

The Living Stone and a Chosen People

4 As you come to him, the living Stone— rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him
5 you also, like *living stones*, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

6 For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” Isaiah 28:16

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,” (Ps 118:22)

8 and,

“A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” (Is 8:14)

They stumble because they disobey the message— which is also what they were destined for.

9 But you are a *chosen people*, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Before reading

Peter intersperses words about Jesus with words about those who follow him.. And mixes metaphors!

1:19 you were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, a *lamb* without blemish or defect...

22 now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth, love one another deeply, from the heart, For you have been *born again*... through the living and enduring word of God

2:1 Therefore rid yourselves of all (that contradicts love) malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander... Like new born babes crave pure spiritual milk, (i.e. the Word of God in the Bible, just mentioned) so that by it you may *grow up* in your salvation.

[Isaiah 28 is the chapter where the prophet speaks of God’s judgement as his ‘strange work’ v21, his ‘alien task’, as if he’d much rather save than punish.]

Sermon starts here.

When a minister called Derek Copland moved into his new Manse, the builders carried on building the church next door. He got friendly with the site foreman. One day he found him shouting at the driver of a tipper truck. A huge pile of bricks lay in a heap; picking up two very misshapen bricks, he asked Derek, ‘ How can I build a straight wall with these bent bricks? They’re like Bananas.

Derek was writing a book about the church: he liked the phrase so much, he used it as the book’s title. Building with Bananas. I’m afraid I’ve lent it and can’t remember more details.

You see, the church is not a rectangular edifice with a high roof and steeple; it is made up of people. And people are not uniform, not standardized. I don’t mean their physical shape - big and small, fat and thin are all welcome here, no problem.

I mean our characteristics, our nature.

We *can* get on with each other, and we can *fall out*;

we can be patient, or irritable; perceptive or insensitive...

And that’s before we get to illnesses: some people remember well; others have Alzheimer’s. A person may stagger from excess alcohol, or from an infection of the inner ear.

In our natural state, and even after conversion, we are all bananas! All a bit bent. We do not naturally fit in with other people’s bent-ness! Yet when we come to faith in Christ, we are automatically incorporated into the church. [bananas growing on a stem *do* fit each other; all from same source.]

Since the church is a community made up of individuals, we need to get along; and it can be hard.

We need to see what Jesus thinks of us, what *he* wants us to be. (Does *he* think we’re bananas?!)



Illustration 1: Bananas

But we do that by first seeing what Jesus is, and how that impacts on us, his followers.

1 What Jesus is

2 How come some don't believe in him?

Those who do believe in him, who are born again, are given a new status; so, 3 'who are we?'

1 **What Jesus is:** the living stone v4

The word Peter uses for stone is Lithos, not Petros:



Illustration 2: Rough stone

Petros, a stone, is the unshaped possibly jagged small piece of rock you might pick up in a field. Petros was the name Jesus gave this disciple.



Illustration 3: Smooth stone

But here Peter uses Lithos. that means dressed stone. Shaped and smoothed.

He uses it first for Jesus himself, v4 'come to him, the living stone' and then for us his followers, v5, 'like living stones'.

Stone is inorganic; we would normally describe a plant or animal as 'living', not a *stone*; but in this case the metaphor has to stretch to cope with the fact that Jesus died and rose again.

Peter's thinking comes from the OT.

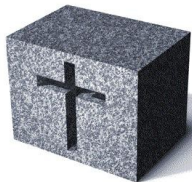


Illustration 4: cornerstone - Isaiah 28:16



Illustration 5: Capstone - Psalm 118:22

A cornerstone is often laid ceremonially. It has to be exactly right, for it determines the layout of the first two sides of the building, and therefore the whole building.. e.g. one side facing north, the adjacent facing side East.

The stone itself had to have one corner an exact right angle, so it is finely dressed stone.

Imagine a building site with a pile of stones that have been dressed by masons; they've prepared one particular one specially to be the corner stone. Imagine a builder ignoring it, missing it's virtue, and choosing one of a different size, whose corner was not an exact 90°. That is what God had been preparing through the prophets, and when the time came for the Messiah to take over, the leaders missed him. They wanted a religion different from God, and they missed the corner stone.



Illustration 6: Pile of stones

Killing Jesus was like throwing the most important stone on the scrap-heap, the stone chosen by God and precious to him, but God raised him from the dead, a living stone.

2 How come some don't believe in him?

- Don't cast that stone aside to choose another one, v4
- Don't trip over that stone; v8
- Don't disobey v8 This is the key; deciding to follow Jesus as the Christ is not merely a question of weighing up the evidence or the truth of his claims; it is a moral decision; people do not want to have this man to rule over them. He came as the light, but humanity preferred darkness. John 3

Those who trip over it were 'destined' to do so. God was not caught unawares when the leaders rejected Jesus; the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 was always going to be rejected. But God turned the rejection into the means by which our sins can be forgiven.

3 We who *do* believe in him, who or what are we?

living stones v4 This status derives from Jesus himself; all that we are, we are through our union with him.

v1,2 shows that Christians are all the time getting rid of vices, craving the Bible, so that by it we may grow up in our salvation... The metaphor of new birth is followed by nourishment and growth; so now, the 'stone' metaphor expects the Master to be chipping off bits of stone that don't fit; repeat v 1,2, and that leads to:

being built v5

We are designed to fit in to the church. That analogy of being banana shaped is not an excuse to *continue in awkward mode*. We should expect every Sunday in the message that God will be chipping at awkward corners of our nature.

People often want God to wave a magic wand and make us all better, and that is part of our fallen-ness, our misshapen-ness. We resent God dealing with wrong in our lives.

My old minister, Jim Philip, who went to University in Aberdeen, the granite city, wrote:

"If we thought more of the ultimate purpose of God for our lives we would perhaps understand far more than we do the disciplines that come upon us. The impact of the Divine chisel on the granite of our hearts can never be without pain, but it should help us to bear it if we realize that the end-result will be 'acceptable to God' v5 Not a little thing indeed, that!"

Being built into a spiritual house v5 a great antidote to people who worship fine buildings. This structure (Killearn Kirk) is a servant that exists to keep the church (that's you and me) warm and dry while we get on with being the church *listening* to God in his word, *addressing* him in prayer, *expressing* our thanks and praise, *encouraging* and *building up* one another. This edifice says far more about our Scottish weather than about God. By its size it says, Far more people wanted to be the church together on Sundays back in 1880 when it was built, than now.

Peter changes metaphor yet again; now the church is a holy priesthood v5

offering spiritual sacrifices. Can't repeat what Jesus did. But everything thing we do for Christ, large or small, offered for his sole glory, done in the strength of his Spirit alone, is a response to the perfect sacrifice He offered. Costly giving.

Who are we, who are related to God in Christ?:

a chosen people v9

a royal priesthood

a holy nation, a people belonging to God

Oh, the longing of people who have no identity, who accept they are bananas, an awkward shape that has trouble fitting in with others; oh the loneliness some feel, that comes to the surface at a tragedy like bereavement, or unemployment.

And oh the joy at finding Christ. The simple act of trusting our lives to him unleashes a world of acceptance, of belonging

once you

were not a people

had not received mercy,

but now

you are the people of God;

you have received mercy.