

THE BIRTH STONE OF THE TWICE-BORN I Peter 2:6

“Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in him will not be disappointed.” (NASB)

What is your birth stone? A birth stone is a gem stone that symbolizes the month of one’s birth. In 1870 Tiffany & Company Jewelers published a list of birth stones in the order of the months of the year beginning with the garnet for January and continuing with: amethyst, bloodstone, diamond, emerald, agate, ruby, sardonyx, sapphire, opal, topaz and turquoise. Today, birth stones are popular and are worn as jewelry.

However, this message is not about jewelry, but about Jesus; not about gem stones but about the God Stone; not about lifeless stones, although they may be very valuable, but about the Living Stone Who is precious beyond compare. He is the life-giving Stone Who gives eternal life to those who come to Him. To them He is truly and uniquely their Birth Stone!

Peter writes of this Stone as follows: “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” (1 Peter 2:4-8, NKJV).

In these verses Peter is speaking metaphorically. He speaks of living stones, a spiritual house, spiritual sacrifices, etc. What is the message that he is communicating? He is talking about those who have tasted of the Lord, that is, those who have come to the Lord Jesus in faith (verse 3). To such he continues, in verse 4, saying, “And coming to him as to a living stone...are being built up as a spiritual house.”

In verse 2 he speaks about *growing up* in Christ and in verse 5 he speaks about being *built up* into a spiritual house or building. That “building” is a spiritual temple. Peter is not speaking of a literal temple, like that at Jerusalem, built of hewn stones, but he was speaking of a spiritual temple made up of living, redeemed people; people in whom is the life of Christ, the Living Stone. Jesus is “*living water*” (John 4:10); “*living bread*” (John 6:51); “*living way*” (Hebrews 10:20) and “*living stone*” (I Peter 2:4).

Let us occupy our minds by concentrating upon this living spiritual temple, which we as believers constitute. Think first about the Living Stone Foundation, second, about the Living Stones Framework and third, about the Living Stones Function within that temple. This is precious truth that will edify believers and glorify God!

THE LIVING STONE FOUNDATION

“Coming to Him as to a living stone...”

Peter speaks of Jesus as being a Stone, a Living Stone. Eugene Peterson’s translation paraphrase of 1 Peter 2:4 is: “Welcome to the living Stone, the source of life.” Why does Peter employ the metaphor of “stones”? (A metaphor is, “A figure of speech in which one thing is spoken of as if it were another.”) He uses the word “stone” or “stones” 5 times. He transitions from babies who need milk (verse 2) to suddenly talking about stones. Why?

We must be mindful that the Epistles of Peter are Jewish in nature. He is writing to the diaspora, to Christian Jews, “To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...” (1Peter 1:1, NIV) These Christians were in a time of transition. They were very familiar with the Temple in Jerusalem, a literal, material edifice of stones, and Peter is teaching them that the Church of Jesus Christ is likewise a Temple—yet not a Temple of literal stones but a spiritual Temple of living stones, built upon the foundation of Christ, The Living Stone. It is a living temple, consisting not of dead materials, but of living parts.

Paul says, “You are God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:9). Every building has a foundation and the building is only as stable as its foundation. There are seven words used to describe Christ, the Living Foundation Stone:

A. The Descriptions of Christ the Living Stone.

1. “Living stone” (verse 4);
2. “Rejected stone” (verse 4);
3. “Chosen” or “elect” stone (verses 4 & 6)
4. “Precious stone” (verses 4, 6 & 7);
5. “Corner stone” (verse 6);
6. “Stumbling stone” (verse 8);
7. “Rock of offense” (verse 8).

Peter, when referring to Jesus Christ as the Living Stone, must have thought of what Jesus said to him recorded in Matthew 16:18—“And I also say to you that you are Peter (*Petrus*) and on this rock (*Petra*) I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” In that statement, Jesus does not promise to build His church upon Peter.

The name “Peter” is “*Petrus*” in Greek and means “a little stone.” Jesus re-named him, as John 1:42 records: “You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas (which is translated, A Stone).” “Cephas” is a Syriac word, meaning the same as Peter - a rock, or a stone. Jesus said that Peter was “a stone” not “The Stone”! Jesus said, “On this rock (*Petra*) I will build My church.” “*Petra*” means “The Rock.” As such, Jesus is the solid rock foundation of the church.

Peter, by the use of this metaphor, shows that he is not The Rock, but Christ is The Rock on which the church is built. Christ, the Living Stone, is the Living Foundation Stone of the spiritual house or temple. “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11, NASB).

B. The Designation of Christ The Living Stone.

Christ is not only the Foundation Stone but He has the singular distinction of being the “Corner Stone” (1 Peter 2:7). What is a “corner stone”? The dictionary definition is: “A specially selected stone on which the corner of the building rests. Usually a stone which is large and solid. Such a stone is commonly laid with special ceremony; a stone at the outer corner of a building uniting two intersecting walls.” (Webster) Isaiah wrote: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation...” (28:16).

