a moment. We are dealing with a holy and righteous God who cannot tolerate sin in any way. He is the First and the Last and is over all things. Yet here we read that He is using each believer to produce this home for himself. A home is a place of comfort and rest that we all want to spend time in. That is what God is effectively doing with each of us. We are that place where God wishes to be!

Another feature of this spiritual house that is worth considering is the nature of being built together alongside all other believers. We have more encouragement here, in that we are not alone in our Christian walk but are already part of a vast company of believers who can support us. God declared in Eden that it is not good for man to be alone. That is the same in the Church and we have the benefit of not only being supported, but also of being corrected and challenged that we are indeed behaving and living in accord with our status as living stones who are being built up by God into a spiritual house. This is how God has ordained it to be for His church and as such it should not be something to be avoided. We should be mindful of the implications for our walk here in this world. Often the expectation that believers have is how a local assembly of believers can be useful to us in our church attendance. The thought of being used by God for His spiritual house should make us consider more how we can serve and be of use there for those who are also part of that same house.

### **Practical implications**

Such thoughts bring me to my final considerations of this topic. Because we have believed in the Lord Jesus, we are living stones and part of God's spiritual house. However, it is not a coincidence that 1 Peter 2:1 also talks about the things that we are to lay aside. There may be an argument to make that we do lay them aside when we come to Christ, but Peter was writing to believers, and the text does not seem to suggest that it is something we have done and therefore do not have to

worry about now. Peter is reminding his readers of the sort of behaviours they should avoid as those who are in this situation. Our state before God is not simply something that we are aware of, but which allows us to carry on living how we please. It is something that we must strive to live up to during our Christian lives.

Both items in the pair have specific challenges for us. If we take the living stone first, there is the challenge of whether our lives reflect the “living” part. Are we living as those born again to new life in Christ or are we not much different than we were before we were saved? Are we known as those who indeed are Christ-like? There is also the aspect of our suffering for Christ. Do people know that we do not follow the world’s ways, but live according to the word of God? This particular aspect will become increasingly more challenging as we see the society we live in change. Living for Christ is no longer socially acceptable, so we must have that thought in mind: ‘Because the world persecuted the Lord Jesus, it will also persecute us.’

Just as an aside, the description of living stone is an interesting one as we can be apt to just act like natural stones. The idea of a living stone would reflect vitality and activity. When we read about the Lord, He was very active, especially according to the Gospel of Mark, where all of His activities undertaken tend to start with ‘immediately.’ If we remember the conditions that Jesus was living in and the shocking spiritual state of Israel, we would have forgiven Him for being a bit downcast or hesitant, but He went about His tasks eagerly! We even read in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 2 that He went to the cross with joy before Him because of what the work would result in. We can have a tendency to be more like plain stones rather than living stones. We can be such that we are not really eager to follow the Lord but just going through the motions. Sometimes the thought that the Lord is coming soon gives us an air of resignation. We should not be like that. Jesus did His work quickly because He knew the time was short, and He really did know what He was to face and when it would take place. If the Lord is indeed coming soon – and we must feel it will be soon – then our remaining time to please God as living stones is short and we should take the opportunities that are afforded to us to be active in our lives in the service of God.

But let us consider the impact that being part of a spiritual house should have on us. This spiritual house is being built up to offer spiritual sacrifices to God. God who will dwell in this spiritual house. So, do we live in the light of this? A helpful analogy would be to imagine if God knocked on the door one day to announce that he was going to walk alongside us for a few weeks, visibly here with us. What would He find? Would He end the time thinking that He was pleased with the time He had spent with us, or would there be, like the old school report cards, “room for improvement?” Our position in this spiritual house is assured, but our lives may not be aligned to that position which we hold. The text that we have read talks about spiritual sacrifices. Sacrifices are supposed to cost something. The story of King David when he had sinned by counting the people, ends when he offers a sacrifice to God. The field which he was to buy for the sacrifice was offered freely by the owner, but David refuses and looks to pay the proper price saying, in verse 24 of Second Samuel Chapter 24,

...Nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing.

This precedent should be one that we follow as well. Does our walk with Christ cost us anything or do we only give what we have spare? It can be easy to take the pathway of least resistance in this world but in the end, although we may be saved, we will suffer loss when one day we stand before the Lord. We must also have in the mind the fact that nobody who comes into the presence of the Lord Jesus in heaven is going to feel that it wasn’t worth the loss they suffered in this world by following God. It is much more likely that we will feel that we were fools for not giving our all and disregarding this world’s luxuries for the service of Christ here.

## **Conclusion**

Passages such as this one can sometimes be among those that we know well and can overlook from time to time. I hope that this study and the subsequent studies in this series will remind us of how much help there is for us on our Christian lives in even the most well-known passages of the Bible. There is much to challenge us in these verses, especially the call for us to allow our lives to follow that of the example given to us by that great living stone Christ Jesus.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on Pairs in Peter – Living stone, spiritual house, talk number T1434.

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