

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters

Sermon Series - The Book of Acts/God's Plan for His Church

Sermon Title - The Cornerstone of The New Testament Church

Sermon Text - Acts 4:1-12

Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

Introduction

"I hear the Saviour say, Thy strength indeed is small, Child of weakness watch and pray,
Find in Me thine all in all"

What does that line mean when it says "find in me thine all in all?" It means that Jesus is our all in all! He's the Creator of the Universe, the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, the Prince of Peace, the Blessed Messiah, our Comforter and Counselor through His Holy Spirit, and Jesus is the Cornerstone of God's Church. The church is the Body of Christ, His family, His people!! As we pray this morning, let's continue to remember those who have recently lost loved ones. Josh, who I asked you to pray for a couple of weeks ago, went home to be with the Lord this past week. Keep His family in your prayers along with the others who are dealing with serious health issues! And of course we need to be praying about the situation in Israel and other places around our globe. Tragic things have happened, and are happening! In the midst of it all, we need to remember that the ultimate answer is for people to find Jesus as their Savior and that needs to be our prayer for all people! Let's pray!

In the very first sermon of our study on the book of Acts, we talked about the foundation of the Church, which was none other than Jesus Christ. His life, His teaching, His Spirit, His sacrifice, His resurrection, and His mission! Today we're going to talk about Jesus as the Cornerstone. A brand new leadership structure for God's people is revealed as Jesus is given the title of Cornerstone, Capstone, Headstone, of the New Testament Church! Last week, we looked at another one of Peter's sermons, and discovered the message of the church. Today we will look at the results of his message and what he said in defense of his message as we discuss...

The Cornerstone of The New Testament Church

Acts 4:1 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.

Acts 4:2 They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

Acts 4:3 They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.

Acts 4:4 But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

Acts 4:5 The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.

Acts 4:6 Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family.

Acts 4:7 They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

Acts 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people!
Acts 4:9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed,
Acts 4:10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.
Acts 4:11 He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'
Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

The religious leaders arrest Peter and John for preaching, question them concerning their message and get a powerful response! Peter lets them know, in no uncertain terms, that Jesus is the Capstone, or Cornerstone of the Church! Why is it so important for Jesus to be the Cornerstone of the Church? We're going to examine the reasons it's so important for Jesus to be the Cornerstone of the Church! But first let me explain the concept of the Cornerstone. What did Peter mean when He said...

Acts 4:11 He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'

Peter is actually quoting a passage from Psalms 118...

Psa 118:19 Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.
Psa 118:20 This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter.
Psa 118:21 I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.
Psa 118:22 The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone;
Psa 118:23 the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.
Psa 118:24 This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

And here in our text in the New Testament book of Acts, Peter and John were at the gates of the temple when they were arrested for Preaching Jesus to be Savior, the stone the builders rejected. According to historians and many theologians, the chief cornerstone or the head stone may have borne much of the weight of a building. Some have said the corner stone had to be precise because it set the right angles for the walls. In other words, the corner stone was extremely important when you were building with stones! And while it was on the corner, it was foundational to the structural integrity of the building. Many times people will use the term cornerstone when describing the essence, the message, the core values or the foundational directions of a business or project they are involved in. They will say, "This is the cornerstone of what we are trying to do!" Let me remind you of something we discussed a few weeks ago. There was a conversation in Matthew's Gospel between Jesus and Peter. Jesus had asked the disciples who they thought He was...

Mat 16:16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
Mat 16:17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.

Mat 16:18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

The rock Jesus was talking about building His church upon was Peter's confession! "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" So the foundation of the Church, and the Cornerstone, the Capstone, is Jesus Himself. And here's one of the reasons it is so important for Jesus to be the Chief Cornerstone...

The first reason it is important for Jesus to be the Chief Cornerstone is that Jesus is the True Shepherd of the Church!

Acts 4:1 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.

Acts 4:2 They were greatly disturbed...

We'll talk about why they were upset in just a minute, but you need to know who these people were. They were supposed to be the shepherds of the flock but they had become corrupt! These priests, according to the Broadman Bible Commentary, were evidently Sadducees of the "aristocratic priestly cast." The captain of the temple guard would have been what was known as the "sagan" or the second in command, in case something were to happen to the High Priest, this would be the guy to take over. This was this guy who had gone out with his guards to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. We also know when the questioning took place the next day, Annas and Caiaphas were there along with other members of the High Priest family. In case you don't remember, Annas and Caiaphas had been at the trial of Jesus! So we know the treachery these guys are capable of! It's one thing for leaders of God's people to be protective in wanting to keep them from false teachers and people who would lead them away from God. But that was not their motivation! Listen to what had happened with the religious leaders of God's people, and this was no new thing. We find this description in the Old Testament in Ezekiel...

Ezek 34:1 The word of the LORD came to me:

Ezek 34:2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?'

Ezek 34:3 You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock.

Ezek 34:4 You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.

And then we see these words in Jeremiah 23:1ff...

