

One People

The New Testament uses several word-pictures to describe the church. In John 10 we are a flock of sheep. Jesus portrays himself as the good shepherd and we are the sheep in his tender care. He knows us and loves us, and we love and follow him.

Later, in John 15, Jesus compares believers to a vine with many branches. Jesus is the main vine that supports us and supplies us with all we need. We are all branches and as long as we remain rooted in him we will grow healthy and be fruitful.

In 1 Corinthians 12, as well as some other passages, Paul compares the body of Christ to a human body. Just as all the parts of a body— the hands, the feet, the eyes, the ears are all very different from one another, and have very different functions, and yet they all work together for a common purpose so does the body of Christ. We might think one part is more important than another, but imagine losing any one of those functions. What if you can't see, or you can't hear, or can't touch, or can't walk? All of these functions are vital and needed in the body. So it is in the church. We are all different with different gifts and abilities, but we should all work together toward a common purpose.

Other passages picture the church as salt, as light, as a bride, as a family, as well as others. Each one of these word pictures portrays some aspect of who we are as the church and what we do.

We want to land on a passage this morning in 1 Peter 2, beginning in verse 4, in which the apostle Peter, picks not one, not two, but three different metaphors to describe the unity of the church. He begins with picturing the church as a house, not a church building, but the people as a structure, a stone house that Jesus is building, and we are the building blocks, the stones that make up this building.

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.

The church is God's great spiritual architectural building program. Jesus is the Master Builder building each one of us as stones into a great spiritual house meant as a dwelling place for the glory and grace of God.

I. **More Than a Pile of Rocks**

Notice that we come to him as individual stones. If you take a walk on almost any hill here in the Ozarks, you will find a bunch of rocks. Occasionally, you might find an interesting looking rock with a curious shape or a pretty color, or you're walking along a creek and find a flat, smooth stone and skip it across the water, but for the most part you just have a bunch of rocks. You could collect them all and put them in a pile, but you still just have a pile of rocks.

Now imagine a skilled stone mason comes along and he collects those rocks, he puts them together, and following a masterful design he begins to put those stones together into a beautiful hilltop home. You no longer have just a pile of rocks, you have something much more. The Apostle Peter says we are stones, but what I see before me is not just a pile of rocks. Jesus Christ is building us into something much more.

We come as individuals, but Christ builds us together. Individually, the stones aren't of much use- just a chunk of rock, but many stones together can build a great house. And the great house only stands as long as the stones all work together and hold together. Otherwise it crumbles and falls.

Verse 5 says we are being built into a spiritual house (singular). A bunch of different stones being joined together to become one house. The church is more than a collection of individuals. We aren't independent people who are all members of the same organization. We are interdependent pieces of a whole. We're all in this together as one people.

II. Odd Rocks

Let's consider for a moment just who was included in this spiritual house when Peter wrote this letter. What sort of stones was God mortaring together to build this house? We will find that God has used some very odd rocks. Going all the way back to the guys Jesus picked as his disciples we can see some rather perplexing design choices. Jesus chose both a zealot and a tax collector. On the one hand you have a radical revolutionary calling for the military overthrow of the Roman rule. On the other hand you have a Jewish collaborator with the Romans, a traitor in the eyes of the zealot who enabled the Romans to stay in power, and stealing from his countrymen. Apart from Jesus, a zealot would rather slice the tax collector's throat than eat dinner with him. In Jesus, they are brothers. One people.

In John chapter 4, a Samaritan village drinks deeply from the well of living water that is Jesus. History tells us the Samaritans descended from the poorest of the poor that had been left behind when the conquering armies of the Babylonians exiled the rest of the people. They inter-married with the foreigners who'd been deposited there by the Babylonians, and they abandoned the faith of their ancestors. The Jews regarded Samaritans as contemptible half breeds and would walk 25 miles out of their way to go around Samaria rather than set one foot on Samaritan soil. But we find Jesus building both Jew and Samaritan together in the house of God. One people.

In Acts 6 we find that the early house of God included another odd couple. It speaks there of the Grecian Jews. Some Israelites had abandoned their Hebrew culture and language and had adopted the Greek culture of their Roman occupiers. Though they had a little friction in the early chapters of Acts, the church dealt with it, and we find both traditional Jews as well as the Romanized Jews being built together, side by side in the house of God. One people.

Another astounding combination of stones comes from the fact that men and women were fully included together in the early church. Jesus let women be among those that followed him, who sat at his feet and learned from him. This was scandalous for a Rabbi of that day. In a culture where women were seen as one rung on the ladder above cattle, women were well-integrated in the church, they served as prophetesses and deaconesses in the early church. This is to say nothing of slave and free, young and old, or the myriad of other differences in the early church. All one people.

This is what motivated Paul to write to the Galatians in Galatians 3:26-28:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Only God could build such a building. Only God could use such stones together. What do you think he wants to do with drastically different stones today? What do you think He wants to do with you?

Do you think that God can join stones that love traditional hymns with stones that dance to modern praise music? Do you suppose He can fit such stones together? Do you think our Savior can join a blue-haired Goth teen with a blue-haired old lady? Can our Lord do that? Is our God powerful enough that he might stick together someone who goes into the voting booth and fills in the little oval marked "R" with someone who goes into that same voting booth fills in the oval that says "D?" Is He really that sort of God? Would God dare put a stone that thinks the church's money would be best spent on overseas missions together with a rock that thinks we should put our money toward youth ministry? Let me be so audacious as to ask if He is a good enough builder that he could join an Assembly of God rock with a Baptist stone? Is that even possible?

If you have come to Jesus, you are a stone that He is building into a spiritual house for God. He can join you with all the other stones. It doesn't matter what shape or color the stones. It doesn't matter their size or what kind of rock it is. It doesn't matter their sharp edges, the Master Builder can chisel those away. No matter what divides, the one fact that we have come to Jesus and belong to him, is enough to join us. The fact that you belong to Jesus is the most important thing about you. It's more important than anything else that defines you. The Super Glue of the God's grace is bond strong enough to hold together all that would separate. We only divide because we let sin and selfishness have the last word.

III. It's All About Jesus

Verse 4 calls Jesus the Living Stone, and the next few verses get more specific as to what kind of stone Jesus is. They talk about how Jesus is the cornerstone. Peter pulls from Old Testament

prophecy to show us that God's intention all along was to build a people with Jesus as the foundation.

For in Scripture it says: (quoting from Isaiah 28) "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." 7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe (Quoting from Psalm 118), "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"

In modern times, the cornerstone is more symbolic. We might put the date of construction on that brick. Some have buried time capsules underneath a cornerstone. In ancient construction, however, the cornerstone had much more than symbolic value. The cornerstone was the most important part of the foundation.

A cornerstone was a well-manicured, exquisitely engineered stone to be perfectly square. Every other stone was lined up and squared off that one stone. If the cornerstone wasn't true, the rest of the building would be off. The only way the church can be true is with Jesus as the cornerstone of its foundation.

What Peter is telling us here is that it's all about Jesus. It all depends on Him. Without Jesus, there can be no church. Without Jesus, nothing we do matters. He is the basis of why we are here. He is the measure of all we do. And if he isn't, we should close our doors.

We have nothing to build on if we don't build on Him, and we can't hold together without Him. From the bottom up, it's all about Jesus.

IV. One Metaphor is Not Enough

Next, Peter violates a major rule of writing. My English teacher would have fussed at me if I did what Peter did here. He mixes his metaphors. Peter has crafted this word picture of the church. We are a building that Jesus is constructing out of living stones into a spiritual house for God, but then we get down to verse 9 and Peter switches metaphors on us. We're no longer a house, we are a holy nation, a people belonging to God. Listen to verses 9 and 10:

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.

Peter might be a Galilean hick fisherman, but he's not an idiot. He's throwing different metaphors into the mix for a good reason. The first is that all of this is rooted in Old Testament prophecy. All of these word pictures come from Old Testament promises about the Messiah, and Peter is showing how Jesus is all of these things put together.

The second reason is simply this. No matter what metaphor you use, no matter what illustration, no matter how brilliant your word picture, at best, it only offers a glimpse at who

Jesus is. No one metaphor can communicate the whole of His glory. One metaphor catches a glimpse from this angle, while a different illustration shows us a view from over here. You cannot describe Jesus with any one view. They all fall short. He's too big for that.

The moment you think you see Jesus and know what he's like, you see something completely new and breathtaking. A poet would have wads of paper piled high around her trash can from starting and stopping and starting again in trying to pen a description of all that our Savior is. So, we can't really blame Peter for mixing his metaphors.

Each new metaphor describes a bit more. Are we a spiritual house for God? Oh, yes, but we are so much more. We are not just some static building that stands there and does nothing. No, we are not that kind of house. We are also a people, a nation, a holy nation, a holy nation of priests that have been chosen for a very special purpose.

What is that very special purpose? The second half of verse 9 says, "*that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*" If you were to ask Peter what the mission statement of the church should be, there's his right there- *to declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* What is the purpose of Son-Rise Christian Church in Marshfield, Missouri? Why has God joined this bunch of odd rocks together – *to declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

Why are you here? Why am I here? Why do we meet on Sunday mornings? Why do we take communion, collect offerings, serve one another, minister to the community, support foreign missions, and call ourselves a church? It's all for this reason right here- *to declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* There's a whole series of sermons right there in this one sentence.

Brothers and sisters, this is what it's all about right here. If we can't be one people on this basis, then we've got no business being here. Go join an Elk's lodge, a knitting club, a shooting range, or a softball league, but whatever we're doing has nothing to do with anything so great and noble as the church, if it's not about this right here: To declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. We can all unite for that. We can put all differences aside for that. That's something greater than our opinion, something that surpasses our feelings, something that overshadows our ideology. It is the glue that holds us together. If you aren't about that, then you're not about His business. If this isn't what you're about, go home, you'll just get in the way.

But if this is the pulse at which your heart beats; if this is the air you breath; if this is the food you eat, then you have come to the right place. You are a part of one people. A bunch of odd rocks, living stones being built together into a great house for God, all so we can declare his praises to a watching world.

V. Praying for Unity

Let me show you how big of deal this is. Turn to John 17. Let me set the scene for you. Jesus and his disciples are all gathered in the upper room. Jesus has washed their feet. They have shared in the Last Supper together. Judas has betrayed his Lord and left the room. In a matter of minutes, Jesus will take his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane. Before the night is over, Jesus will be betrayed by a kiss, arrested and hauled before the Jewish religious council. It's a kangaroo court filled with false witnesses.

But before all this goes down, Jesus prays for his disciples. He knows the next few days, the next few hours will be crucial, and the hardest thing they've ever had to face. He prays for their protection. He prays that they would be made holy, but as he continues to pray, Jesus looks beyond those 12 men with him in that upper room. He looks past the next few trying hours and he considers the future. He knows that one day there will be many more believers than this ragtag group of fishermen, radicals, rejects and rescued women that have remained with Jesus until the very end.

Jesus prays for all believers. In essence, He prays for you, and He prays for me. He prays for only one thing, and what do you think that is. Does he pray that we would be knowledgeable? Does he pray for our worship, or our boldness in witnessing? Does he pray that we would be correct in our theology. Nope. He doesn't pray for any of those things. Not that those things don't matter, but Jesus saw one thing as being more important than anything else He could have asked his Father for. Listen to his prayer,

20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Jesus prays for our unity. He prays that we would be one, united in spirit and purpose. Why? So that the world may believe. Our unity matters more than anything else when it comes to the watching world believing in Jesus. If we want others to declare his praises. If we want others to know what it is to be called out of the darkness into his wonderful light, we must have unity. That's how the world will know that God loves them, because we love each other. Regardless of our differences, we have a love for God, a love for each other, and a love for the lost that unites us.