

## THE ROCK AND YOUR ROLE

1 Peter 2:4-6

1-31-10 A. M. An expository message from 1 Peter for the “State of The Church” Sunday

### INTRODUCTION

A search on a popular Christian bookseller’s Web site revealed hundreds of titles containing the term “revolutionary.” There are revolutionary books for teens. There are revolutionary books for stay-at-home moms. There’s a book about how Jesus was a revolutionary communicator, and how you can use His revolutionary communication skills in your home/business/church. There are revolutionary books about the church. The question becomes, if we are all revolutionaries, are any of us an actual revolutionary?

This morning is our “state of the church” Sunday, and it bears repeating that the state of the church is the state of our hearts. That is true of any church. When God measures Woods Chapel Bible Fellowship, He puts the tape measure around our hearts. When it comes to the church, according to revolutionary literature, being a revolutionary means you are a courageous enough visionary to have church on the golf course or at Starbucks.

Hebrews 10:25 declares we should *not [forsake] our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as*

*you see the day drawing near.* The revolutionary writers would have us believe that such interactions could take place at a worship service or at Starbucks.

Could it? Will we sing hymns and spiritual songs to our God at Starbucks? Will we pray together, for each other, at Starbucks? Will we be exposed to consistent, biblical, expositional, gospel-oriented teaching at Starbucks? I doubt it. Not only does God say I need church, . . . I say I need church. I need to worship; I need to be encouraged to reach out in love and to be an example of good deeds; I need to hear from God's Word—I need truth to help me worship and learn about God and to know what it means to follow Christ; I need the structure of my community group, where there is engagement, connection, and meaningful experiences. Woods Chapel can, and does, provide those elements. Is that revolutionary? Or is that just biblical?

This morning we are going to look at a passage in 1 Peter 2 on the church. We will see two major truths that are foundational for us at Woods Chapel, if we embrace them into our thinking and practice.

The first truth is simple, but profound. It is the basis for our existence as a church. The first metaphor is this:

**Jesus Christ is the Cornerstone.**

We see this in verse 6, where Peter quotes the prophet Isaiah:

*For this is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."*

The foundation of the church is Jesus Christ. He is the Cornerstone. Peter's readers would have understood this metaphor and the truth it represented. There was a cornerstone in every building that stood around them. The cornerstone was the basis for building and for structure. The cornerstone was the largest of the stones, set in the corner, the first stone laid. Everything that is added rests on the cornerstone. The cornerstone has to be perfect, precise, exact. It sets the line both horizontally and vertically for the building. The angles have to be perfect. It is like the building's plumb line; if the angles are not perfect, the building will end up out of square, and if it is off even a degree or two, the building will end up leaning in one direction or another. If the cornerstone is not perfect, the building may even collapse. The whole building rests on the strength and stability and perfection of the cornerstone.

Peter says that the Cornerstone of the church is Jesus Christ. He is the Rock. His life was perfect. He was without sin, and because we were not, He laid down His life for you and me. He is the living stone because He lives forever, having risen from the dead (Romans 6:9). He is called *A PRECIOUS CORNER*

*stone. Precious* means “unequaled in value, irreplaceable.” He is irreplaceable, because He is the Cornerstone of the church. The symmetry and strength of the church is based on Him. Here’s the point: It all begins with the Cornerstone; It all begins and ends with Jesus Christ. To ensure the perfect precision of God’s spiritual house, the main Cornerstone had to be flawless. The only One who could set all angles of God’s house was the perfectly prepared Cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

If you have become a member of God’s church through faith in Jesus Christ, the promise from verse 6 is that you *WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED*. Those who sincerely believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will never know any disappointment from Him (Romans 10:11-13). How can you be disappointed in the One who has called us, loved us, redeemed us, reconciled us, regenerated us, forgiven us, was crucified for us, justified us, sanctifies us, will glorify us, and in Him, blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

Because Jesus Christ is the perfect, exact, precise One on whom God has built His church, all the lines coming from Him in every direction complete the perfect temple of God. No one is ever out of alignment. No one ever falls from the structure. We all fit permanently together. Jesus is the Cornerstone. He is the Rock. He is the solid Rock.

