

What If I Wanted My Church To Be Stronger

Part 5 – Good Stones

Introduction; *Many areas are very rocky.*

A. New England is like this. Palestine is too.

1. Plowing fields is very rough. Rocks are just a few inches below the soil. In New England you see many rock fences, both old and new.
2. Palestine is similar. The soil is rocky until the field is cleared. Then seed can be sown. The rocks are again used to make walls and fences.
3. Stones are also used to make houses. However only the best stones are used for the home. Many are even carved to make them flatter and fit better. Mortar is used to make them stronger and last longer.

B. The church is the house of God.

1. *1 Tim 3:14-15 These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; 15 but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*
2. We are God's house. We are the holy temple of the Lord —Eph 2:19-22. We are His family, His household —ibid.
3. Jesus is the chief cornerstone — We are living stones built on His foundation —1 Pet 2:4-5. 1 Pet 2:6-7. We need to be the best stones we can be.
4. Love is the mortar that binds the stones together in the church. We must love the Lord —Matt 22:37. We must love the truth —2 Thess 2:10. We must love each other —1 Pet 1:22.
5. *Eph 4:15-16 ...but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head; Christ; 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

C. We have been talking about making our congregation stronger.

1. For the church here to be the best it can be we must all be the best we can be. We need to be the good stones that fit together
2. We work to make ourselves strong. We work to help others be strong. We make sacrifices and give what we can for the work here. We attend all the services we can to help encourage each other.
3. We are all living stones at work here. We each do our part to make the church strong. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. We want to be a strong link.



D. We will consider being strong stones today.

J. We will look at 2 Chronicles

A. We will consider the example of Hezekiah.

1. His co-regency with his father, Ahaz, lasted from 728 to 715 BC. and his sole regency from 715 to 686 BC. —Holman's Bible Dictionary.
2. He became the sole king shortly after the northern kingdom was carried into captivity by Assyria —721 BC. Because of his faith in God he rebelled against Assyria successfully.
3. We want to consider some events in the first year or two of his reign.

B. He inherited a weak, pagan kingdom.

1. **2 Chronicles 28:22** ff. show the falling away of his father and the shutting up of the temple of the Lord of heaven and earth.
2. **2 Chron 29:1** ff. shows Hezekiah changing the policy of his father. His father wanted to make the kingdom strong by following pagan gods.
3. **2 Chron 29:17**; It took over two weeks to clean out the temple. When that was done the worship of Jehovah was restored.

C. In 2 Chronicles 30 we see Hezekiah's great Passover.

1. **2 Chron 30:1-5**; Hezekiah invites the northern kingdom to come to the Passover. They have not done this for over two hundred years. They are also under Assyria. Yet Hezekiah still invites them.
2. **Vs 6-9**; The runners go quickly. They do not just invite them with pleasant words. They invite them with reminders of their sins. They also give them hope if they will return to Jehovah.
3. **Vs 10-13**; They faced a lot of ridicule. However this did not stop them. They also received a great response. Many Hebrews came to Jerusalem for the first time in their lives to worship.
4. **Vs 14-16**; They did things according to the law of Moses. Moses had given the law 700 years earlier at Mount Sinai. It had been perverted many times. Now they go back to the book and do things God's way.
5. **Vs 17-20**; Many who had never been to worship were not ritually clean. They did not have time to go through the rituals.
6. Yet they were God's children, Israelites. They were there because they wanted to be. So king Hezekiah prayed for them and their forgiveness. God heard the prayers of a righteous man and accepts their to worship.
7. **Vs 23**; They did not just keep the Passover and feast of unleavened bread. They stayed another seven days. Worship was not a chore nor burden to them. They did not find an excuse to miss. This was a great attitude towards worship.
8. *Psa 122:1 I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the LORD."*
9. **Vs 26-27**; This was the greatest Passover in over two hundred years. Because of their desire to serve God and their sincere worship, the Lord heard them and accepted their worship.
10. In many churches the prayers, songs and worship do not go beyond the building. Yet here it went up to heaven and before the throne of God.
11. The Lord continued to bless Hezekiah and the people. When Assyria comes to deal with Hezekiah's rebellion he loses 185,000 men —2 Chron 32:20-23, 2 King 19:35. Israel prospers greatly under Hezekiah —and Isaiah.

