

Living Stone Covenant Sunday
March 3, 2024

Introduction

- Good morning and welcome. I am glad that you're here to be a part of our time together this morning. [\(Talk about Ellaney in the Sound of Music.\)](#)
- Today is a special event in the life of our church, that is, the annual signing of the Living Stone Covenant.
- If you're visiting with us this morning or you're new to the church, this probably sounds strange to you. What is a Living Stone? The rocks that I've seen look dead to me!
- So, this morning, I want to give you the Scriptural basis for this and then a brief history on how this became an annual event in the life of our church.

Living Stones for God's House

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 2:4-5...

- The Apostle Peter is writing to 1st century believers, many of whom were enduring intense suffering and persecution because of their faith in Jesus Christ.
- Peter is writing to them to encourage them and to give them hope. After the resurrection of Jesus, persecution began in Jerusalem and spread from there to the rest of the world.
- As the persecution spread westward, so did the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Followers of Christ first started being called Christian in the city of Antioch which was located in what is today the country of Syria in the Middle East.
- Peter is writing to give hope to these persecuted Christians who were having serious doubts about this new faith.

In chapter 2, verses 4-6, Jesus Christ is seen as "the living cornerstone" upon which the church is built...

1 Peter 2:4-5 NLT

You are coming to Christ, who is the **living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was **chosen by God for great honor.****

Peter continues in verse 5, telling them that they are "living stones" ...

[5] And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.

- This picture of the Church held special significance to Peter...

Matthew 16:13-18 NASB95

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" [14] And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." [15] He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" [16] Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." [17] And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. [18] I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

- In verse 18, Jesus uses a "play on words." Here's what I mean...

"You are Peter..." Petros – Translated "Peter" and means "little stone."

"...upon this rock, I will build my Church..." Jesus uses a different Greek word when He says "...upon this Rock, I will build My Church..."

- "Petra" – This isn't talking about Mark Hathaway's favorite Christian Rock band from the '70's who were regarded as pioneers of the Christian rock and contemporary Christian music genres.
- So, some of you older Christians who prefer hymns and Gospel songs now know who to blame for "contemporary Christian music." It's the group "Petra."

I digress...

- The Greek word, "Petra," means "bedrock," or "foundation stone," upon which the Church is built. And Jesus Christ is the Cornerstone of the foundation...

Ephesians 2:20 NLT

Together, **we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.**

- One more thing to say about Matthew 16 is **where** Jesus said these words to His disciples...Caesarea Phillipi.
- It was a place called the "Gates of Hades" in Jesus' day, and referenced Satan and all his demons, believed by the pagan worship of the day that the caves in this rock were literally the entrance to the underworld.

- Jesus used this setting to introduce His Church that would overcome the fortresses and strongholds of Satan. Unfortunately, the Church in the U.S. is a far cry from what Jesus Christ intends the Church to be.
- Peter says that you, the Church, are “living stones,” built upon the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets, Jesus Christ being the Cornerstone.

There is much more that could be said about this, especially in regard to the relationship between Christianity and Judaism during the Millennial reign of Christ – a sermon for another day.

A brief history of Calvary and Rock of Salvation Churches...

(Show the “Memorial Stone document” from the foyer.)

A month or so ago I was looking through the history of Calvary Mennonite Church which I found to be quite interesting...

- Point out Romiro and Martha Hernandez...Many of you know that Romiro was the “Associate Pastor of Hispanic Ministries” here at Calvary.
- A group of people, some from Calvary, some from the Mennonite conference, had a vision of reaching the Hispanic population with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and a new ministry was born here at Calvary.
- That ministry began to grow under the ministry of Romiro who was called by God to be a pastor here at Calvary.
- Now, I don’t know the specifics or the reasons why, but Romiro was told by, well, I don’t know who, or why – there are some here today that were here then that give you more of the specifics.
- But Romiro was let go by Calvary as their Associate Pastor of Hispanic Ministries. Some of it had to do with finances, some of it had to do with the politics within the church, and I’m sure, other reasons.
- Although Romiro was no longer a pastor at Calvary, he was told that he could use this church’s facilities, but that Calvary would no longer support them financially. But there were individuals at Calvary that continued to support them.

That was the beginning of Rock of Salvation Church.

- Now, I wasn't here during that time and maybe my interpretation of this history is wrong, but I believe that the original vision at the beginning was not to start a new church, but to reach a people group with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- I believe, from the beginning, that God intended for us to be one church...

Galatians 3:28-29 NLT

There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29] And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

- ...But that didn't happen here...we became 2 churches. I believe that God always intended for us to be one church, but Satan wanted to destroy that vision because he hates the church.

That brings us to the Living Stone Covenant...

What is a Covenant?

- When the Bible mentions a covenant, it's referring to a **strong, solemn agreement between two parties**. The most familiar covenant that we know is that covenant between **a man and a woman** (emphasis intended in light of today's popular culture AND church cultures).
- However, biblical covenants are very different from the kinds of agreements we make nowadays:

Two of these differences I want to highlight before signing the Living Stone Covenant.

First...

Covenants make two into one. When two parties make a covenant in the Bible, they are joined together and identified with each other. They may exchange coats ([1 Sa 18:3-4](#)), have a commemorative meal ([Ex 24:11](#)), and erect a long-lasting memorial to their promise ([Gen 31:46](#)).

At every covenant's core, there is a change in relationship.

Secondly...

Covenants involve promises that are not easily broken. To break a covenant is a serious thing with serious consequences. There are many examples broken covenants in the OT, the most serious being the broken covenant between God and Israel ([Hint: It wasn't God who broke the covenant](#)).

In a few minutes, we will read the contents of the Living Stone Covenant which includes both statements of belief as well as promises to the church.

- Signing this covenant is a serious matter, and, quite frankly, this has not been communicated very well in the past – I will take full responsibility for that.
- Some of you may choose not to sign the Living Stone Covenant, and I don't want to make anyone feel that they must sign it.
- You may be new to the church, even a 1st time visitor. You will need time to pray about a decision to sign or not to sign a commitment to this church.
- Some of you may feel that you can't sign this covenant. If you don't feel that you can sign the covenant today, for whatever reason, you can always sign it later. And please don't get the idea that you cannot attend here if you don't sign it. That is not the intention. Our intention is to unify the church.

[John 17:20-23 NLT](#)

"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. [21] I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one-as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. [22] "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. [23] I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.

Also, there are those that can't be here today whether for health reasons, travel reasons... They will be able to sign it later.

Pastor Victor and I believe that God's purpose is for us to be one church and it always has been God's intention to be one church. By signing this covenant, you will be committed to that vision: two becoming one.