

West Valley Church
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On This Rock: Part Three *1 Peter 2:4-10*

Let's just acknowledge something together: right now, doing this thing we call church is *way* different than it was a month and a half ago. I read somewhere that as of last week we've now been in quarantine longer than Noah was on the ark. Kind of puts the ark story into perspective, doesn't it? Right now, West Valley Church, we are doing church through video messages like this, and through small group zoom meetings and the pastoral staff and church board are all having zoom meetings too. We are reaching out to each other through text, email, phone, and postal mail. Seems like a strange way to do church, but it's the best we can do under the circumstances. And now it sounds like we've got to keep doing this for the rest of May.

I can tell you that your pastors are working hard to develop a plan that will allow us to be ready to meet together as things are lifted, while providing a way to worship for those who are not able to venture out at the same time as everyone else. I've got to tell you though that our planning for coming back together has been really hard to do, because it seems like just as soon as we have a plan, the timeline and the rules change. It's like a football team coming up with an entire playbook and then before taking the field they are handed a completely different set of rules. And that reminds me – the NBA season was cancelled, the summer Olympics were postponed, and the entire baseball season might also be cancelled – we can't even watch sports! Now I'm even more frustrated!

I promise you that we are constantly planning so we can find the best way that will allow all of us to worship together when this begins to lift; we don't want anyone to feel left out or left behind just because they can't come out of quarantine yet. *That* promise is what drives our planning, but it's proven to be a whole lot harder than it sounds.

So I think it's perfect timing that we are in part three of our series called, "On This Rock." We're going through Peter's letters and today we are on 1 Peter 2:4-10. The reason this is perfect timing is because it reminds us what the church is really all about. There's nothing in Peter's letter that talks about Zoom meetings or live-streaming online platforms or video switchers or encoders or software or video hardware or hand sanitizers or masks. But there *are* plenty of clear descriptions of what the church is built on, who we are, and what we are supposed to be doing.

So if you don't mind, grab your Bibles or your phone apps or whatever you read your Bible from, and turn to 1 Peter 2:4-10. As we've done before, I'm going to ask you to pause this

video and read that passage – 1 Peter 2:4-10, and then un-pause and we'll unpack it together. So pause the video now and read that passage.

Pause

I think it's going to be really good for us to be reminded of what's most important about being the church.

This passage is somewhat of a challenge to understand because it covers a broad theological landscape. Theologians would tell you that Peter moves swiftly from soteriology to Christology to ecclesiology – big words that simply mean this: Peter takes us from our understanding of salvation to our understanding of Christ to our understanding of the church. And, Peter does it by using rapidly-changing metaphors; from cornerstones to capstones to living stones to buildings to a temple to a stumbling block to priests to a nation. So forget whatever your English Lit. teacher told you about mixing metaphors, because Peter does this in a seamless way that really works and makes total spiritual sense. I think you'll see what I mean. Remember; we are looking at this to learn what the church is built on, who we are, and what we are supposed to be doing.

Let's get started with...

1. The Foundation Stone of the Church.

First of all, I'm not going to spend too much time talking about what a foundation stone is, because we did that a couple weeks ago already. And I think we all understand that the foundation of the Christian Church is Christ, but there's more going on here that is helpful to understand. First of all, Peter says "As you come to Christ," or "you are coming to Christ..." Keep in mind that he is talking to believers, so he's not referring to the first time that someone comes to faith in Christ; the original language says that it is an ongoing activity and relationship. In other words, we are *always* coming to Christ in *all* things *all* the time; in prayer, for needs, for direction, to worship, to serve, to give – on and on. God's spiritual house – the Church – is built on the sustained relationship of Christ with believers who continually come to him for direction and guidance and life. So here's our first application already; what makes us the church is that we continually come to Christ every day. That means that even as we are scattered and not able to worship together in the same room, we are being the church by continually coming to Christ in our lives.

Then Peter says that we come to the "Living Stone." At first, that kind of sounds like an oxymoron, doesn't it? Like "jumbo shrimp" or "civil war" or "lead balloon" or "alone together"...you get the idea. So what does Peter mean by "living stone"? The word "living" here means a source of life, so Christ is the foundation stone that we receive and build our lives on. It is through Christ that we become "living stones," which we'll talk about in a minute. Peter is pointing out that before Christ, our lives were dead as a stone, but Jesus is the one who brings us to life. Without him, we have nothing and cannot be built into anything. He is the foundation of our lives and of the church. That's why, when Peter confessed that Jesus is the

Christ (Matthew 16:13-20; Luke 9:18-20; Mark 8:27-30), Jesus renamed Simon as “Peter,” because it is *our* confession of faith and reliance on Christ that *our* lives are built on.

This wasn't a new idea from Peter – he knew the Old Testament Scriptures very well. The concept of a living stone and cornerstone is talked about several times (Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:13-14; 28:16), but the Holy Spirit also helped Peter remember that Jesus said this about himself, too (Matthew 21:42; Luke 20:17; Mark 12:10). So Peter picks these thoughts up again in verses 6-8, tying it all together that Christ is our cornerstone that we put our faith in and we continually come to him for our life. If we reject him, he becomes a stone that we will keep stumbling over.

