

INTRODUCTION

For anyone who has flown on an airliner, you're familiar with the mandatory announcements you hear. Frequent fliers seldom pay close attention. But sometimes you'll hear something quite funny. These are some actual announcements made on airline flights:

1. "Welcome aboard Southwest Flight 245. To operate your seat belt, insert the metal tab into the buckle, and pull tight. If you don't know how to operate one, you probably shouldn't be out in public unsupervised."
2. "Delta Airlines is pleased to have some of the best flight attendants in the industry. Unfortunately, none of them are on this flight!"
3. "In the event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure, masks will descend from the ceiling. Stop screaming, grab the mask, and pull it over your face. If you have a small child traveling with you, secure your mask before assisting with theirs. If you are traveling with more than one small child, pick your favorite."
4. (After a particularly hard landing) "Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to Amarillo. Please remain in your seats with your seat belts fastened while the Captain taxis what's left of our airplane to the gate!"
5. "Ladies and gentlemen, if you wish to smoke, the smoking section on this airplane is on the wing and if you can light 'em, you can smoke 'em."
6. "We'd like to thank you folks for flying with us today. And, the next time you get the insane urge to go blasting through the skies in a pressurized metal tube, we hope you'll think of US Airways."
7. "In the event of an emergency water landing, your seat bottom can be used for flotation. In such event, please paddle to shore and feel free to keep the seat bottom with our compliments."

After hearing those statements it's interesting that an American Airlines pilot is facing heat over a simple statement he made last week. As they were waiting on the ground for takeoff he asked the Christians on the plane to identify themselves so anyone interested in talking to them could do so. Some passengers were offended and he may lose his job. Why do people get upset over the mention of the name Jesus Christ, or Christian? The reason is found in our text today. Peter explains that for some people Jesus is a stepping stone and to others He is a stumbling stone. This message is entitled "The Rock and Our Role," because it is about whom Jesus is—the Rock; and it's about whom we are—living stones.

I Peter 2:4-8 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 in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (Isaiah 28:16) 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." (Psalm 118:22) and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." (Isaiah 8:14) They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

The big fisherman, Simon Peter, was writing a letter to Christians who were facing terrible persecution and suffering. He wrote to remind them about who Jesus is and who they are. He gives them two directives and we would be wise to heed them as well:

I. COME TO THE ROCK!

Jesus is the rock of ages. Long before professional wrestler Rocky Maivia started calling himself "the rock" Jesus was already the rock. Rocky Maivia is just borrowing that title temporarily—the *real* Rock is Jesus.

Peter has been writing about spiritual growth and he begins this section by writing, "As you come to him (Jesus), the Living Stone. Peter employs a participle when he communicates the idea that you don't simply come to Jesus one time. The word is literally saying, "As you continually keep coming to Jesus over and over again."

He identifies Jesus as a living stone. Isn't that an oxymoron? An oxymoron is a combination of two seemingly contradictory words, such as: jumbo shrimp; freezer burn; pretty ugly; Microsoft works; athletic scholarship; living stone. A stone isn't alive! But just as Jesus is a wounded healer; a meek master who gives us a light yoke, there is a width and depth to His character that is impossible to fully comprehend.

Peter goes on to describe the rock-like character of Jesus by providing three powerful word pictures:

1. Jesus is the foundation. Through the prophet Isaiah, God promised to choose and lay a precious cornerstone in Zion. Zion is a word for the temple area of Jerusalem.

Peter used two words to describe this cornerstone: *lithos* (which means rock) and *akrogoniaios* which means "the best cornerstone." A cornerstone provided the foundation for a building. It was the first stone to be placed and all the other stones related to it. If the cornerstone was not perfectly square and perfectly laid, the entire building would be flawed.

