


SERMONS IN STONE



*“Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall. The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him; but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob (from thence is the shepherd, **the stone of Israel**).” “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”*

Gen. 49:22-24; 1Peter 2:4, 5.



 We shall see different cases, where, under one experience and another, one record and another, this thought of the “living stone” is brought out.

“Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek; tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with

Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a *stone*, and put it under him, and He sat thereon." Ex. 17:8-12. The fact that Moses sat upon a stone means something more than simply that he had something to sit upon. It indicates that it was the God of Israel, "the stone of Israel," who gave him the victory.

The Stone in the Hand of Israel's Shepherd Boy.

We have, too, the case of David and Goliath. We need not take time to read how the Philistines had defeated the army of Israel, and how Goliath came out morning after morning to defy them. David, who was but a shepherd boy at this time, came down to visit his brethren. They rather despised him. "And Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness?" 1 Sam. 17:28. David came from keeping the sheep. A shepherd is one who keeps his sheep, not loses them. Christ is the Good Shepherd.

David, after talking with Saul, obtained his consent to go out and fight Goliath, and "Saul armed David with his armour, and he put a helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail." He thought that if David was going to fight against Goliath, he would need armour. "And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him. And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine. And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield went before him. And when the Philistine looked about and saw

David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field. Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.... And it came to pass when the Philistine arose, and came, and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone." 1 Sam. 17:38-50.

David went out in the name of the Lord, and Jesus went with him to give him the victory simply by a stone. It was not simply David's power and accuracy that caused that stone to sink into the forehead of the Philistine. It was the power of the Lord, who was fighting the battle for him. That record is for us. We have battles to fight against the enemy of the Lord of hosts, and we prevail over him with a stone. David without armour, without implements of warfare, David going forth in the faith of the Lord of hosts, is the example for us. He prevailed with a stone. Jesus Christ, the living stone, is our strength and power for our battles with the enemy.

A Building of Prepared Stones.

In 1 Kings 6, we have a record of the building of Solomon's temple. In the 7th verse is a description of the house: "And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was

brought thither; so that there was neither hammer nor ax nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.” The stones of this temple were quarried out and hewn, and each stone fitted for its particular place in the temple, before they were brought together; and then when they were brought from the quarry, each stone fitted into its place. The building was put together, stone upon stone, and there was heard no sound of ax or hammer. “They prepared timbers and stones to build the house.” But all the preparing was done before they were fitted together.

“Ye also as lively stones, are built up—

A Spiritual House,

a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Christ Jesus. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe He is precious; but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient.” 1 Pet. 2:4-8. Christ is the living stone; and as soon as we come in contact with Him, we become living stones. Apart from Him, we are dead; but coming in contact with Him, we are built up a spiritual house for Him, “whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (Heb. 3:6); “Jesus Christ Himself, being the chief cornerstone.” Eph. 2:20. “For ye are the temple of the living God.” 2 Cor. 6:16. And the whole house, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord. We are built together for an habitation of God. Each believer is a temple of God, and then the believers are built together, and that makes the church, which

is the temple of the living God, He, by His Holy Spirit, taking up His dwelling place there.

We become living stones because He is a living stone, and we are built upon Him. Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid. “I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up.” He will gather again a people with which to build His church. He is at work now, preparing the stones for His temple. They are being quarried and hewn, each one to fill his place in the temple of God. When that temple is complete, the work will be done.

Preparing the Stones.

In Hosea we have again brought to view the figure of preparation: “O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, What shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets.” The Lord takes us out of the quarry, rough unhewn stones. That is the beginning of our experience. Each individual is to be fitted for his particular place in the temple of God. And when the temple is fitted together, it will be without the sound of ax or hammer. That is done before. It is then that He says, “Come, ye blessed of My Father.” But we are not to wait till that time to prepare. The work of preparing these rough, unhewn stones must be done before.

I once visited a cemetery in which was a very beautiful statue of a man standing by a chair. It was of heroic size; and the attendant called my attention to the fact that that was all carved out of one stone. The sculptor, when he started, saw an immense stone, but he also saw the man and the chair. As he looks, he loses sight of the rough edges, and sees instead a man of heroic size, standing there perfect. Everything else must

be cut away, and he goes to work with his tools. He wants the world to see what he sees, and so he cuts away everything but the man and the chair.

