

**West Valley Church**  
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## **Easter Sunday**

I, never in my life, would have imagined that one day I would be preaching on an Easter Sunday like this. In all my years of college and two graduate degrees, I don't remember a single class on "Pastoring and Preaching in a Pandemic." This is new to all of us. I have to take a minute though and tell you, we have an amazing pastoral staff in our church, who are finding new and creative ways to encourage our church and keep us growing in the Lord through this. And our support staff are doing all they can to make sure that West Valley Church continues to function. And, your Leadership Team and I – the church board that you elected – we've had several Zoom meetings to make sure West Valley Church still moves forward in our mission during this challenging time. But on this unusual Easter Sunday, I want to talk about rocks. And more specifically, about *The Rock* and his love for us.

Some of you know my story that over five years ago the car I was driving was struck by a motorcycle that caused my vehicle to go airborne, flipping through the air and then rolling down the embankment. In the process, my scalp was split from front to back. You can't tell now because of my hairpiece! I'm just kidding; it's my real hair, which is a good thing because if I had to shave my head like Pastor Jason or Pastor Roger, I wouldn't look anywhere near as good as they do – I'd have a scar running right down the middle of my head!

But when I was taken by ambulance into the emergency room, they began washing out my head, and a number of rocks from the road and the embankment had gotten into my head. So as the nurse was flushing out that wound, I asked her if she would please separate the rocks from the road and the rocks from head because I wanted her to put those back in my head. I need every one of those rocks in my head!

She saved those rocks for me – several of them of varying sizes. Later, a dear friend of mine gathered pictures of my car after the accident and from when I was in the hospital, then he took a few of the fourteen staples that went in my head, a couple of small pieces of my car, and a few of those rocks, and he made them into a shadow box that I keep in my office – a vivid reminder of how God was gracious to me. Awhile later, when I first went back up to the scene, I noticed that there was a large boulder (about this big), probably weighing about 75 pounds or so, that somehow my vehicle missed. I really don't know how I missed it, because it was directly in the line of where my car travelled.

So once again some good friends and I went up, found that large rock from the shoulder of the road, and we loaded it up and brought it to my house. I intend to have a hole drilled in it and turn it into a fountain in our back yard.

Both the little rocks in my shadow box and the big rock that will be a fountain serve as something the Bible calls an "altar" or "stones of remembrance" or a "stone of help." There are several occasions in the Bible that people used stones or rocks as a tangible reminders

of God's love and care and help. For example, when Joshua led God's people across the Jordan River into the Promised Land, God stopped the flow of the Jordan and they crossed on dry ground. On their way across, they picked up rocks from the dry river bed, and stacked them as an altar, or stones of remembrance, on the other side of the River. That way, whenever their kids saw that pile of stones, they could tell the children the amazing thing God had done for them. That's in Joshua 4.

In a way, many of you who found a rock from last week's sermon have kept it this last week as a sort of stone of remembrance; a reminder to you to make sure you are right with God, and to remind you to let your lives bring glory to God.

Rock, or rocks, or stones have a very prominent place in the Bible - "rock" or "rocks" is mentioned 180 times in the NIV translation, and "stone" or "stones" is mentioned over 550 times. That means "rock" or "stones" in some way are referred to in the Bible over 700 times. Besides being referred to from the purely physical aspect, like "there were stones in the road," rocks actually represent many different things. They can be reminders, stones of help, like the shadow box and large rock I have from my accident.

But far and away, the most uses of the term are in the Psalms. Time and time again, all through the Psalms, and not just there but especially there, God is referred to as our "Rock," or "The Rock." I'm not a big fan of the WWE, or the WWF, or the WWA, and I'm not even sure what those letters stand for besides "wrestling," but I can tell you that when the Bible refers to "The Rock," it is NOT referring to Duane Johnson! *God* is our rock - he is an immovable, solid, fortress, strong and secure, unshakeable in his love for us at all times. We are on solid footing when our lives are given over to our Rock and Redeemer. There is no greater, no more solid love for you than God's love for you in Christ.