Adam Clark comments: “This might probably be designed to show that, in Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles were to be united; and this is probably the reason why it was called a stone of stumbling, and rock of offense; for nothing stumbled, nothing offended the Jews so much as the calling of the Gentiles into the Church of God, and admitting them to the same privileges which had been before peculiar to the Jews.” Jesus is the “chief corner stone” Who unites all believers into an everlasting temple.

As the text states, not all believe the truth that Jesus Christ is the precious Corner Stone, as verses 7 and 8 indicate. Some believe in Christ, some remain in unbelief; He is, by some rejected, by others accepted; some stumble at the Corner Stone to their eternal despair, others are saved by the Corner Stone to their eternal delight.

Jesus said, “What then is this that is written: ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone’? Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder” (Luke 20:17, 18). Jesus is saying that those who stumble over Him, shall be broken. They stumble because they have misjudged Him and in the end they, themselves, will be judged by Him when he, the Cornerstone, will fall upon them. What is your position as regards Jesus Christ the Living Stone foundation? As for myself, “On Christ the Solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand”!

C. The Distinction of Christ the Living Stone.

Do not miss the triple descriptor of the Lord Jesus! Three times the word “precious” is used:

1. “chosen by God and *precious*”—verse 4;
2. “I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, *precious*”—verse 6;
3. “to you who believe, He is *precious*”—verse 7.

It is no wonder that Lynn De Shazo wrote:

Lord, You Are More Precious Than Silver
Lord, You Are More Costly Than Gold
Lord, You Are More Beautiful Than Diamonds
And Nothing I Desire Compares With You.

However, not everyone esteems or views the Lord Jesus Christ as precious. Although He is selected by God the Father, He is rejected by men; He was excluded by men but exalted by God. “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone” (verse 7).

Jesus was chosen by God His Father and was precious to Him. If something is precious, it occupies the attention, gratifies the mind, and stirs the emotions. The same is true of a person who is greatly esteemed. We often speak of them in glowing terms. No one is more pure, perfect and precious than the Lord Jesus, our Redeemer. If He is a living reality in your life, make Him the object of your thoughts and tell Him you love Him!

I heard the story of two college young men who were both in love with the same young lady. One of them was continuously telling his buddies how wonderful “his girl” was. He told them of her beauty, her talents, personality, etc. His friends thought that he would certainly marry the girl. However, to their surprise, she married the other fellow! His buddies asked him how he lost out in to the other fellow? He said, “Well, I guess that while I was here telling you how wonderful she was, he was over there with her telling her!”

The point is, sometimes we Christians are busy telling others how precious our Savior is—and that is proper and right—but we often fail in personally telling Him how precious He is to us! If you are actually deeply in love with the Lord Jesus, tell Him so!

So precious is Jesus, my Savior and King,
His praise all the day long with rapture I sing;
To Him in my weakness for strength I can cling,
For He is so precious to me!

- C. Gabriel

THE LIVING STONES FRAMEWORK

“...you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house...”

Having described Christ as the foundation, the apostle goes on to speak of the framework, the superstructure, built upon Him. We are part of a living temple built on the Living Stone. The company of believers, the church of Jesus Christ, is a living, spiritual building.

Notice the words, “...you...are being built up a spiritual house...” Who is building this spiritual edifice of which believers, the living stones, are the framework? Let us focus upon the Person Who is erecting this spiritual structure of living stones:

A. The Person Who is the Builder.

Paul writes, “You are God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:9). God is the Great Builder! His history of building is well-known. Jesus Christ is said to be the Architect and Builder in several Bible passages. For example:

1. He designed and built the universe.

“...by whom also he made the worlds” or, as in some translations, “the ages” or “the universe” (Hebrews 1:2).

The psalm writer said, “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” (Psalm 8:3-4)

2. He designed and built our bodies.

Again the psalm writer said, concerning his body: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:13-14).

3. He designed and is building heaven.

“I go to prepare a place for you and I will come again...” (John 14:6). In the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, we are given glimpses of heaven and what a glorious place it is!

4. He designed and is building the church.

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, “I will build My church.”

Jesus Christ is in the construction business! He majors in taking wrecks and making of them temples—of taking failures and making them monuments to His glory! He is the Architect and Builder—we are the materials—the “living stones.”

B. The Process Of Building.

Ephesians 2:20 tells us that: “...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.”

Notice the words: “being fitted together” and “being built together.” Togetherness, therefore, should characterize us. In the book of Ephesians 2 there are five phrases with the word “together” in them. We are:

- “alive together” (verse 5);
- “raised us up together” (verse 6a);
- “sit together” (verse 6b)
- “fitted together” (verse 21)
- “built together” (verse 22)

We are lifted out of the quarry of sin and are cut and polished by God and prepared for that special place that He has determined that we should occupy in this grand temple that He is building, called the Church of Jesus Christ!