God takes us, rough, unlikely-looking stones; but He sees in us an expression of His character, and He looks upon us, not as rough stones, but as what we may be. Even then He sees in us Jesus Christ. And so He goes to work to cut and to polish. What is He doing? Some would think that He was destroying the whole thing. But He has a place for that stone, and He wants it cut in a particular way. These are the hard experiences of life, when it seems as if Christ would pound us to pieces. But He will not spoil His stone. He knows exactly the place it is to fill in His temple, and He is cutting it so that it will fit. The Lord carries on His work of preparing, that a people may be prepared, each one to fit in his place in the heavenly temple, and each one becomes a living stone, because of his contact with Christ, the living stone. God will develop in each one just that phase of character that will fit the best in the place He wants filled. When He comes, He says, Let the work of preparation cease. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still." Rev. 22:11.

When we receive Jesus Christ, God sees in us that perfection of character which we may attain. He knows what He purposes to do with us. He gives us the character of Christ, and then looks upon that character and so "we are accepted in the Beloved." He accepts us, not for what we are, but for what He purposes to make of us and for what Christ is. He will make of each one of us a stone for His temple. The Master-builder looks at the rough stone, and sees in it His model of perfection. He accepts us, not for what we are, but for what He is.

Let us turn to another line of thought. "And He gave unto Moses, when He had made an end of communing with him upon Mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God."

Ex. 31:18. In Ex. 34:28 we are told what was written there. You will remember that when Moses came down from the mount the first time, he found that the children of Israel had broken God's commandments already, and were worshipping idols; and that when he saw them, he cast the two tables of stone down and broke them. Then God told him to prepare two more tables. You see in this the rewriting of the law. Man in the first place broke the law. God then wrote it on the tables of stone. After He had written it there to tell them in words what His character was, Jesus Christ came to interpret it in His life. Jesus Christ was the one who spoke the law on Sinai; and when He came, in human flesh, He sat upon another mount, and spoke the law over again. We have it in the sermon on the mount. It was the same law, the same Christ, the same principles, but He was opening it out. He not only opened it out in words, but He Himself was the law, the expression of God's character. He tells us what God is, not only in His word, but by *being* that among us. He was God manifest in the flesh. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

Then Christ is the stone, the stone of Israel. God wrote the law perfectly and completely in the first place on the tables of stone, and gave them to the people. Then He wrote that same law upon the Living Stone and gave it to the people. Thus, you will see, Christ is the living law. That was putting the law in stone the second time. Here, then we have the law in stone twice; on the tables of stone, written with the finger of God, and on the Living Stone, Christ, and presented to the people.

Let us consider for a moment—

The Law Written on the Tables of Stone.

"Moreover the law entered that the offence might abound." It came to give the knowledge of sin, and to condemn sin. "The sting of death is

sin, and the strength of sin is the law.” Rom. 5:20; I Cor. 15:56. Sin is not taken into account where there is no law. Sin results in death. “Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Jas. 1:15. The law on the tables of stone, simply as the ten words of God, condemns to death. “Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Then when we meet the law simply as God’s code, it means death to us. But God has put that same law upon *living* stone, and when we meet it written on the Living Stone, it means life to us; but it is still the same law. We must either meet the law upon the tables of stone, and be condemned and put to death by it, or we must meet it upon the Living Stone, and be made alive by it. But we must meet it. God does not ask us whether we want to or not. What we say makes no difference. But whether we are condemned or made alive by it, it is the law of God just the same. It is our attitude toward it that makes the difference. The law in Jesus Christ is—

The Law of the Spirit of Life.

He is the Living Stone, the Rock of Ages.

“And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.” Matt. 21:44. One of two things must happen: We must fall on the stone, or the stone must fall on us. If we fall on the stone, we come down on top; we shall be broken, and He will heal us. If we fall the other way, the stone comes down on top, and it grinds us to powder. One of these experiences comes to every one. Shall *we* fall on the living stone, or shall it fall on us, and grind us to powder? We must meet the law of God out of Christ or in Christ. When we meet God out of Christ, He is a consuming fire; when we meet Him in Christ, He is our glory. We must be hidden in the Rock in order to see the glory of God without perishing. I beseech you to think most earnestly of this lesson. We must

be brought face to face with the law of God. When the Spirit of God brings the law before our minds, and brings conviction, it is that we may be forgiven and cleansed.

God’s Great Purpose

Let me call your attention to another point. God’s purpose in history, in types, in shadows, in ceremonies, is to preach the gospel; and even in some of those things that seem to us the most forbidding, God is still preaching the gospel. I doubt not that in the minds of many there has been a feeling that stoning to death was a terrible punishment, and how many look to it as a way of preaching the gospel? You remember that in the days of the theocracy of God, when His law was the law of the nation, any offence against it was punished by stoning. But in this method of punishing for breaking the national law, God was preaching the gospel. If you will make a study of this, and look up each of the ten commandments, you will find that the punishment for breaking it as a national law was stoning. And how was the gospel preached in this? God was teaching the people, in this form of punishment, that the law *out of Christ* would stone them to death. Just as these literal stones killed them, the law in dead stone would put them to death. He was even in this way teaching them of the Living Stone, the Stone of Israel, the law in life, and that is the gospel.

“And when the tempter came to Him, he said, If thou be the Son of God,—

Command that These Stones be Made Bread.

Matt. 4:3. It seems as if God has put lessons for us even in the devil’s mouth. Some preach Christ through envy, but nevertheless Christ is

preached. “If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.” Christ’s work on this earth was to change stones to bread, that the law which on the tables of stone condemns and kills should be changed in Him, the Living Stone, into the very bread of life. His work all through His career was to change stones into bread, put the law into the gospel, change death into life, and become the living life. He said, “I am the bread of life,” and at the same time He is the Stone of Israel. The law of God, lived by Christ, becomes life, and He says the commandment is life everlasting. So while Christ refused for His own benefit to change literal stones into bread, yet His whole life was spent in changing stones into bread to satisfy the longing of hungry souls. When we receive the law of God in Christ, it has power to make us like unto Himself.

A Building All Glorious Within.

This lesson of stones goes all through the Scripture. Suppose we take the lesson found in I Kings 6:14: “So Solomon built the house, and finished it.” Remember that this house was built of stone. From the outside, all that could be seen was stone; and you know that sometimes a stone building looks rather cold and uninviting. “So Solomon built the house, and finished it. And he built the walls of the house within with boards of cedar, both the floor of the house, and the walls of the ceiling; and he covered them on the inside with wood, and covered the floor of the house with planks of fir. And he built twenty cubits on the sides of the house, both the floor and the walls with boards of cedar; he even built them for it within, even for the oracle, even for the most holy place. And the house, that is, the temple before it, was forty cubits long. And the cedar of the house within was carved with knops and open flowers: all was cedar; *there was no stone seen.*”

“So Solomon overlaid the house within with pure gold.” From the outside it was a building of stone, nothing but stone. But inside there was not a stone to be seen. Stand outside of Christ, look from without at the Christian life, and all you see is two tables of stone. It seems forbidding; but come inside. You need not take down the stone to do this. Come inside, and the building is aflame with gold. It is only those who stand outside who complain that it is a hard law which they have to keep. Come inside; there are no stones to be seen inside, and yet they are not taken away. By them the building stands. Suppose you take them away, what becomes of the rest of the building?—Down it falls. Takes away the law, and the gospel comes with it. You cannot keep the pure gold of the gospel apart from the law. Come inside. There you will see nothing but pure gold.

Another thought. Just as soon as you enter a building of gold, your image will be reflected everywhere. Christ would have us reflect *His* image in the temple of the living God.

All through the Scripture mention is made of walled cities, and these walls were made of stones. Jerusalem was—

A Walled City

The wall was meant as a protection. But if a city is shut in with a wall, no matter how elaborate, if there is a flaw in it, the protection is gone. The enemy never attacks a walled city that has a breach in the wall anywhere except at the open place. You will find that this idea of the wall is made very prominent throughout the Scriptures. We will notice it in Nehemiah. He was sorry because the city of his fathers lay waste, and the wall was torn down; and he proposed to go up and rebuild the city and the wall. “But it came to pass,” he says in his record, “that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great

indignation, and mocked the Jews. And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" Neh. 4:1, 2. What do they think they are going to do? The stones are buried. Do these feeble Jews think that they are going to recover them? "Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall. Hear, O our God, for we are despised; and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity, and cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before Thee; for they have provoked Thee to anger before the builders. So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof; for the people had a mind to work."

God's Wall for His People.

We read in Mark that a certain man planted a vineyard and set a hedge about it. What was the hedge for?—Protection. The Lord brought up His vine out of Egypt, and set it anew, and built a hedge about it. That is the purpose of a wall—to protect and keep out the enemy; but the wall must be complete. God has built a wall for His people. The law is this protection, but in order to be a complete protection, it must be a complete wall. Our safety is in having a complete wall; but they have broken down the wall sadly. It is God's purpose to have it built again. "Is not this the fast that I have chosen," He says, "to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then

shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; and if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." Isa. 58:6-14.

A Breach to be Repaired.

There has been a breach made in the wall God would set about His people. It is to be repaired, and God's people are to be hedged in with a perfect law, every commandment is to be restored. And "they shall be called, The repairer of the breach." Every man builds over against his own house. Are *you* building over against your house in repairing the breach? If so, the wall will be built again, even in troublous times.

This is only a mere hint of what is contained in the Scripture about stones. God would have us keep His words in mind, that we may live in them, and that above all, and in all, and through all, we shall see Jesus Christ, the Stone of Israel, the Rock of Ages.



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