

**1 Peter 2:2-10**

**LIVING CORNERSTONE**

Back in the day when such things were still very easy and commonplace, some of you travelled to Europe and saw some of the grand buildings which are there; buildings of an age and a size which we simply don't have here in Australia. It seems to me that whenever someone is showing me their pictures from their European holiday it is a grand cathedral, followed by a large castle, another cathedral, another castle, etc. And while I have yet to see these buildings myself, both the awe of those who have and the pictures we see certainly do show how impressive these buildings are. They are of a scale and a beauty which make you wonder at those who both designed and built them. They are built to draw attention and to make a strong statement.

I don't know about you, but for me every time I hear this image of Jesus as the Cornerstone, I think of these grand cathedrals. In a way that's a bit strange, because as old as they are these Christian cathedrals did not exist back in Bible times. Writers like Peter and others may have seen buildings like the temple in Jerusalem, may have known of structures like the pyramids, but they certainly were not thinking of these grand cathedrals when using this cornerstone image.

But there is a reason why this image is used quite widely in the Bible, and why we think of these cathedrals when we hear of Jesus as the Cornerstone. And that's because for many years the method of constructing some buildings at least, was to use a cornerstone to set out their place, their starting point, their orientation. Everything begins with the cornerstone, and it determines how the building finishes up. In our more modern times this practical cornerstone has often been replaced with a more symbolical one, so that it's purpose is more of a commemorative plaque; giving some idea of the history of the building, and even what it is all about. But still, we could say, even these more modern cornerstones fulfill the same purpose, even if not in a strictly physical sense, of giving a building its place, its starting point, its orientation, or direction.

So, whatever Peter was thinking of when he wrote this letter just under 2,000 years ago, applying his image to both the practical and symbolic cornerstones in our buildings works, doesn't it? In saying that Jesus is the 'living stone', Peter is talking about the One who as our cornerstone gives us our place, our starting point, our direction. The picture is of the 'building' which is God's people, the building which is both built for us and by us. Jesus is the 'living stone', and this building is built both for our benefit and blessing, but is also a building for us to work in and through as a witness to others. In this case of course it's not a building made of stones, or concrete, or metal, or wood. It doesn't even have any glass or fancy fittings in it. The building is the people, God's people, us, being the living stones to build the spiritual house.

And that 'choice and precious cornerstone' mentioned here is Jesus. What did we say before about the original use of cornerstones? They set out the building's place, its orientation, its direction. The cornerstone determines what the building is, what its purpose is, what it says to others. Mmm, any surprise then that this image of Jesus as the Cornerstone of the 'building' of God's people, what we often call the Church, fits so well. As the Cornerstone, we know that Jesus sits at the foundation of who we are as God's people; through what He has done for us and what He teaches us He determines what we do. It is Jesus' love, His life, His teaching, His forgiveness, the peace and the hope we have with Him, which truly sits at the basis of who we are and what we do as God's people.

Sometimes in the past, even the most well-made Cathedral could collapse at least in some part so that it was no longer a witness to God's glory. As the living stones of this 'spiritual house' Peter talks about here, how do we go? Do we ever fall down, lose our connection with the 'cornerstone', give a witness to God which is not the one we are called to give? Think about it like this: when people see those great cathedrals, many hundreds of years old, reaching to the sky, both large and beautiful and designed in ways that astound us, what do they think of? The building does what it was designed to do, doesn't it? It points to God's glory, it brings an awe of God's love, power and might, but also an appreciation of how much those people believed in and loved God that they would build something like this in His honour. But if, instead, we see a cathedral now in ruins, what does that make us think? We may think that while the building once was great and beautiful, it has had its day, it is no longer relevant, maybe not enough people

really cared or believed in what it was about to keep it providing the witness it was. Perhaps, at the heart of it all, the importance of and the connection with the cornerstone had been lost.

Let's bring that back then to how people see and view us, the living stones of God's spiritual house as Peter calls us. When the world looks at us, and thinks about us, what is seen, what is experienced by those who 'come to' this building? Are we always a beautiful and grand building, mind-blowing in how we are joined together, showing people God's glory and the difference He can make in their lives also? The Church as a group of people is unique from most others, in the way it brings people of all ages, backgrounds, interests, abilities, strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, together. And when that works as it's designed to, based around the Cornerstone, it is a beautiful thing which gives glory to God and makes others want to know more.

And it very often does work, otherwise possibly none of us would be here. But sometimes the witness isn't the grand cathedral, but it is the ruins. When there is a selfishness for getting our own way, a reluctance for serving God and His 'building', an inclination to follow other people and things before we follow God, an unwillingness to forgive as we are forgiven. What is this building we are a part of showing then? Are we providing the witness of a grand cathedral showing all of God's power and might and what He still today means to His people? Or are we showing that the Cornerstone who lies at the basis of this 'building', who gives it its place, its orientation, its purpose and direction, is now irrelevant, out of date, and no longer worth putting effort into glorifying? Have we also then lost connection with our Cornerstone?

This spiritual house or living temple which we are all a part of as God's people, is something which brings blessings to us. When we are placed and directed by Jesus as our Cornerstone as Peter says here, 'No one who has faith in this one will be disappointed.' (v. 6b) One of the functions of Cathedrals was to provide refuge for people, protection in times of danger, hardship, even famine. We know that when we come to Jesus, align ourselves with Him, base ourselves on His love, connect with the other living stones who are a part of His building, that we receive His love, His hope, His peace, in our lives also.

We are God's chosen and special people. A group of royal priests, a holy nation. We are people whom God has brought into His light. Over and over in different ways in this reading Peter tells us why we are so blessed when we are with Jesus. He knows that, he was with Jesus, that's why he is so passionate

about it even though he's now living in a time when he is persecuted for his faith. Peter knows what God's love means for us, and he also knows what our role is now to do with it, and that is to, 'tell all the wonderful things he has done'. (v. 9b) While many people, like me, haven't been to Europe to see those grand cathedrals and the way they witness to God's glory, people here do see us, the living stones of God's temple. All the politics, and earthly power, and other human stuff aside, the reason those cathedrals were built was to show how great God's love and glory is, and how much people love and want to serve Him because of what He means to them in their lives. We, both as the whole Church, as congregations, and as individuals, are the living cathedrals people get to see today. Our call also is to show out the wonderful things God has done.

Jesus, the Living Cornerstone. We as the temple of living stones, both finding our shelter and strength with Him, and showing His love and glory out to others. It's a picture we are both blessed by, and a part of. As God's people, together in Him, placed and orientated by our Cornerstone, we provide a grander witness of God's glory than the greatest Cathedral. Stay connected with Jesus the Living Cornerstone, receive His forgiveness and comfort, and allow others to see what He has done through you and through the building we now make together. Amen.

### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION**

- If you have been to Europe, think about some of the great cathedrals you saw there, perhaps even look back at some of your pictures. How did these make you feel? If you haven't been to Europe, find some pictures of cathedrals online. What sense do even these pictures give you of the size and majesty of those buildings?
- Reflect on Jesus as the Living Cornerstone in your life. How does He give you strength and stability? In what ways does He give you direction? In what ways does His forgiveness, hope, and peace comfort you?
- You are also a living stone in this temple. What does this mean? Do you always show this in how you interact with fellow church members? Are you a witness to God's love in all do you with others? Pray for God's help and strength in living out His call to show and tell others what He has done.

Pray: thank God for giving us Jesus as our Living Cornerstone. Ask Him to help us both alone and with others to be part of a 'building' which helps others to know His love and glory also.

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