C. The Progress Of The Building.

“...the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord...” Jesus said, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18), and He is! In Ephesians 2:20 we are told that it “grows”—that is, it is progressing! Every soul saved is another stone prepared and inserted into the edifice of the Church.

D. The Purpose Of The Building.

“...in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” We once were “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1) but are now “living stones,” “a spiritual house,” a temple made up of living materials, of redeemed people, in whom God now resides in the person of His Holy Spirit. What a transformation!

It is an awesome truth that the redeemed are now "...a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." Consequently, we are the property of the Divine Occupant! "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

How many professing Christians are aware of this tremendous truth? When the impact of that truth invades our souls, we will stop trespassing upon God's property and will relinquish our bodies to the Holy Spirit Who indwells us and we will do, as Paul pleads for us to do: "...that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2).

THE LIVING STONES FUNCTION

"...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" (1 Peter 2:5).

The words, "a holy priesthood," define our function. As New Testament priests, our function is "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Hebrews 8:3 states: "For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices." However, not sacrifices of bloody animals as in the Old Testament but spiritual sacrifices. What sacrifices does the New Testament instruct us to make to God?

A. The Sacrifice Of Our Persons.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). We must begin with the offering, the gifting, the sacrifice of ourselves to God. If He does not have us, He does not accept anything we have to offer Him.

An old story, retold many times, illustrates this truth: An early American Evangelist was preaching in an Indian village about giving ones self to God. An Indian man was moved by the message and came to the evangelist saying, "Me givum tomahawk to God." The evangelist said, "God doesn't want your tomahawk." The Indian then said, "Me givum my blanket to God." The evangelist replied, "God doesn't want your blanket." The Indian paused and then said, reluctantly, "Me givum my horse to God." Again the evangelist said, "God doesn't want your horse." The Indian was silent for a few moments and, kneeling down, he said, "Me givum myself to God." The evangelist said, "Wonderful! You are what God wants!"

If God has us, He has what we have. The reason some Christians struggle with relinquishing their possessions to God is because they have not presented themselves totally to God. They are essentially saying to God, "Save my soul, but leave my life alone!"

B. The Sacrifice Of Our Possessions.

"Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God" (Philippians

4:18); “But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. (Hebrews 13:16).

If we truly give ourselves to God, we have given the greater. Therefore, it should not be difficult to give the lesser, that is, our material possessions. Jesus said to a certain rich man, “Go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (Matthew 19:21, 22). Not only did he have “great possessions” but his “great possessions” had him!

Augustine said, “Where your pleasure is, there is your treasure; where your treasure is, there is your heart; where your heart is, there is your happiness.” Martin Luther gave this testimony: “I have tried to keep things in my hands and lost them all, but what I have given into God's hands I still possess.”

C. The Sacrifice Of Our Praise.

“...let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (Hebrews 13:15).

Praising God is the ascribing of glory and honor to Him in recognition of His supreme worth: “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (Revelation 4:11).

Praising God is the acknowledgment and confession of His great and wonderful excellencies: “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations” (Psalm 100:4, 5).

Praising God is giving thanks for blessings and benefits bestowed: “Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits” (Psalm 103:1, 2).

Praise from the children of the heavenly Father, either in silent meditation, sung or spoken words, is a sweet sound in the ears of the God. Let us follow the example of the psalmist who said, “Seven times a day I praise You” (Psalm 119:164). A day without praise is like a day without sunshine!

May our attitude ever be that as expressed in Sylvanus D. Phelps’ hymn, “Something for Thee”:

Savior, Thy dying love Thou gave to me,
Nor should I aught withhold, dear Lord from Thee;
In love my soul would bow, my heart fulfill its vow,
Some offering bring Thee now, something for Thee.

Conclusion

The church of Jesus Christ is a living organism. It is a spiritual house, built upon a living

foundation with living stones. We are not building it—God is. It is His House, it is to glorify Him.

Illustration: The Taj Mahal is regarded as one of the most beautiful buildings in the world. It was begun after the death of the wife of emperor Shah Jahan. He was devastated at her death and resolved to honor her by constructing a temple that would serve as her tomb. Her coffin was placed in the center of a large parcel of land, and construction of the temple began around it. No expense would be spared to make her final resting place magnificent.

But as the weeks turned into months, the Shah's grief over his wife's death turned into a passion for the building project. He no longer mourned her absence. The construction consumed him. One day, while walking from one side of the construction site to the other, his leg bumped against a wooden box. The prince brushed the dust off his leg and ordered the worker to throw the box out.

What Shah Jahan didn't know is that he had ordered the disposal of the coffin of his late wife. And so the one the temple was intended to honor was forgotten, but the temple was erected anyway.

There is the same danger with us as Living Stones in the edifice God is erecting. If we are not careful, we can forget the purpose for which we, as temples, are being constructed and become occupied with ourselves, forgetting the one in whose honor the building is intended.

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