

WITH THESE STONES....THE REJECTED STONE

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

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TEXT: Mark 12:1-12, I Peter 2:5-7

As we are drawing near to the 150th anniversary of our church, today I thought I'd see how much you know about the beginning of our church and our current building.

- The year the church was organized officially: 1872.
- The church met here before it was officially organized: In a doctor's office - Dr. Vivion.
- The reason the church organized: They wanted a Christian Church in Galesburg.
- 4 things foundational for our new church
 - Confession of Faith in Jesus Christ, Unity of all Christians,
 - weekly communion, baptism by immersion
- The year our current building was built: 1915
- The height of the church building in 1915: Just one story
- The top part of this sanctuary was built in this year: 1928
- The cornerstone is located here: Southwest corner
- The wording on the cornerstone: First Christian Church, Erected 1915, Organized April 11, 1872

Have any guesses as to what is in the cornerstone? The cornerstone contains a Copper Box which will preserve for future generations such interesting data as the membership role of the church a list of pastors, copies of church papers etc. and a copy of the sermon used in dedicating the old church.

You know we don't talk much about cornerstones anymore. Today's cornerstones are often a plaque of some sort placed on the inside of the building. The cornerstone is used to note the date when the building was erected and who the original occupant was.

But historically, before the days of laser beams and electronic levels, the cornerstone was the most important part of the building. It was the first stone to be laid in building – and was the fundamental stone that structurally held the whole building together. All the other stones would be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire structure. The cornerstone was the key to keeping the walls straight – and the total weight of building rested on the cornerstone. If the cornerstone was set properly, the stonemason could be sure that all the other corners of the building would be set at the right angle as well. ¹

And so – the word came to be known as a symbol for that which holds “life together” - that which we should align our lives with. The foundation – something we can put our whole weight on.

In the days of Isaiah – the Israelites had decided to put their trust in a different “cornerstone” – trusting in their political strength and their military alliances, rather than trusting in God. Because their cornerstone was not set right, they were judged and their building collapsed – and ultimately they were defeated and deported to Babylon.

But the prophet Isaiah gave them a promise of hope. Look at our first text from Isaiah 28:16 – *“Therefore, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Look! I am placing a foundation stone in Jerusalem, a firm and tested stone. It is a precious cornerstone that is safe to build on. Whoever believes need never be shaken.’”**

This was a great prophecy of a coming cornerstone – one that was firm and solid – precious and safe to build upon – one that could be trusted and would never fail. By the New Testament, we come to know that this new cornerstone was our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus as our cornerstone was a common theme in the gospels and in the letters of Peter.

And so, we come to our passage today from the Gospel of Mark. We hear that the Pharisees and teachers of the law have not changed much since the Israelites of old. They are trusting in themselves – and their own authority. Out of their own disobedience – they reject the very cornerstone that would give them life and hope.

Turn to the gospel of Mark, the 12th chapter and we’ll hear Jesus describe how the Israelites approached the cornerstone of Jesus. Let’s start reading at verse 1 of Mark, chapter 12.

¹Then Jesus began teaching them with stories: “A man planted a vineyard. He built a wall around it, dug a pit for pressing out the grape juice, and built a lookout tower. Then he leased the vineyard to tenant farmers and moved to another country. ²At the time of the grape harvest, he sent one of his servants to collect his share of the crop. ³But the farmers grabbed the servant, beat him up, and sent him back empty-handed. ⁴The owner then sent another servant, but they insulted him and beat him over the head. ⁵The next servant he sent was killed. Others he sent were either beaten or killed, ⁶until there was only one left—his son whom he loved dearly. The owner finally sent him, thinking, ‘Surely they will respect my son.’

⁷“But the tenant farmers said to one another, ‘Here comes the heir to this estate. Let’s kill him and get the estate for ourselves!’ ⁸So they grabbed him and murdered him and threw his body out of the vineyard.

⁹“What do you suppose the owner of the vineyard will do?” Jesus asked. “I’ll tell you—he will come and kill those farmers and lease the vineyard to others. ¹⁰Didn’t you ever read this in the Scriptures?

*‘The stone that the builders rejected
has now become the cornerstone.*

*¹¹ This is the LORD’s doing,
and it is wonderful to see.”*

¹² The religious leaders wanted to arrest Jesus because they realized he was telling the story against them—they were the wicked farmers. But they were afraid of the crowd, so they left him and went away.

