

Theme: Christ is our solid rock

The game of Jenga has been a family favorite for decades now. The concept is simple, you take 54 identical wooden blocks and build up a tower. Each player takes a turn to pull one block away. The game can go on for five or ten minutes if the players have a good strategy and good hand-eye coordination. But once someone takes away a vital piece, the whole tower collapses! Our sermon text today describes all believers as living stones, living building blocks in the structure of the church. Jesus is one of those living stones too, but he has a special purpose. He is that vital block. Take him away and the tower collapses. There are two sides to seeing Christ as a stone. When he is rejected he is a block that causes people to fall. For those who believe, Jesus is our solid rock. A cornerstone on which we are founded and have life!

Now comparing someone or something to a rock maybe isn't the most exciting comparison. Maybe we would like if Jesus were compared to a powerful lion, or a fighter jet, or a skyscraper....something impressive! But his comparison to a rock works on several levels. A rock is strong and sturdy. A rock is durable and useful for building strong buildings. But a rock can also make someone trip if you don't take care when you walk outside. If you don't pay attention to it, a rock can be your downfall.

When people don't pay attention to Jesus or they reject his message, he is a rock that causes them to fall! We sometimes get stuck in the here and now and think that things have never been as bad in our world as they are now, but in reality history has been rather consistent. People have consistently been offended and upset by Jesus and his message. When he tells people about how they should act in marriage, how they are supposed to take care of their parents in their old age, and how they should love their enemies and not fight them back, he offends people. The sinner's natural response to Jesus and his words are that Jesus is intrusive and he tells us what to do too often!

People in the church often get caught up in the "what I do for everyone else" attitude. Tasks, chores, and duties done for others in the church certainly can be done in love for our brothers and sisters. Yet when we are tempted to think that our work is the most valuable thing, we begin to put our needs first in front of others. Often we use our works of service as a false test, to reassure ourselves that we are doing enough. "We'll, I already do this thing, so I'll let someone else take care of that other problem." We can even let our works of service affect our spiritual health. "I'm participating enough as it is, there is no reason for *me* to be another warm body in a Bible Study." How upsetting it can be when Jesus calls us a Martha instead of a Mary!

Jesus is often seen and heard upsetting the Pharisees. These were made up of some of the churchiest church people you could find! Is it going too far to say that if we don't admit to having a Pharisee's attitude at times, we might be the most like them? The Pharisee's were critical of Jesus wanting to spend time with people who didn't like going to church. They were offended when Jesus talked to sinners and didn't hold their sin against them when they repented! It's upsetting when Jesus criticizes us for not always seeing every person as a person who needs the gospel. Everyone needs to hear their sins have been paid for by Jesus.

Jesus can be a stumbling block to people inside and outside the church! Jesus offends both because he points out the sin that is present in both! If a church claims to preach and teach Jesus and his word, and no one bats an eye, something isn't right! If we go out in the world to preach and teach Jesus and no one is ever upset, we have to double check what we are saying! Yet any one of us who points out another's sin must remember that as a sinner too, we do so humbly so as not to be hypocritical. Jesus on the other hand can boldly point out sin as one who has no sin to hide.

The words of Jesus can trip us up when we are living contrary to them. When a person rejects Jesus, that rock that Jesus is will trip them and make them fall! Jesus is like that vital piece in the Jenga tower. Take it away and everything falls! There are many churches and many Christians and even my own sinful nature that wants to take pieces out of God's Word who take pieces out of God's Word that

they don't like, just like players take a wooden block out of the Jenga tower. Every piece that is taken out makes the whole structure less sound and secure. But once you see that you *can* take pieces out and still have a tower, just like people take out parts of God's word and remain Christian, it becomes much easier to feel fine taking just one more piece out and then another.

People have faith as long as they believe that Jesus lived for them, that Jesus died for them, and Jesus rose from the dead for them. It's true that tower can stand for a while with a few pieces missing and yes, as long as you believe that Jesus lived and died and rose, you still have faith, but once the attitude is there to take out pieces of the Word, eventually Jesus too will be taken out and then the whole tower will fall. "Take that Jesus piece out of the tower and it will fall! Reject Jesus as the cornerstone of the church, and he will be the stone that trips your faith to fall to its death. You don't want to start playing Jenga with God's Word!!

There are two sides to Jesus as a stone. Leaving Jesus out means losing everything, Jesus is a stumbling block, the rock that trips. Trusting in Jesus and his forgiveness sees him as the cornerstone Jesus as our cornerstone means having it all! Trust in this stone, trust in Jesus and you will never be put to shame!

We are called living stones in God's house because we are founded on and connected to Jesus as our cornerstone. God's love compelled him to make us living stones built as part of his house founded on Jesus. Perhaps a cornerstone isn't something that you think about everytime you go into a building, but knowing what a cornerstone is makes this picture Peter uses so meaningful. Today a cornerstone typically is a symbolic stone with the year the building was built engraved on the front. But for thousands of years through today, any house or building that has a foundation made of stones needs a cornerstone. A cornerstone is the stone that is laid down first. It is a stone that marks the right angle for the rest of the stones to follow to make a straight and sturdy wall. All other stones in the building rely on the cornerstone for guidance and support. See the connection? Jesus is the foundation of the church on earth. He was set first, so the rest can follow. Because Jesus died for you, you are part of the spiritual house made of living stones. As stones follow the cornerstone, we all fall in line after Jesus. He sets our direction and position.

All the stones in the building are connected to the cornerstone. All the believers in the church are connected *directly* to Jesus. Jesus our Savior is alive and through him we have life. That is why we are called living stones! Stones in a building are set and laid down and have no freedom or life on their own, but with Jesus have an everlasting eternity.

This connection to Jesus is a valuable connection to have! Through him we are precious in God's sight! Through Jesus we become many things: a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession. We are a chosen people, a nation made up of many nations to be God's children. We are not random, but known individually by God and chosen out of his love and his grace. We are a royal priesthood. We are royal because we serve the king of kings! We are a priesthood because serve in the world on God's behalf, even as his representatives! We are a holy nation! This is something that you can't find on this earth. No nation can claim that they are holy and others are not. But as living stones connected to Jesus, every member of this nation has his or her sins washed away through Jesus. In this nation founded on Jesus there is no sin at all! Through our connection to Jesus, we no longer are worthless and ugly sinners, but God's special possession!

We are told and reminded of our connection to Jesus now for specific reasons. We are reminded to pay attention to Jesus' words. Don't let them trip you up. Listen to them! We are reminded that our faith is founded on Jesus, our solid rock. We are reminded of God's love for us through our connection to Jesus. Share the news of Jesus our solid rock, pray that through your words and actions he becomes a cornerstone, and not a stumbling block, for others. Amen.

1. What is Jenga?

2. What's a good thing a rock can do?
 3. What's a bad thing a rock does?
 4. What are things that Jesus does that makes people upset?
 5. When do we act and think like Pharisees?
 6. How can Jesus be a stumbling block (a rock that makes you trip) inside and outside the church?
 7. How is Jesus like that vital piece of the Jenga tower?
 8. Why are we called living stones?
 9. What function does a cornerstone serve?
 10. What do we become through our connection to Jesus?
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1. Describe how focusing on our works of service can be a false test to determine our spiritual health.
 2. Does knowing that Jesus' word's may upset you make you eager to study and hear his word?
 3. What does it mean to you to be a living stone in God's house?
 4. Describe what people think makes them valuable. Can a person not connected to Jesus back up the claim they are valuable?