

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—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. 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.” 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,” and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. 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. 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.

In the name of Christ our Cornerstone, dear friends,

It was certainly helpful last Sunday to have Pastor Clemons explain the sheepfold and the gate so that we can understand Jesus when he tells us that he is “the gate” for “the sheep.” Today we have the words of Scripture giving us another picture, another image of our Savior. The words of 1 Peter chapter 2 speak of Christ as a “cornerstone.” We even sing about Christ, our cornerstone, in one of our hymns—in fact we will later on in the service today—but what exactly does that mean, CHRIST IS OUR CORNERSTONE?

Well, if you have one of those Bibles that gives you references at the bottom of the page or in the margin, you would see that as Peter wrote our text for today, specifically verse 6, he referenced the ideas from Isaiah 28:16. It’s not an exact quotation as your Bible layout might make it appear, but Peter paraphrases the key thoughts from Isaiah—in particular this idea of the “cornerstone.” But what does that mean that Christ is our Cornerstone? How does this image help us to better understand our Savior? That’s what we want to find out today.



These days, a cornerstone is really a decorative architectural feature. Not all buildings have them, but some do. The picture on the front of your worship folder is of Grace’s cornerstone—you can go out and take a look at it after church if you want! There might even be a time capsule inside the cornerstone, a container with a number of items representative of the time the building was built—maybe a newspaper or some coins. That way, years down the road, that capsule can be opened up and people can be reminded of what life was like back when the cornerstone was laid and the building built. So a cornerstone today might look nice, have a date or message inscribed on the outside, and have a bit of history on the inside.

But it used to be that the cornerstone was the most important stone of the whole building—for structural reasons. It was the first stone to be put down. If you wanted to build a good building, you needed to have a good cornerstone because it would determine all the angles and lines of the building. It really set the design for the whole house or temple or shop or whatever was being built. A crooked cornerstone would make for a crooked building, but a perfect cube or rectangle would give you perfectly straight walls both out from the corner and up from it.

We talk about Christ being the spiritual Cornerstone of the building of God's Church—the "spiritual house" of believers. As the Cornerstone, he is the One that makes perfect the Church of God—the building of "living stones" Peter says here. That is what we mean when we speak of and sing CHRIST IS OUR CORNERSTONE. God's Word before us today moves us to consider two things about our Cornerstone:

1. ON HIM ALONE WE BUILD and 2. FOR HIM ABOVE WE SERVE.

Let's first consider how it is ON CHRIST ALONE THAT WE BUILD. At the beginning of our text, Jesus is called the **living Stone**. Why a "living" stone? Because, as we emphasize especially in these weeks that follow Easter, we rejoice in the fact that Jesus rose from the dead, just as he said he would.

Christ promises that because he rose from death to life, we will also. Why? Because on the cross, he offered up his sinless life in payment for our sinful lives. None of our sins against God and His Word are counted against us because Christ has won forgiveness for us and the Holy Spirit has made us members of God's dearly-loved family. We were dead in sin, but made alive by faith in Christ. And so God talks about us as "living stones" in the building of his church.

Can you understand the picture then of CHRIST THE CORNERSTONE on which WE BUILD? He lived a perfect life, died a perfect death, and was the perfect sacrifice for sin. So everything based on him, "built" on him, will also be perfect! He is the risen and living Cornerstone. And so we're told in verse 5 that we **also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house...** We are living stones because Christ has made us like himself. The picture God uses is that we and all believers are like individual stones that are part of the building of this spiritual house of God.

I mentioned that Peter used the images from Isaiah's prophecy. He did that as he wrote, ***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.*** If you and I build on Jesus Christ—if we trust in him and put our confidence in him—we will never be put to shame. If our hope of eternal life is based on Christ, none of us will stand before God on Judgment Day and see him shake his finger in our faces and hear him say *"Shame on you! You disobeyed me and my Word! You're going where you deserve to go--straight to hell!"* Truthfully, we deserve for that to happen, but no one who builds on the Cornerstone of Christ, trusting in his life and death for forgiveness and salvation, will hear that. We will **never be put to shame!** For all eternity we will be stones in God's spiritual house.

This important message is what we preach each week. It is what we teach in Bible classes. This saving gospel is the reason we have confirmation classes for our young people and Grow in Grace classes for adults. In these ways we are able to share the truth of salvation in Christ. We want people to know and understand that Christ is the Cornerstone of faith; it is ON HIM ALONE WE BUILD our hope of eternal life in heaven.