The second metaphor for the church is this: We are living stones. He is the

Rock, the Cornerstone, the Living Stone, but we are also living stones—that's our role.

**We are living stones.**

Verse 4 and 5: *And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

It's an interesting metaphor. When we think about stones, we don't think about something that is living. Stones used for a building are set in place, they stay in place, and there is no life there. But Peter describes those of us who make up the church, built on the Cornerstone of Jesus Christ, as living stones. When sinners come to faith in Christ, the living stone, we too become living stones. We are united to Him. When we believe in Christ, He shares His life with us. We have eternal life in Christ. We are living stones.

We are not made to sit and stand in one place. We are made to live, to act, to love, to give, to connect, to engage, to serve. We are living stones. We are alive in Jesus Christ, and we have a purpose. We constitute God's church—the church of the living God (1 Timothy 3:15).

Paul told the Ephesians:

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).*

God is the architect and builder of His household. It is impossible to overstate the importance of the church in His eternal plan. Each individual believer is a living stone, as God builds the church. Think of God's building, built with living stones, connected to the Cornerstone. Each living stone has a name on it. The Cornerstone has the name Jesus Christ. The living stones connected to Christ have the names Candy, Tony, Judy, Julie, Jeff, Carl, and every believer here at Woods Chapel. Together our purpose is multiplied. This house that God builds is beautiful and strong and varied and unified and God uses it to accomplish His work.

This past year you have been living stones at Woods Chapel—living stones of generosity. In a year when the economy has not been good, when some have lost jobs and found it hard to find new ones, God has shown His favor on this body. Even though we did not take in as much this year as last, we were able to cut

expenses in many areas. Outside of our mortgage payment, we may be in the strongest financial shape that we have been in our history. We have money already set aside for a new staff person. At a time when other churches are cutting staff, we are in a position to hire staff. We were able write checks of over \$15,000 to pay down on our mortgage. God continues to give us the resources to do ministry. Many of you have been living stones of generosity.

This past year you have been living stones in your service for the Lord. Most churches run on what is called an 80-20 ratio. Twenty percent of the people do eighty percent of the work. We blow that ratio out of the water, because so many of you are involved in one ministry or another. We have an excellent and strong volunteer base at Woods Chapel. That does not mean we don't need more volunteers, we do, but it does mean that many of you have functioned as living stones in serving your Lord.

Our passage points out our privileges as God's living stones. When you and I fulfill those privileges, we are being the church.

**We have union with Christ.**

Verse 4 begins: *And coming to Him . . .* It is by coming to Christ that believers enter the realm of spiritual privilege. The Greek word *coming* (*proserchomenoi*) conveys more than just drawing close to Christ for salvation. It

denotes a drawing near to Christ in intimate, abiding, personal fellowship. It pictures coming into His presence to remain and commune with Christ.

This is where spiritual power begins. You can tell when people are spending time with Christ. There is a joy, there is a passion, there is an energy in their life that comes from connecting with Him. You are growing in the knowledge of Christ so your faith begins to expand; your passion swells because what in on His heart now energizes you.

Obviously, the church is on God's heart. The church is His bride, His house, His body, His family, and His plan. If the church is commonplace for you, if you are indifferent to the church, if your heart doesn't beat faster when you think about the church, if there is a sense of boredom in your mind associated with the church, then you are not gripped by God's passion for His church. The church is the pillar and support of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). Jesus is seeking and saving the lost through the church. Jesus is strengthening disciples for ministry through the church. Jesus is reaching out in love to those who are hurting through the church. We learn what is at stake with the church when we come and connect with Christ. We have the privilege of knowing God's heart as we come to Him.

**We have access to God as priests.**

*Verse 5: you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house*

*for a holy priesthood, . . .*

When the Bible speaks of believers being priests, it speaks of God sovereignly choosing you to bear fruit. In John 15:16 Jesus said, *"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, . . ."* It speaks of God washing you clean from sin, so you can minister as His priests. The apostle Paul writes of Jesus,

*who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds . . . He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done*

*in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of*

*regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit (Titus 2:14; 3:5).*

*The priesthood speaks of being clothed in righteousness (Rom.*

*4:5, 11, 22; 2 Cor. 5:21), and anointed and set apart for service through*

*the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. It speaks of a calling to obedience as we follow Christ and conform our lives to His Word.*

You have been called to ministry as a living stone. There is something

wrong with a church in which the staff does everything. The Lord has entrusted His mission and giftedness to every living stone, and He calls you one of His priests.