In Matthew 16, Jesus was talking to Peter about the foundation of the church. Peter had just confessed Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. After which Jesus said, "I tell you that you are Peter (*petros* = pebble) and upon this rock (*petra* = stratum) I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." (Matthew 16:17). Now some people assume Jesus was talking about Peter being the foundation of the church. Millions of people believe Peter was the first pope based on these words. But it's clear when you study the words, Jesus wasn't calling Peter the foundation. He was actually making a contrast. Jesus had given Simon the nickname of Peter, which means "rock." We would probably have called him Rocky. But that word *petros* means a small rock. It's the kind of rock you pick up and throw at a dog. You wouldn't use a pebble for a foundation. Jesus used another word, *petra* to describe the foundation of the church. It was a word that meant a stratum of rock. Have you ever stood beside a mountain and seen the different strata of rock pressed into the mountain side? That's what Jesus was describing.

I think if you had been there that day you would have seen Jesus point His finger to Peter when He said, "You are Peter." Then He would have pointed at Himself and said, "and upon *this* rock, I will build my church." But let's face it, we weren't there. But Peter was there. He knew what Jesus was talking about, so that's why Peter identifies Jesus as the living stone, and the foundation.

The Apostle Paul identifies Jesus as the foundation of life when he wrote, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." (I Corinthians 3:11)

It's amazing to consider the construction genius of ancient builders. They didn't have computers and heavy equipment. A few years ago, as a project for PBS, some builders decided to try to duplicate the building of an Egyptian pyramid, using only the methods available 3,000 years ago. It was to be built on a 1/4 scale to the actual pyramids.

The group took measurements and made calculations. They took great care in chiseling and laying the first stone, the cornerstone because they knew all the other stones would be cut and placed in relation to it. They were 25 days into the project when it was apparent they had miscalculated the angle of the cornerstone, and as a result, the project was a failure.

In life, like in construction, it's important to have a good foundation. Jesus is the only true foundation upon which you can build your life. Next Peter points out that

2. Jesus is the capstone. In verse 7 Peter quotes Psalm 118 to give us another rock picture of Jesus. In this description, Jesus is seen as the capstone. A capstone was different from a cornerstone. A cornerstone was used for a foundation guide, and was the first stone laid. In contrast, a capstone was the last stone laid.

By law, the tallest structure that will ever be built in our nation's capitol is the Washington monument, which is 555 feet tall. On December 6, 1884 the capstone for the Washington Monument was set in place. A scaffold had been built so the dignitaries could participate. The winds were gusting to almost 60 mph that day which made the ceremony a dangerous endeavor.

The capstone is a 9-inch pyramid containing 100 ounces of pure aluminum. In the 1880s aluminum was a rare metal, and it was installed as part of the monument's lightning protection system. At the time, this capstone was the largest piece of aluminum produced and it was displayed in Tiffany's jewelry store in New York City before it was installed.

On the eastern face of this capstone are two words in Latin, "LAUS DEO" which means "Praise Be to God." In other words, overlooking the 69 square miles of the most powerful city on earth is a capstone that offers praise to God!

When Solomon's temple was built, all the stones were quarried at a remote location so there was no sound of chiseling heard on the holy ground. A powerful Jewish legend tells the story of a strange-shaped stone being brought to the construction site early in the process. The head builder looked at the stone and couldn't figure out where it fit, so he figured it was a mistake, so the stone was rolled away to the side and forgotten. It took several years to build the temple, and

when the building was almost finished the builder sent word to the quarry that he was ready for the capstone. The quarry master sent word back that he sent the capstone years earlier. The capstone was the stone that had been rolled aside and by now it was covered with dirt and vines. That's what the Bible means when it speaks of how "the stone which the builders rejected has become the capstone."

You may wonder how Jesus can be *both* the cornerstone and the capstone. He is both the foundation of your life and the crowning achievement of life. He is the author and the finisher of our faith. He is the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega.

3. Jesus is the stumbling stone. The third picture of Jesus, the Rock is that of a stumbling stone. Verse eight says to those of us who believe, the rock is precious. Jesus is more precious than diamonds, emeralds and gold to those of us who know Him. Peter quotes Isaiah 8 to show the other side of the rock. He says to those who disbelieve, Jesus is a stone which makes them stumble and a rock that makes them fall. The word "fall" is the Greek word *skandalon* from which we get our English word "scandal."