This is something we can practice *now*; so Christ is our foundation, and we as his church must continually come to him for everything, from everywhere we are, alone or together. And that's something we do whether we are able to worship together in the same room or not, right? *He* is your foundation right where you are.

Now let's see who we are as the church, or...

2. The architecture of the church.

Notice that Peter said that as we come to Christ the Living Stone, we become living stones. The word for “stone” is not just some rock you'd find, it's actually more like a shaped stone, like a gemstone or a diamond would be, or like a chiseled stone for a wall. So as a Christian you can call yourself a jewel or you can say that you are chiseled! But the point is that you are shaped and being shaped to fit *together* in a spiritual wall. The Bible says that if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), so Christ has shaped you to fit into the church.

But understand also that Christ uses the circumstances in our lives to shape us or further chisel or refine us, right (remember last week that Peter said that our trials are refining us like gold)? So right now God is using this circumstance that each of us is in to better shape us for when we *are* together – to be the church, or as Peter says, a spiritual house. And please don't miss that it is plural – “living stones,” “not stone.” That means that Christianity IS community; that as a Christian, you will only find your true place when you are put together with the other believers in your church. To be a Christian and not go to church is a contradiction in terms. I've been praying during all of this that, when this is lifted, there will be a revival of worship attendance; that we will have realized how much we need to gather together every week in worship.

After 9/11, there was an increase in worship attendance in our nation...for about two weeks. *That* is not going to do us any good. I'm praying that all these weeks that we've been apart will bring about a revival in committed worship attendance. I think God is using this time as a sort of massive global “time-out”. Any other parents or teachers use “time out” as a discipline method? It's when your child needs to sit still and think about how he or she has behaved badly until they decide to behave appropriately. Our world has been misbehaving – for sure our country has been. So I'm also praying that we will all come out of this more appreciative and respectful of each other and more civil to one another; that we'll behave better. Of course, I'm praying that God will use this time to draw people to Christ. But I'm praying for Christians

that we will be more committed to worshipping together in person every week. Maybe what this virus intended for evil, God intends for good, and part of that good is revaluing worshipping together. Peter says we are chosen by God; we are his special possession. How in the world could we disregard the family of God? How in the world could we come out of this and just be some stone laying over there by itself? Christianity IS community. Period.

So as we are built together, we realize that together we have a purpose. Let's look at...

3. The function of the church.

There are different kinds of buildings, right? There are business buildings, mercantile buildings, industrial buildings, storage buildings, residential, educational, institutional...and all those kinds of buildings are identified by their *purpose* or *function*. The church has a function as well, and it's not simply as a gathering building or a non-profit building. You might remember last week that we learned that we are *chosen for a purpose*; everywhere in the Bible it equates being chosen by God with the purpose of God. You are not saved just so you can have a happy life; you are being saved and chiseled to fit together with the rest of the church to accomplish God's purposes here on earth. We accomplish our purpose *together*, as the Church.

And here's what that is: Peter says we are a royal priesthood, and that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. Let's look at those in reverse order.

We are to declare his praises. The implication of this is that it's not just our individual lives; something happens when we come together to worship and to carry out God's mission in this world – our collective lives bring glory to God and magnify him.

John Piper is a Christian writer, and he said, "There are two kinds of magnifying: microscope magnifying and telescope magnifying. The one makes a small thing look bigger than it is. The other makes a big thing begin to look as big as it really is.

When David says, "I will magnify God with thanksgiving," he does not mean, "I will make a small God look bigger than he is." He means, "I will make a big God begin to look as big as he really is."

We are not called to be microscopes. We are called to be telescopes. Christians don't try to make God bigger than he is, as if he needs us to build him up, or be his sales people, trying to convince the world that our "product" is better than theirs. There is nothing and no one superior to God. And so the calling of those who love God is to make his greatness begin to look as great as it really is. That's why we exist, why we were saved, as Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9...

"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." (1 Peter 2:9)

The whole duty of the Christian community can be summed up in this: feel, think, and act in a way that will make God look as great as he really is. Be a telescope for the world of the infinite starry wealth of the glory of God.

Think of it this way; by yourself, you are a low end, limited telescope. But combined together in worship and in action, we become a telescopic array that helps our West Valley community see how big God really is!

And that explains what it means to be priests. The job of a priest is to worship God and to be a bridge to help people draw closer to God. So it's our job to worship God and bridge people to God! Again, we are a telescope through our gathered praise and our actions that demonstrate God's great love!

So use this time to keep coming to Christ, to worship God, and let God use this time to better shape you and prepare you for when we come together to worship and to serve our great community.

Pray

Close: May you continually come to the Living Stone, Christ, to be shaped to fit together with the rest of your church, to worship and to show the rest of West Valley how big God really is, and may you continually point people to Christ, the one true foundation stone.