

## **Sermon 8th October '23**

### **The Stone that the Builders Rejected has Become the Chief Cornerstone**

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We read in our Gospel passage today the parable of the tenants, where the owner of the vineyard sends his servants to gather the fruit from the tenants. They beat and kill the servants, and eventually the owner of the vineyard sent his son, but he too was thrown out and killed. The owner of the vineyard is like God, and his vineyard is Israel. The fruit that Israel is supposed to bear is faithfulness to God. The servants being sent represent the prophets, like Jeremiah or John the Baptist, that God had sent, who were then rejected and killed by those claiming to be followers of God. With a bit of foreshadowing, the owner sends his son as God did, but they continue to reject and disobey God, and will eventually kill the Son.

Jesus then asks the question of what the owner should do with the tenants. This leads us to the real heart of the passage. Jesus then refers to Psalm 118 and says to them "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The very stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'?"

In the book of Acts, Peter uses the same psalm when speaking with the Jewish leaders who were persecuting him. Peter and John had been arrested after healing a man and teaching about the resurrection of Jesus and the next day the Jewish leaders, the very

same who rejected and condemned Jesus, asked Peter and John with what power they were acting and Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, responds:

“Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are being asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is ‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.’

“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

The builders are the rulers of the people and elders, the stone is Jesus Christ, the rejection of the stone was the crucifixion of Jesus, the becoming of the cornerstone was the resurrection. There is salvation in no other than Jesus.

A cornerstone is the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation. All other stones are set in reference to this stone, determining the position of the entire structure. Jesus, made the chief cornerstone, is Jesus being made the first stone of a new creation. All stones to follow align themselves to Christ and the whole structure will be centered on and determined by Christ. And the church - visible, gathered here today, and also the church we cannot see, made up of all the saints that ever have been and

will be, takes our structure after this. This rejected Jesus, despised Jesus, has been made the chief cornerstone, and there is no other name more trustworthy, more worthy, than his. We can trust in Jesus as the cornerstone because as we affirmed in our Psalm today, “the law of the Lord is perfect...the command of the Lord is true...the precepts of the Lord are right...the commandment of the Lord is pure...the fear of the Lord is clean and endures forever...the judgements of the Lord are unchanging.”

As we look over to our reading from the letter to the Phillipians, Paul reminds us of the stumbling blocks we will face such as those who oppose the message of the gospel, continuing to reject and condemn Jesus. He warns us against falling into finding confidence in the flesh, admitting his own confidence as he describes in what he used to boast; being circumcised, being from Israel, being a Pharisee, being found blameless according to the law. This is where he, wrongly, used to find his assurance for his salvation.

But in meeting Jesus, Paul came to realise that none of that mattered. All things pale in comparison to the value of knowing Jesus. Nothing is more worthwhile than life being built around the chief cornerstone. Paul is willing to count all things as loss, so that he may gain Christ, not having righteousness that comes from the law but one that comes through faith in Christ. He counted up the cost, and following Christ was worth it. He gave up things which he used to find of great significance, and I am sure that others saw as great significance in him, so that he could have the greatest treasure, Christ.

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

We are encouraged to pursue Christ so that we can know him, and come to know him more. If Jesus is of highest value, the greatest treasure, then we can count all other things as loss, just to count Christ as gain. I can't gain a thing more because I've already won. Christ, the treasure. Our justification, the forgiveness for our sins, can come only through Christ because we are imperfect, no keeping of the law could redeem us. The faith which justifies is a faith which casts aside much in pursuit of Christ. And why can we trust that faith in Christ will justify us? Because as Paul says in verse 12 “Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” We can trust that our faith in Christ justifies us because Christ has made us his own.

Do not be like the builders who reject the very stone that became the cornerstone. Instead, do as Paul has encouraged, reject all else, count all else as loss, to count Christ as gain, to pursue Christ, to have faith in the cornerstone.