When the American Airlines pilot asked his passengers to talk to Christians on board the flight, it created a scandal. I have been in places where I was asked to pray publicly and because I prayed "in the name of Jesus" it created a scandal. All this talk about the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, has created its own scandal. We shouldn't be surprised. The Bible says there is no neutral ground concerning Jesus. He is either a precious stone or a stumbling stone.

You can love Jesus and accept Him, or you can reject Jesus, but you can't ignore Him.

In America today, it's okay to be religious and to talk about God in vague terms. But if you start talking about the blood of Christ, or that Jesus is the only way to heaven—watch out, you are going to be in trouble. As I've predicted for years, we have arrived at a time where Bible-believing Christians are labeled as mental Neanderthals because we oppose such liberating ideas as same-sex marriages.

But that's the way it's always been. One of the early Christians, named Stephen, had the audacity to stand up and say that Jesus was alive and standing at the right hand of God, and what did they do? They stoned him to death.

Jesus will either be a precious stone to you, or a stumbling stone. Have you ever heard the phrase, "One man's junk is another man's treasure?" That's why yard sales and garage sales are so popular. A few years ago, an 85 year old widow in Wisconsin died. Her only living relative was a niece who came to dispose of her possessions. It was mostly junk so she decided to have a garage sale. One item was a box of miscellaneous papers that had been in the attic for over 50 years. One man looked at the contents and asked the price. She said, "One dollar." With trembling hands he paid her. Inside the box were dozens of mint-condition baseball cards from the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Included were rookie cards for Babe Ruth and other baseball legends. The value of the cards was estimated to be \$475,000. One man's junk is another man's treasure, indeed!

II. CONNECT WITH THE ROCKS!

Jesus is the rock, but now let's consider our role. Who are we and what are we to be doing in light of the fact that Jesus is the cornerstone, the capstone, and the stumbling stone? The Bible answers this question in verse 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. Jesus is the living stone and we are chips off the old block—we are living stones. The adjective can mean "lively" stones. God is using these living, lively stones to build up His church—a spiritual building. Are you a lively stone, or just dead wood? God is looking for exciting, excited, enthusiastic stones to build up His house. That's our role. Remember, a mossy stone gathers no role. (Sorry)

Next week, I'm speaking on the power of positive praise which goes deeper into our role as living stones. Don't miss next Sunday because of all the messages I've ever preached, I guarantee it will be the next one. But for now, let's briefly examine three aspects of your position in the building.

1. You are selected by God. I've shared before that there are three dynamic pictures of the church in the New Testament that all start with the letter "B." We are the Bride of Christ, and Jesus is the Bridegroom who is coming to take us back to His Father's house. We are the Body of Christ, and Christ is the Head and we are like the different body parts. And we are the building of God, and Jesus is the cornerstone and we are the living stones that make up the building. Don't be confused, the church is *not* a building like we're sitting in—we, the people, are like a building. But one stone doesn't make a building. We need to connect with other stones to make the house of God.

As you can see in this picture of a stone church, the stones are all different shapes and sizes. God loves variety—if you don't believe it, just look around. But like the stones in this building, we are joined together through the mortar of the Holy Spirit. The stone mason carefully chooses each stone to fit with the others. That's exactly what God does with us.

We need each other. Where I'm weak in one area, you may be strong, and where I'm strong, you may be weak. That's how different The Bible says you are a living stone God is using to build up His spiritual house.

2. You are shaped by God. When the temple in Jerusalem was being built, David hired stonecutters to shape the stones for the temple. In the same way, God is the stonecutter who is working on us. Rather than saying you are "shaped by God," I should say "God is shaping you." Unlike stones that are dead and cold, we are living stones. Have you ever seen a brick mason take a brick and break it with his trowel in order to make it fit? That's what God is constantly doing in our lives. He chisels on us to conform us to the image of Christ.

The church is being built up as God keeps shaping the stones. The critics are saying the church of Jesus has lost touch and it will soon be extinct. That will never happen, because of the One who is doing the building.

