

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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"Take Ye Away The Stone"

The foregoing command of Jesus is found in John 11:39. The occasion was the resurrection of Lazarus from his tomb.

Lazarus had been dead four days. Jesus worked this great miracle to prove that He truly is the Son of God. I would like to borrow the expression, "Take ye away the stone" and apply it in a different, but appropriate, way.

In New Testament times when a cave or carved out tomb was prepared for the dead, a large, round, wheel-shaped stone was carved to cover the entrance. The wheel-like stone was often four or five feet in diameter. Obviously it would weigh several hundred pounds and require the combined strength of several men to move it. Hence, the great round stone sealed the opening of the tomb and separated the living from the dead.

Stones Separating Men From God

The Scriptures describe those who are not Christians as "the living dead." The word "death" means separation. And, so all who are not Christians are said to be spiritually dead since they are separated from God by their sins (Isaiah 59:1-2).

This separation from God could end if certain "stones" were rolled away.

(1) In some cases the stone of ignorance needs to be rolled away. It is tragic that so many far and near, know so little about the Bible and Jesus. How sad for millions to live and die without ever understanding how Jesus died to extend to one and all the opportunity of salvation (John 3:16).

(2) With others the great barrier to salvation is the stone of prejudice! Often mis-informed or un-informed people become offended or antagonistic toward the Church or religion in general. It is sad to realize that countless multitudes will spend eternity in a devil's hell

because some stone of prejudice became a mental barrier that kept them from ever realizing the love that God has for them (Acts 2:38).

(3) From time to time we find self-righteousness is the stone that needs to be taken away. The Bible teaches that salvation is by grace through faith. "It is the gift of God." However, the gift is not unconditional. Sinners must believe in Jesus, repent of their sins, confess that Jesus is the Messiah and be baptized for the remission of sins. Indeed it is sad when so many reject God's simple way and suppose they can work or buy or serve or suffer their way into heaven (Romans 6:3-8).

To lose one's soul is to lose all. To save one's soul is the ultimate victory. For the sake of your own eternal welfare, we implore you to roll aside anything and everything that stands between you and a proper relationship with the Almighty.

Stones Affecting The Indifferent

Jesus taught another lesson. He was about to call the dead back to life (which no man could do). But, mortals could roll aside the stone - and this they were commanded to do. Hence, we see the principle that God will do for man that which is beyond his power; but, man must do his part by responding to the grace of God. Man must do for himself all that he is capable of doing.

The principle can be applied today to church members who have grown cold and drifted back into the world. It is obvious that real or imagined barriers separate them from God. Anything standing between man and God should be removed at once. Some such "stones" that need to be rolled away are:

(1) Anything that hinders spiritual growth and development.

- a. "Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2).
- b. "Study to show thyself approved unto God" (2 Timothy 2:15).
- c. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matthew 5:6). The Bible says faith comes from hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). We suggest that one's faith can only be maintained and sustained by continued study.

(2) Anything that hinders total commitment and genders indifference.

- a. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1).
- b. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

- (3) Anything that hinders a lack of [*sic*] church attendance and worship.
- a. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" (Hebrews 10:25).
 - b. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world . . . the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

Roll the stone away. Worship this Sunday with the church of Christ.

- Raymond E. Harris, via Guardian of Truth, 01/21/1988

James and John Request Positions of Greatness

"Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, 'Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask.' And He said to them, 'What do you want Me to do for you?' They said to Him, 'Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.' But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They said to Him, 'We are able.' So Jesus said to them, 'You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared.'" (Mark 10:35-40, NKJV).

The disciples did not understand the kingdom's true nature. They continued to argue and dispute over which of them would be the greatest. On this occasion, James and John approached Jesus privately and requested that they be given favored positions in His kingdom.

Jesus told them they did not understand what they were asking. He then asked if they could drink the cup that He would drink and be baptized with the baptism with which He would be baptized. He would mention the cup again while praying to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). Here, the cup referred to the suffering and death of the cross (Luke 12:50). The Greek word for baptism means "to plunge or immerse." The events of the cross would plunge Jesus into immense suffering.

Though they didn't understand what Jesus meant, James and John were confident they could share in His cup and baptism. Jesus affirmed they would share in His suffering. James was the first apostle to be martyred when he was executed by Herod (Acts 12:1-2). According to tradition, John was not killed, but he suffered for the cause of Christ (Revelation 1:9).

Although they would share in His cup and baptism (suffering), Jesus told them He was not able to grant their request to be seated on His right and left. This is not a position to which one is appointed; it is one that he earns because of his character, as Jesus would go on to explain.

When the other ten apostles heard about what had happened, they became greatly displeased with James and John (Mark 10:41). Jesus immediately addressed this situation, as it threatened to destroy the unity of the twelve. He reminded them that the rulers of the Gentiles used their power and authority to rule over their subjects. However, it should not be so among them. In God's kingdom, one achieves greatness, not by exercising power and authority, but by serving others.

Jesus used His own life's work to illustrate this principle. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Of all people, Jesus was in a position to demand service from others. Instead, He rendered service, even to the point of dying on the cross to secure our salvation. Because of this willingness to sacrifice and take on the role of a servant, God gave Jesus the position of highest honor, power, and authority (Philippians 2:5-11).

- Heath Rogers

The High Cost of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a costly thing! Fortunately for mankind, his Creator is the great provider of sin's remedy, the solution far beyond man's ability to deliver. God is love, and God is holiness, therefore sin must have its punishment. The only means of avoiding the terrible consequences of sin is to be forgiven. Forgiveness is never a trivial matter. The common condition of all men, guilt for sin, never reduces the seriousness of the need. Remission and forgiveness are offered to man through Christ.

What does man's forgiveness cost? In speaking of those for whom Christ died, the apostle Paul declares, "For you have been bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20). Peter indicates what that price is: "you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." (1 Peter 1:18-19). We are "justified by His blood" (Romans 5:9). In Christ "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

For all mankind, forgiveness cost Jesus Christ His very blood! Such is the price He paid to purchase the church (Acts 20:28; to build His church, cf. Matthew 16:18). Forgiveness

brings salvation to every forgiven person, and when the Lord applies His blood of forgiveness (cf. Matthew 26:28) He adds that person to His church (the body of Christ, the body of the saved; Acts 2:47).

The same blood that saves from sin also purchased the church for that is what the church is: those who have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ! It is a glorious church because of the price paid for it. "He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." (Hebrews 9:26).

Yes, forgiveness is a costly thing! It cost the precious blood of Jesus Christ! It cost that to forgive my sins! It cost that to forgive your sins! God's beloved Son was crucified on a cross to make it so! Can you imagine a higher price than this?

- Gary Smalley

- * "First, give yourself to God. You may be sure He'll look after what is His!"
 - * "In many beauty parlors the gossip alone would curl your hair!"
 - * "He who lives in hope dances without a fiddle!"
 - * "A person with a reservoir of knowledge is not well educated unless he knows when to turn the spigot off and on!"
 - * "Any king who thinks he can silence God with a knife and fire, has a very high opinion of himself, and a very low opinion of God (cf. Jeremiah 36:20-26)!"
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What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)