In this parable, Jesus kind of sums up the history of Israel, portraying how Israel had been unfaithful and rebellious to God, the landowner. They had refused to turn and live out their lives in repentance and produce fruits for the Lord. Again and again, God sent prophets to them to get them to turn to Him – telling them of their responsibility to be faithful and righteous - but they ignored them and in some cases killed the prophets. And then, Jesus does some foreshadowing in this story saying, “even if the one and only Son would come – they will turn and kill Him.” And that is exactly what happens. Jesus – the very precious cornerstone – was rejected and killed.

When Jesus talked about the “Stone” the builders rejected, the people knew exactly what He was referring to. When Christ, the Stone, presented Himself to the builders – the political and religious leaders of Israel — they had no place for Him in their building plans. They threw Him aside as useless. But following His death, He was raised from the dead and given the place of honor by God the Father. He was made the chief cornerstone in God’s building. God is constructing his church, made of all peoples, nations, and languages who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. It is a holy nation, a people separated to God for His own.

I Peter 2, tells us “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. 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. As the Scriptures say, ‘I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem chosen for great honor, and anyone who trusts in Him will never be disgraced.’”

Peter reminds us that Jesus is the Cornerstone for all believers. As we trust in Him as our Savior, we will be the living stones built into His spiritual temple. Jesus is our strength to make it through stressful times. He can provide peace when nothing else can. Its through his death on the cross that we are forgiven from our sins and that we can have a relationship with his Father in heaven, God. By trusting in Him as the cornerstone of our lives, the Scriptures say we won’t be shaken nor will we be disgraced.

So, what or who is the foundation of your life? Who is your cornerstone? Who do you turn to when your life is crumbling around you? How do you cope in times of disaster or the loss of a loved one? What or who do you turn to when you attempt to make a significant change in your life? I pray that you know Jesus and that He is the foundation of your life, your Cornerstone.

Ron Hutchcraft says: “Your life is supposed to be all about Jesus; With him as the cornerstone, with everything else in your life built on him your relationships, your marriage, your money, your career, your priorities. But maybe you're building on another cornerstone right now. Slowly but surely, you've pushed Jesus from the center of things to the edge. He's the King of kings. He's the Lord of lords; but you pushed him to the margins. You can tell by how little time you spend with Him - by how little you make Him the bottom line in your decisions, or by the things you do that break His heart. But count on this; Unless your life is being built on Jesus at the center, what you're building is not going to last - isn't going to satisfy - isn't going to

work. Jesus is the only cornerstone that can support everything you face in your life so make sure that you're building it all around Him.”²

We are coming up on the 23rd anniversary of the shooting at Columbine high school in Littleton Co. Columbine has become synonymous with the anger and pain that seems to permeate our culture today. Two teenage boys- themselves rejected by their peers- went on tragic rampage. One of the people they encountered in the library that afternoon was a young woman by the name of Cassie Bernal. With a gun pointed directly at her face she was asked if she believed in God. She could have said no and lived. She could have rejected the one who she believed to be the Cornerstone of her life and that would have assure that they would have gone on to someone else. But she said yes. In fact, that's now the title of the book written by Cassie's mom, “she said yes”. And they killed her.

Few of us, if any, will ever have to take that kind of stand. Our conflicts and tests present themselves in everyday settings like deciding on telling the truth, or not, on our income tax forms or whether to be faithful in our marriage. Or perhaps the times when we would rather gossip and tear people down than build them up, loving them as a neighbor we have in Christ. We can reject Christ when we harden our hearts – and refuse to love others – or refuse to forgive. We reject Christ when we do not share our God-given talents or give of our resources to help others. These are the ways that we can reject Jesus in our everyday live.

Once again, this morning you hold in your hands a stone. It's an important stone- maybe, the most important of stones- because it's symbolic of Jesus as the cornerstone of our lives. Take some time right now to reflect – have you made Jesus the cornerstone of your life – putting Him first? Or perhaps are there times when you have rejected Jesus and failed to make Him the cornerstone.

Maybe you don't need to lay the stone to the foot of the cross today, if in your honest introspection you believe that you have not rejected Jesus in your daily living. So please take it home with you as a sign of Jesus as the Cornerstone.

But I know what I must do.

PRAYER & INVITATION

RESOURCES

¹Back to the Bible, “*Building on the Cornerstone*”,
<https://www.backtothebible.org/post/building-on-the-cornerstone>

²Ron Hutchcraft, “*How to Build a Life that Works*” - #5210” –
<https://hutchcraft.com/a-word-with-you/your-most-important-relationship/how-to-build-a-life-that-works-5210>

³Steven Molin, “*Journey of Stones*”, CSS Publishing, 2002, p. 20.