D. We see Judah transformed from a weak kingdom into a strong one.

JJ. We want a strong church.

A. We can learn some things from Hezekiah.

1. If we want our nation to be strong today most would say spend more money on the military. They say to build up weapons and armies and intelligence.
2. Most rulers would do this. They would also worry about the economy and jobs and things like that. These are first things for a strong nation today.
3. Yet Hezekiah did not work on these things. His method was more successful than these things would be.
4. We need to consider what Hezekiah did for the kingdom of God then. They should work for the kingdom of God today.
5. Hezekiah did not just build the Lord's house of physical stone. He built it of spiritual stones. Let's consider some of the stones he used.
6. We will also consider the beginning of the church in Acts 2. The church was new and perfect. It is also an example for us to follow. We need to see why they were strong.

7. *Acts 2:41-42 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. 42 And they continued steadfastly in 1) the apostles' doctrine and 2) fellowship, 3) in the breaking of bread, and in 4) prayers.*

B. The 1st Stone; Truth and Purity

1. In 2 Chronicles 30:16 they did all things according to the **law of Moses**. This was the truth under the law of Moses. It was turning from the law that cause them to be weak. Turning back to the law made them strong.
2. In Acts 2:42 they continued '**steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine**'. This is the teaching of the apostles. These are the ones the Lord sent out to preach the Gospel. They gave the **New** law as Moses and the prophets gave the **Old** Covenant.
3. Purity comes from following the truth. So many today need to do as ancient Judah and Israel did and return to the truth. Many others need to be more committed to it and apply it to their lives.
4. *1 Pet 1:22-23 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, 23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever...*
5. Someone has said that we do not run the church today as a man drives a car. If men get lost they do not like to ask for directions. We must seek direction in God's word for His church.
6. *John 8:31-32 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*
7. The truth sets us free from the condemnation of sin and death. Following the truth makes us disciples of Jesus Christ. We need to seriously study our Bibles and follow them.
8. We saw in 1 Timothy 3 (page 1) that the church is the "**pillar and foundation of the truth**". As such it must uphold and teach the truth —Jude 1:3-4. It does this in many ways.
9. One way is the worship and Bible study periods. These are set up so Christians can study together and share their wisdom and thoughts. They can ask questions and bring up things to consider.
10. We need to take advantage of these and invite others to come and be with us. Worship and Bible study are not just once a week events.
11. *Acts 20:20 & 31; 20 "...how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house..." 31 "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears."*
12. *Acts 2:46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart...*
13. We need to have the love for truth and purity the people had in Hezekiah's day and the day of the apostles. We need to study together as well as privately.

C. The 2nd Stone; Unity and Peace

1. There was unity in Hezekiah's day. He did not keep the Passover just for his nation but invited the northern kingdom to attend. The division of over 200 years did not keep him from inviting Israel.
2. The '**fellowship**' of Acts 2:42 showed their unity and peace. They did not practice different things in worship. They did not avoid one another. They worked together and associated with each other.
3. **Fellowship** in the N.T. (the Greek word, koinwnia, κοινωνία) is a spiritual sharing. It is used of the contribution for the poor saints in Romans 15:26. It is used of the Lord's supper in 1 Corinthians 10:16. It is used of our fellowship with the H.S. in 2 Corinthians 13:14. It is used of accepting someone as being a fellow child of God in Galatians 2:9 and other passages. It is used of doing good and sharing in Hebrew 13:16.
4. To have spiritual fellowship with someone is to be united together in the doctrine of Christ. Those who are baptized into Christ have fellowship or unity with Him and with each other.
5. *1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*
6. *1 John 1:3 ...that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*
7. We have fellowship with those whom we agree with. We can worship together and work together in the kingdom of God in peace because we hold to the law of Christ.
8. *Amos 3:3 Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?*
9. The division in Israel disappeared when they returned to the law of Moses. Division in the church will

disappear when we stick to the law of Christ. We will have peace and unity because we all follow the same Lord and same law.