All of that is best seen in the story of one particular rock - a huge rock. And because of what happened with that huge rock, everything has changed for you and me.

Here's the story: After Jesus had been crucified and died, he was buried in a tomb that had a large rock rolled in front of the entrance - the rock had been hewn into sort of a disk-shaped rock about five feet in diameter and probably 10-12 inches thick. So then a couple of the women went to the tomb on the third day to provide more burial treatments for his body. That's where we pick up the story in Luke 24:

"But very early on Sunday morning they took the ointments to the tomb— and found that the huge stone covering the entrance had been rolled aside. So they went in—but the Lord Jesus' body was gone.

They stood there puzzled, trying to think what could have happened to it. Suddenly two men appeared before them, clothed in shining robes so bright their eyes were dazzled. The women were terrified and bowed low before them.

Then the men asked, "Why are you looking in a tomb for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He has come back to life again! Don't you remember what he told you back in Galilee—that the Messiah must be betrayed into the power of evil men and be crucified and that he would rise again the third day?"

Then they remembered and rushed back to Jerusalem to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened." (Luke 24:1-10)

When that rock was rolled away, everything changed for you, me, and every human who has and will ever live.

And because of that rock, there are other rock stories in the Bible that begin to have deeper meaning. Take, for example, the time that the Israelites were wandering in the desert for forty years. Moses was trying to lead them to the Promised Land, which would have been an easy trip if they had taken the direct route out of Egypt – especially when God parted the Red Sea for them. But because of their sin, they were wandering in the wilderness for like 40 years. And as they were wandering in the desert, they got thirsty, so God told Moses to strike the rock and water would come out so the people could drink (Exodus 17:5-6). Later, in John 4:14, Jesus referred to himself as the water of life: “But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.” Jesus is the Rock from which the water of life springs, and when we drink of Him, we will never be thirsty again.

You might think I’m stretching things, but not according to the Apostle Paul, because he wrote this about that event in the desert:

“All of them drank the same spiritual water. For they drank from the spiritual rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ.” (1 Corinthians 10:4)

So listen: I don’t know what you are thirsty for, physically or emotionally or metaphorically, but no matter what it is, Jesus provides everything you are thirsting for in life. You might be thirsting for a promotion or admiration or accomplishment, and you are especially frustrated right now because all your ambition has nowhere to go. But Jesus gives you all the affirmation you need; there is no greater or more solid and sure love than God’s love for you in Christ.

Maybe you are thirsting for relationship or companionship, and right now you are really struggling because you are having to practice extreme social distancing. Jesus fulfills all of your ultimate need for relationship; there is no greater or more solid and sure love than God’s love for you in Christ; and when you experience that love, all other loves become secondary and find their fulfillment in him.

Let me give you another example: Jesus was teaching about how important it is to base our lives on him. This is what he said:

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” (Matthew 7:24-27).

I think in times like these, we realize how shaky everything can get; a little, small, virus in some obscure market in China has brought the entire global economy to a halt, overloaded our hospitals, killed around 100,000 people by today, and millions of people are sick and without jobs. The only sure foundation is to build your life on is Jesus, who “who does not change like shifting shadows.” (James 1:17) He outlasts any economy and any

pandemic. What do we say; the only sure things are death and taxes? Not with Jesus; he defeated death and he outlives all taxes. There is no greater or more solid and sure love than God's love for you in Christ.

This is the Jesus who is alive and able to be all these things in your life today because there was a rock that was rolled away. If that rock had stayed in front of that tomb, Jesus would be just another dead prophet, and your life and mine would be no different whatsoever. But because the rock rolled away and Jesus came out of the tomb alive, everything changed; not even death itself can take your life because you will live forever. So you don't have to be afraid of anything!

So how can you have this rock-solid life? You must give your temporary life to the One who holds forever life, and then build your life on Him. The Bible describes it in a certain way; the concept of a cornerstone. Of course, you know that a cornerstone is the most important part of the foundation. The cornerstone (or foundation stone or setting stone) is the first stone set in the construction of a foundation for a building or structure. All other stones will be set in reference to this stone, so it is the cornerstone that determines the outcome of the entire structure. In the Old Testament, God said this about the time when he would send his Son, the Rock:

“Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘Look! I am placing a foundation stone in Jerusalem, a firm and tested stone. It is a precious cornerstone that is safe to build on. Whoever believes need never be shaken.’ (Isaiah 28:16)

So we must build our lives on *that* cornerstone – Jesus. In fact, you either believe in him and build your life on him, or you don't. There are many people who reject him. God talked about this again in Scripture when he said:

“See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.” (Romans 9:33, Isaiah 8:14; 28:16)

More specifically, Jesus said that he is the cornerstone that you will either build your life on, or it will end up judging your life in the end. He said this about himself:

“Jesus said to them, ‘Haven't you ever read in the scriptures, The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. The Lord has done this, and it's amazing in our eyes?’” and then he said, “Whoever falls on this stone will be crushed. And the stone will crush the person it falls on.” (Matthew 21:42, 44; Psalm 118:22-23)

That seems confusing, but here's what he meant: if you don't give your life to Jesus, the Rock and cornerstone, you will always be tripping over him. Either you fall on him and give up your life to him (be broken on the stone), or your life will not be true and square and eventually your life will be judged by the cornerstone, Jesus (crushed by him).

All of this is true because a rock was rolled away. So the question is what will you do about it? We can see the answer in the Apostle Peter's life. There was a time when Jesus sat down with his disciples to ask them who they thought he was. After so much time teaching them and performing miracles and signs, did they get? It's probably helpful to know that

Peter's name at that time was Simon – that was his given name. Peter was a nick name or a new name that Jesus gave him. You'll understand why in just a second as I read it to you:

“When Jesus came to Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who are the people saying I am?” “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; some, Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”

Then he asked them, “Who do *you* think I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “The Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

“God has blessed you, Simon, son of Jonah,” Jesus said, “for my Father in heaven has personally revealed this to you—this is not from any human source. You are Peter, a stone; and upon this rock I will build my church; and all the powers of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:13-18)

Did you see that? God had been revealing himself to Simon – just like he has been to you – so when Jesus asked Simon who he thought Jesus was, Simon said, “You are the Christ, the Son of God. The Holy One.” So Jesus renamed him Peter, which means, “Rock” and said that the church would be built on that realization, that confession of who Christ is. That confession is the solid foundation, the Rock, the Cornerstone, on which you can build your life, also. There is no more solid and sure love than the love God has for you in Christ.

God has been revealing himself to you and now Jesus is asking you – what about *you*? Who do *you* say He is? You can finally acknowledge that he is Christ – Lord of your life, or not.

Interestingly enough, it was Peter, the Rock, who wrote *this*:

“As the Scriptures express it, “See, I am sending Christ to be the carefully chosen, precious Cornerstone of my church, and I will never disappoint those who trust in him.” Yes, he is very precious to you who believe; and to those who reject him, well— “The same Stone that was rejected by the builders has become the Cornerstone, the most honored and important part of the building.” And the Scriptures also say, “He is the Stone that some will stumble over, and the Rock that will make them fall.” They will stumble because they will not listen to God’s Word nor obey it, and so this punishment must follow—that they will fall.” (1 Peter 2:6-8; Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14)

What about you? There was a stone that was rolled away, and because of it, you can know the Rock that, if you drink from him you will never thirst for other things again. Jesus is the Rock, the cornerstone that you can build your life on and that can make everything else in your life true, aligned, and well built. What you need to do is make that rock-solid confession that your life can be built on – you must acknowledge that he is Christ, Lord, of your life. There is no greater or more solid and sure love than God’s love for you in Christ.

*Pray*