There is a story about the Hall of Fame baseball pitcher Dizzy Dean. Dizzy would like to throw the first pitch behind the batter's head to shake them up a bit, making them think that the next one might not miss your head. Then he would hammer the strike zone. Very effective. His career ended because a batter broke his toe with a line drive during the 1937 All-Star game. That injury ruined Dean's pitching motion because when he pushed off the pitching rubber to throw, he had to compensate for the injured toe by turning his foot in an awkward direction. Consequently, he began overextending his pitching arm, which eventually ruined it for pitching.

That same principle is true in the spiritual realm. Where there are non-functioning members, there will be adverse effects somewhere else in the body of Christ. All of us are priests and called to ministry.

**We offer up spiritual sacrifices.**

*Verse 5: you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

Even though we enjoy the privilege of unrestricted access into God's presence, we are responsible *to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*. Jesus told His disciples in the Upper Room, "*Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it*" (John 14:13-14). As believer priests and as His followers, whatever we ask that is consistent with His person, consistent with His will, and consistent with His plan, He will accomplish it. All of our spiritual offerings must be consistent with His person—with His Word and work. Our acceptable sacrifices are offered with the goal of honoring and glorifying Him.

The New Testament sets forth seven basic, acceptable sacrifices for Christians—for believer priests: our bodies (Rom. 12:1), our praise/worship (Heb. 13:5), our good works (Heb. 13:16), our possessions (2 Cor. 8:1-4), our converts (Rom. 15:15-16), our love (Gal. 5:13), and our prayers (Phil. 4:6). One of the primary functions of the church is to advance God's kingdom by stimulating one another to fulfill our priestly duties. The fulfillment of our priestly duties represents the state of our hearts—the state of our church.

We are not a perfect church, we fall short of God's design, and we all know it. So we don't accept the church as it is. To accept the church as it is, is to deny

our ability to see something better; denying our ability to be something better. To accept the church as it is, is to choose a slow death.

So we choose to get on a path to reach our potential for ministry. We are told that our property can support a 700 seat auditorium. As soon as we get out of debt, we will have plans in place to build that worship center and educational space. Not so we can become more comfortable, but so we can become more dangerous. Once we reach that, we are not done. We will need to plant new churches. As long as there is a world out there without God, we have a mission to accomplish. We need to prepare ourselves as a church to fulfill our potential as living stones in God's building of His church.

How do we prepare ourselves to reach our potential as God's church? God tells us in His Word. He outlines for the church godly leadership, who are to equip disciples for ministry. We are to penetrate our community with the gospel, person to person. We are to care for one another by practicing community. We are to proclaim God's truth with solid biblical teaching at every level. We are to maintain a high view of God by acknowledging His right to be worshiped. We are to be people of faith, willing to take risks, because too much is at stake not to take risks. There needs to be a spirit of dependence upon God, as we allow His Spirit to empower and enable us for ministry. Are you on board?

## **LIFE APPLICATION**

The state of the church is the state of the heart of every living stone. So we ask the question: What has God been doing in your life? What has He been teaching you? How has He been leading you? That is the state of this church.

At the bottom of your sermon outline are two statements. The first statement is this:

**God is** \_\_\_\_\_ . Take a moment and finish that statement. What is one thing that is true about God in your life this year. As we begin a new ministry year, look back on this past year—look in the rear view mirror—and answer the question: What is one thing that has been true of God in this past year for you? I will give you a minute to reflect on that and write out your statement.

This second statement is all about embracing our purpose as living stones. How do you sense God's leading?

**I will** \_\_\_\_\_ . This statement answers the question of the one thing I want to be true of me in the days ahead. What one thing, by God's grace, will be true of me as I live out my purpose as a living stone. How/where do you sense God leading?

As long as the Lord gives me breath—as long as the Lord gives you breath

–let’s invest our lives and energies in the ministry and advancement of the church’s mission. Let’s remember–He is the Rock and we have a role.