10. To have unity and peace there must be some kind of association. It can be giving to the same spiritual need. It can be working together in the same spiritual work. It can be worshipping and studying the word of God together.

D. The 3rd Stone; *Worship and Commitment*

1. When Hezekiah wanted to strengthen his kingdom he turned back to worshipping the Lord of heaven and earth. He committed himself and his nation to serving God. The Passover was just part of their worship.
2. The early church met daily in the temple —Acts 2:46. We see them often in the temple, the synagogues and other places worshipping together. Worship was an important part of their lives.
4. This worship was also based on the truth and purity. They worshiped as their Lord commanded. In Acts 2:42 they **broke bread**. This, in a worship context, is the Lord's supper —see Act 20:7. However, like the Passover, the Lord's supper is just part of our worship.
4. *John 4:23-24 "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."*
5. Worship must be based on the truth. We meet on Sunday to worship and partake of the Lord's supper. We are all united on the rocks of **truth, unity and worship** when we partake of the communion on Sunday.
6. *Acts 20:7 Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.*
7. Studying God's word together is worship. Praying together is worship. Singing together is worship. We have spiritual fellowship with God and each other when we worship according to the N.T pattern.
8. *Heb 10:23-25 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*
9. Worship was important to God's people in both the Old and New Testaments. It should be to us today. Worshipping God often and regularly is one way we show our commitment to Him.

E. The 4th Stone; *Prayer and Patience*

1. Hezekiah prayed for the people who had not completed the ritual purifications. God heard his prayer and accepted them —probably because they a) did not know and b) did not have time to go through the rituals.
2. God listens to the prayers of the righteous. Prayer is important to Christians and to the church. A strong church is a praying church. This last stone is very important.
3. *James 5:16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*
4. Someone has said that more things are accomplished by prayer than this world will ever realize. This is probably true. Prayer shows several things.
 - a. **Our belief in God;** Non-believers do not pray to something they do not believe in.
 - b. **Our trust in God;** We believe He hears and answers prayer. We believe he cares for us.
 - c. **Our need for God;** We cannot save ourselves. We cannot supply all we need. We should our dependence.
 - d. **Our submission to God;** We cannot control Him in prayer. We recognize we are under Him.
 - e. **Our hope for something better;** We pray to Him for help, both in this life and in the life to come. We believe He offers us something better than what we have now.
 - f. **Our willingness to wait on Him;** We know God answers prayer. We learn patience when we see God working in His own time and see it is for the best.
5. *1 Thess 5:16-18 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*
6. We should pray often and regularly. We should do it personally and as a congregation. Prayer is one sign of faithfulness on earth —Luke 18:1-8.
7. *Col 4:12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*
9. Epaphras was in Rome. Yet he still worked for his brethren in Colossi. He did so by praying fervently for them. This is one way we can serve one another. We can pray for one another.

10. *Acts 12:5 Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.*
11. This is an example of the church praying as a group for a brother. The church needs to pray both individually and congregationally. This is one way we worship and one way we serve one another.

F. We see God's way of making the church strong.

Conclusion; Are we helping make the church here strong today?

A. Hezekiah make Judah strong in his day.

1. He went back to the law of Moses. He called all God's people together to worship and pray. He restored God's people to their faith.
2. The early church stood in the doctrine of the apostles and had unity. They worshipped and prayed together.
3. This is how we can be strong today. We should;
 - 1) stand fast in the word of God
 - 2) have unity and peace
 - 3) worship together
 - 4) pray for one another



B. We must first become Christians.

1. We do this through faith, repentance and baptism as they did in Acts 2.
2. *Mark 16:15-16 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."*
3. Will you obey the Lord today?