Chuck Swindoll writes: "All kinds of prophets of doom wonder about the condition of God's building. They see it as condemned property, worn out, dilapidated, and derelict rather than as a magnificent edifice that is being constructed on schedule. The truth is, God is the master architect, and every stone is being placed exactly where He designed it to fit. His project is right on schedule." (*Hope Again*, p. 68)

This is a beautiful building, but there's something 1,000 times stronger than this facility—it's the faith and commitment of the men, women, students, and children who make up the church. You can visit all the wonderful temples and cathedrals on earth, but you'll never see the power of the church in stone and steel.

During the days of Greek power, the Spartan king boasted to a visiting monarch about the walls of Sparta. The visiting monarch looked around and saw no walls. Puzzled, he asked the king, "Where are the walls about which you boast so? I see no walls!" The king pointed to the Spartan soldiers and said, "These are the walls of Sparta and every man is a brick."

We could point around to the people here who are followers of Jesus and say, "Here is the building of God, and every person a brick."

3. You can sacrifice to God. Peter changes metaphors in the middle of the verse as he writes that we are "a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Who are we? We are living stones. What do we do? We are priests who offer sacrifices to God. In the Old Testament, only a select few were priests. The common people would bring their offerings and sacrifices to the temple, but only a priest could offer them to God. The people couldn't even approach the inner court of the temple. The common priests could only approach the holy place on rare occasions, and only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies for a few hours one day a year! There were many "middle men" between God and an average person.

But when Jesus died on the cross, the curtain between the Holy of Holies and the rest of the world was torn apart. It was ripped from top to bottom to signify that God was removing the barrier. Today, you don't need any priest to approach God except our High Priest the Lord Jesus.

We are all priests before God! You can approach God and make sacrifices to Him. But these sacrifices are only acceptable when offered through the Lord Jesus Christ. There are different kinds of sacrifices we offer to God. In Romans 12:1 we are told we should offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. In the Old Testament, the priests offered dead animals as sacrifices. Today, God is looking for living sacrifices.

The New Testament makes it clear that even our financial giving ought to be a sacrifice. Today, if a person is in jail, the jail provides them with food and clothing. But that wasn't the case when Paul was in prison 2,000 years ago. He needed help, and some of the Christians in Philippi took up an offering and sent him some money. Paul wrote them a thank-you note from prison: "I am amply supplied now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:18-19)

In the Temple, the priests burned incense to produce a heavenly fragrance. Some offerings probably stink to God and some have a sweet fragrance. This offering sent to Paul was like a fresh, pleasing aroma. Do your offerings smell good to God? We all love to quote Phil. 4:19, because we want God to meet our needs, but notice it follows Philippians 4:18.

CONCLUSION

Well, that's our rock and that's our role. Is Jesus your stepping stone to heaven, or are you stumbling over the truth about Jesus? Back in the days when the Old West was being settled, pioneers were flocking across the country to California and Oregon. In one particular spot on the Eastern slopes of the Rockies there was a large, dirt encrusted lump in the middle of the trail. Wagons rolled over it and men tripped over it. Finally someone dug up the lump and rolled it off into a nearby stream. The stream was too wide to jump over, but by using that lump, people could "two-step" over the water. It was used for years, until finally one settler built his cabin near the stream. He carried the lump out of the stream and placed it in his cabin to serve as a doorstep.

As years passed, railroads were built and modern cities sprang up. The old settler's grandson went east to study geology. On a visit to his grandfather's cabin, the grandson happened to examine the old lump of stone and discovered that within that lump of dirt and rock was the largest pure gold nugget ever discovered on the Eastern slope of the Rockies. It had been there for three generations, and people looked at it in different ways. To some it was a stumbling stone to be removed. To others it was a stepping stone, to others it was just a heavy rock. But only the grandson saw it for what it really was—a lump of pure gold. Jesus is the precious rock God has given us to be the foundation of our lives. Will you come to the rock today? Will you build your life upon Him? One day, you will discover that Jesus will either be a stepping stone that gives you access to God, or He will be a rock that causes you to stumble. The choice is yours.

OUTLINE

I. COME TO THE ROCK!

1. Jesus is the foundation
2. Jesus is the capstone
3. Jesus is the stumbling stone

II. CONNECT WITH THE ROCKS!

1. You are selected by God
2. You are shaped by God
3. You can sacrifice to God



DISCLAIMER: These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes