

TWO STONES SPEAK

57At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.-----

Good morning. Let me introduce myself. I am a stone of destruction. I am here attempting to bring ruin to God's good things – to knock down, to break apart, to pulverize. It is my goal to bring disheartenment, grief, shame, guilt, pain and suffering. I want the people of God to lose sight of His kindness, His mercy, His power and providence; and I want them, instead, to turn their eyes toward other things.

I was the rock that sealed the tomb of Jesus and said, "He is Dead. Your hopes are dashed. His promises are mere words." I was the stone that struck down Stephen as He was witnessing to the Jerusalem leaders and brought death to his weak human frame. I am the granite wall that has been erected between you and God – the wall of sin and shame and evil.

You don't like what I can do. You've seen me do my business. Take that fellow Job, for instance. One fell swoop, and I dashed to pieces all those blessings that had been bestowed upon him. His livestock – BOOM. His servants – BOOM. His sons and daughters – BOOM BOOM BOOM.

Or take that Moses. 10 great plagues from God miraculously lead the people out of Egypt. WOW, you'd think that would fortify those Israelites against my work. But not really. Once they got out there, I began to ply my trade. I was the rock that was hard to climb and wearied their bodies. I was the rock that was dry and lifeless and brought hunger and thirst. I was the wall of their enemies that seemed insurmountable and caused the spies to cower in fear so that they did not enter the Promised Land right way.

And then there was David, the King. I was the stone rooftop upon which the lovely Bathsheba was seen and brought weakness to his faith. I was the stone of his enemy's weapons, which sought to wrench the kingdom from David's hand. I threw my rock at him to bring such grief after the death of his son, that he became weak, fragile, and devoid of all hope.

Yes, I love to do my work. It is a pleasure for me to undermine God's grace and mercy as I wreak havoc in the lives of His people by deceit, hardship, and pain. I feel like a wrecking ball battering against the walls of faith just waiting for that one moment when the wall will come tumbling down – that final blow that unseats another one of God's followers and leads them to the abyss of hell.

Be ready. I'm there for you.

See this conflict in our nation? It's one of my stones. Can I get you filled with anxiety as you read the news every day – as you watch more infighting, press conferences, political machinations – as you see the nation you love at war with itself, its leaders, the choices? I love it.

Feel that bitterness – resentment toward your relative, neighbor, coworker? That's me too. I'd love to assist in making it stronger – in fueling it with misunderstanding, conclusion-jumping, and bad advice.

Then there's that passion that borders on addiction. You know – the drinking you do to ease your tensions – the cigarette you pull out in times of anxiety – that extra pill – that moment of pornographic lust – that extra drumstick from the refrigerator – that special trip to the casino. I'm happy to keep you going there. That's another one of my stones of destruction.

Or how about all that stuff out there that you can own? Bigger TV's with crisper pictures, quicker computers, cellphones with all kinds of extras, a sleeker car, a larger house. I love it when I can get you to focus your thinking on yourself. It's another rock that I use to stop you from noticing the desperate needs of others – to hold you back from generosity, compassion, and love.

Get used to me. I'm there at every turn, and I will try to get you, one way or the other. You may think that you're the temple of the Holy Spirit and that your house is strong in faith, but I will be happy to try and dismantle that temple any way I can, one brick at a time.

SONG: Built on the Rock

10By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. 11For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

The stone of destruction, over there, has had a few words with you about his work, and I want to tell you that I have seen him in action and know that He is a formidable opponent. Take him seriously, because He is certainly serious about leading you away from God.

I AM His adversary – His greatest enemy – the One He despises. Some call me the Cornerstone – the rock of strength. Others call me a gem, a pearl of great price. Either way, it is my goal to bring hope in the midst of struggle, life in the midst of death, strength in the midst of weakness, joy in the midst of sorrow.

You've seen me at work too. I was the rock under Jacob's head when he saw a stairway to heaven reassuring him that the promises of God were real. I was the rock that, when called upon in the Desert, spewed forth water to provide for the thirst of the Israelites under Moses. I was the rock that brought down the walls of Jericho with a great crash, that took down the giant Goliath before a shepherd boy, that rebuilt the hopes of the Israelites as they again built the temple following their 70 year exile in Babylon.

I am a rock built upon a Rock named Jesus. And He is the One who enables me to be the rock I am. He looked at the work of Mr. Destructo over there and His heart was filled with compassion for the people He had made. He yearned to see them set free from bondage, released from their chains, protected from his flying stones and blasted through his insurmountable walls.

And so He went to work at building a new foundation. But an ordinary foundation it would not be. No. Rather, His new foundation would be grounded in a love that made Him come into this world, experience all the struggles and trials that the rocks of destruction could bring, suffer the pain of our punishment, the agony of our evil, and the death we should have died. And then, when all hope seemed lost and all joys extinguished, He broke forth from the hollow stone chamber that **he** (rock of destruction) thought was the final blow, and said, "NO. NO. I come that they might have life and have it to the full. I come, that they might be able to ward off all the stones he has to throw. I come that all the walls and barriers and blockades he's

created might be knocked down for good. And I come, that I might take those stones and rebuild them into an eternal mansion that can never perish, spoil, or fade.”

Jesus declares in John: “In my Father’s house are many rooms, I go there to prepare a place for you.” Think of it. He who created the universe and everything in it – He who went to the cross and offered His life for you, is, even as we speak, gathering all his precious stones and putting them together as a place for you to all eternity. He loves you so much that He not only humbled Himself for you, suffered for you, died for you. But when He rose, He had you in mind as He began to prepare for eternity in the beauty of heaven.

St. Peter, whose name means “Rock” and who, when he spoke his great confession that Jesus was the Christ was told, “You are Peter, and upon the Rock of that confession will I build my church. That Peter writes about the rock of strength. He says: 4As you come to Jesus, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— 5you 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. "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 7Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," 8and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”

You know what that means? It means that you are strong because of Him who is your cornerstone. You are strong – powerful – mighty. Strong enough to recognize my adversary, over there, whenever he rears his ugly head of destruction and tries to lead you astray. Strong enough to fight him off when he tries to break you down and to resist him when he tries to coax and coerce you to follow him instead of the Rock of your salvation.

And count on this – because it is also a part of God’s promise to you.

Jesus will prevail. And he (pointing to rock of destruction) will ultimately stumble and crumble and fall to His destruction. Let me say that again. Jesus will prevail and he will ultimately stumble and crumble and fall to His destruction, because the Cornerstone on which you rest has already defeated him. And that Cornerstone says to you:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in Me. And no matter what temptations and threats and taunts and challenges the enemy will throw at you, I will bring you home. And you will find rest for your souls. Come unto Me all you who are weary and burdened. Come find strength and hope and help each moment of each day in the rock of your salvation.”