But you know, there is a portion of Confirmation classes that typically ends up leaving the church, abandoning their study of God's Word, and eventually, losing their faith. There are people who grow up trusting in Christ who later abandon him. There are those who profess their faith in their Savior and declare that they will not turn away from him, but who later do. It sometimes happens in high school or college when a Christian's faith is challenged. Adults find that God and his Word are threatened in the workplace and among non-Christian friends.

Sometimes, even to a student of God's Word, Jesus and His Word become, as verse 8 says, ***A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.*** When what God teaches becomes difficult to square with our reason and logic, some walk away. When people give Christians a hard time or make them feel foolish for their faith, some walk away. When God doesn't answer prayer the way a person wants or as quickly as they want, some walk away. But remember, our logic or reason is not the cornerstone of our faith. Our feelings and emotions are not the cornerstone of our faith. Our expectations and demands are not the cornerstone for our faith. CHRIST IS OUR CORNERSTONE, ON HIM ALONE WE BUILD! When we set aside our reason and emotions and demands and simply let the Holy Spirit take over through the power and promises of Scripture, we find the firm foundation. We find Christ. We find that we are part of the "spiritual house" of God. CHRIST IS OUR CORNERSTONE, ON HIM ALONE WE BUILD!

And FOR HIM ABOVE WE SERVE. It says here: ***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.*** If we are each a part of this spiritual house of God, then we are each a part of this holy priesthood that offers up spiritual sacrifices. You probably remember how God's priests in the temple offered up the animal sacrifices for the people. Peter is not telling us that we are still to do the same today. In fact, Scripture tells us that those kind of sacrifices are not necessary anymore because the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was the ultimate bloody sacrifice and payment for the sins of the whole world.

Well then, what does Peter mean? The "spiritual sacrifices" that we make are our prayers and praise and worship of our God. Those are the things that we offer up to our God. Scripture describes the things we offer to God as being like a fragrant smell. To God our prayers and praises and worship smell like a freshly baked apple pie smells to us, or like a bouquet of fresh flowers smelled to mom on Mother's Day last Sunday. And we gladly offer up those prayers and praises to God out of love for the way he saved us in Jesus.

The last part of these verses emphasize the point. Listen to the way God describes all of us whose faith is built on the CORNERSTONE: ***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. 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.***

God reminds us that we were once in the darkness of sin. We were once not a people. We were once without mercy and forgiveness. That's kind of a "three strikes and you're out" kind of explanation of our plight before God! It shows that there was nothing good in us and that we were separated from God. But Jesus changed all that! All of the sudden, instead of being lost in the darkness of sin, we are people who soak up the rays and warmth of God's wonderful light. We weren't a people at all, but now have become the people of God. Before we were under God's judgment and anger, but now we have mercy and forgiveness from our God. A Savior who does all of that for us is certainly worthy of our thanks and our service, isn't he?!

Because we know the dramatic change that has taken place in us through CHRIST OUR CORNERSTONE, we can confidently say FOR HIM ABOVE WE SERVE!

We serve our Lord with our whole lives—every aspect of our lives. We know that because Jesus is our Lord and Savior, he is the Cornerstone of our marriage. He is the Cornerstone of our families. He is the Cornerstone of Grace Lutheran Church. He is the Cornerstone of our own personal faith and life. He is our foundation and we build off him. That means WE SERVE HIM ABOVE with our lives lived here—in every relationship, in our jobs, when we play, in the way we talk, in the things we do, in the thoughts that govern our minds—in every part of our lives. Our entire life is an act of worship and SERVICE TO HIM ABOVE.

And it is God's Word that reminds us of all of this. It doesn't matter how smart you are, how recently you went through confirmation instruction or finished a Grow in Grace class. God has lots more to tell us in his Word than any class or series of classes can share. More than any sermon or series of sermons can proclaim. It is my prayer that you are continually in his Word, so that you can be inspired to serve him as he expects and so that you'll know how to do that. Read your Bible, worship every Sunday, go to Bible class. God has much more to say to you—give him the opportunity to do so. The Word of God is so precious and necessary not only for creating faith, but also for encouragement and strengthening of faith and instructing us on how to SERVE our Savior.

The desire of every Christian is to remain in the building of God's spiritual house into eternity. God has laid the Cornerstone of the building and that Cornerstone is Christ. Continue to BUILD ON HIM ALONE during this earthly life and SERVE HIM ABOVE until the time he blesses you with goal of your faith—eternal life with Him. May the Holy Spirit keep every one of us true to our vows of faithfulness and service to our Savior Jesus, the Cornerstone of our faith. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.