

Rock Solid Faith In a Rocky World

Living Stones

April 30, 2023

Overarching Theme: 2023 – Living the Dream

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point: 2023 can be a year of living the dream of faithful discipleship as we take a next step forward in following Jesus Christ.

Reflect on this Scripture: ***1 Peter 2:4-10***

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," and "A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Commentary:

This passage begins with a potent image of stones made alive and being built into God's temple. In this word picture, Jesus is the living stone whom these believers have embraced and in whom they have found their hope. Jesus is also the cornerstone rejected by people but of greatest value to God (2:4, 6). The connecting point for Christian identity comes in verse 5, "You yourselves are being built like living stones into a spiritual temple" (Common English Bible). The follower is being made into the image of the master. And

the followers together are being built into God's temple to "*offer up spiritual sacrifices.*"

The image set is complex and beautiful. Rather than viewing true worship as what happens in the temples to various gods spread across the cities of Asia Minor, 1 Peter draws on this image of stones. Suggesting that acceptable worship arises in small, fledgling house-church communities of Jesus followers scattered across this region, where these "living stones" gather together to proclaim their allegiance to the once-rejected Messiah Jesus, THE Living Stone.

One possible background to this "living stone" image comes from the OT book of Nehemiah who is seeking to rebuild from rubble the formerly defeated and rejected city of Jerusalem. One of Nehemiah's powerful opponents, Sanballat, criticizes attempts to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem saying, "*Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble – burned as they are?*" (Nehemiah 4:2).

In Nehemiah, a major focus is dispersion and return—themes that are also important in 1 Peter. Within this passage, imagery about stones is configured as demolition materials salvaged and repurposed for rebuilding the Holy City and site of God's presence. From this perspective, the "*living stone*" imagery may invite us to consider resurrection as a site of repurposed life and reconstruction. Resurrection life creates the environment to house and honor the presence of God within Christian communities as God's precious living stones, built upon that living cornerstone. As God's chosen ones, having been brought from darkness to light, we can offer spiritual sacrifices and to proclaim God's wonderful acts of mercy.

-Adapted from online commentaries by Jeannine K. Brown and Shively Smith

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. In biblical history, there seems to be ongoing cycles of spiritual decline followed by times of spiritual renewal. What are the reasons for our spiritual inconsistency?
2. Why do you think persecutors like the Samaritan Sanballat (in the days of Nehemiah) or Roman Governor Pliny (in the approximate time of 1st Peter) oppose and ridicule the positive efforts of others?
3. 1 Peter reminds us that some reject Christ and he is to them a 'stumbling block.' But for others he is a precious 'cornerstone' to build

one's life upon. What makes the difference in these contrasting responses?

4. In contrast to the 'dead stones' and 'heaps of rubble' imagery of Nehemiah 4:2, 1 Peter calls Christ followers 'living stones' being built into a spiritual house (God's temple). How might this imagery encourage the small house churches of 1st Century Asia Minor that met in the shadows of magnificent, impressive pagan Temples?
5. 1st Peter declares that the purpose of Christ followers is to *proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light* (v. 9). What are some ways that the people of God can do this today?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: *Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* (1 Peter 2: 4-5).