Jer 23:1 "Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD.

Jer 23:2 Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the LORD.

Jer 23:3 "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number.

Jer 23:4 I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD.

Jer 23:5 "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.

Jer 23:6 In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.

So we see from these passages that God had already spoken long ago that there would be a change of guard and the wicked shepherds would be replaced by one who would truly care for the Sheep. It is ironic and sad at the same time that the religious leaders were so blinded they couldn't see the very fulfillment of their own Sacred Scriptures being fulfilled in Jesus. Of course, we do need to remember that the people of Israel had mis-interpreted the prophecies and fully expected a Messiah who would overthrow the Roman occupiers and return Israel to its former power, economic prowess, and prominence in the world. But we also need to remember Isaiah had very specifically prophesied that the Messiah would be a suffering servant! And David had prophesied in Psalm 22 amazing details surrounding the crucifixion. Listen...

Psalm 22:7 All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.

Psalm 22:8 "He trusts in the LORD," they say, "let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

And then in verse 16-18...

Psalm 22:16 Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet.

Psalm 22:17 All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.

Psalm 22:18 They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

Again, it's ironic and sad that the very fulfillment of prophecy was right before their very eyes, but they were too blind to see it. Jesus had tried to get them to see the truth by quoting verse one of Psalm 22 while on the Cross! "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me!" Jesus knew they would know the context of this verse in Psalm 22 and I believe He was hoping they would put things together and realize what was happening and repent! Remember, Jesus prayed for them to be forgiven and said "they don't understand what they are doing!" And fast forward to the Day of Pentecost and following. One of the reasons the religious leaders were so upset with Peter and John was their message that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy! They were especially distraught over the teaching of the resurrection. And this leads us to...

The Second Reason it's so important for Jesus to be the Cornerstone of the Church is Jesus is The True Message of the Church!

Acts 4:2 They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

Acts 4:3 They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.

Acts 4:4 But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

However unpopular or even when outright opposed, the message of Jesus can change hearts and lives! So Peter has now preached just a few messages and already the number of men alone who had decided to follow Jesus had grown from three thousand to five thousand. And that's not counting the women and younger people. Folks, the New Testament Church was approaching MegaChurch status! But there's some very important things to understand about what was happening. The people were tired of the institutional religion which had become more about trying to maintain the status quo, feeding the institution, and pleasing the world, rather than fulfilling God's divinely given purpose! The people wanted and needed a message that would change their hearts and lives and they just weren't finding it at their temples or in their leaders! Jesus had the message they needed, but their leaders had rejected Jesus. The disciples understood this and had decided to preach Jesus even though that was outlawed! We have to understand why the religious leaders were so opposed to Peter and John's message! It wasn't only that they expected a different kind of Messiah, they wanted an earthly king! But the message of Jesus threatened their normal. It questioned their motivation. It challenged their effectiveness as representatives of God and it revealed how their message of legalism on the one hand, and their hypocrisy on the other, had become so twisted it was no longer effective! I don't know if you've noticed this or not, but the denominations and churches in our world today who have become more about maintaining the institutions and making sure they don't say or preach anything that offends the status quo or puts them at odds with the world, those denominations, and churches, for the most part are in serious decline. When the pressure of the world comes, and it will, if we turn our back on the message of Jesus and God's Word, and embrace the ways of the world we will no longer be effective in transforming worship, people or the world! Paul, better known as Saul of Tarsus at the time of our text, was a part of the corrupt religious establishment, as we will see in a few weeks in a message Brother Eddie Riley will bring to us. Paul would later become a follower of Jesus and write these words about his ministry and message to the church. Ready for some amazing Scripture? Listen closely because it will give you powerful reasons why the message of Jesus is such a huge part of Jesus being our cornerstone. Paul said...

1 Cor 2:1 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.

1 Cor 2:2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

1 Cor 2:3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.

1 Cor 2:4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,

1 Cor 2:5 so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

Resting on the Cornerstone! Paul continues...

1 Cor 2:6 We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

1 Cor 2:7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

1 Cor 2:8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

1 Cor 2:9 However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"--

1 Cor 2:10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

1 Cor 2:11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

1 Cor 2:12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

1 Cor 2:13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

Those are some of the most beautiful and convincing words in the Bible on why it is so critical that Jesus never be dethroned or removed as the cornerstone of our message and ministry. But there is yet another reason it is so important for Jesus to be the Cornerstone of the Church...

The third reason it is so important for Jesus to be the Cornerstone of the Church is that Jesus is The True Power of the Church!

Once again I want to say that when a church walks away from the very clear teachings of Jesus's full message they will lose the power to be a church. They can be a social club, a meeting place, and their buildings may be a part of a cultural and historical landscape, but the power to transform lives will be lost! Jesus is the true power behind our message and mission! In our text the people in power were jealous and scared of the power which was manifested through Peter and John so they wanted information. Look at verse 5 through 7...

Acts 4:5 The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.

Acts 4:6 Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family.

Acts 4:7 They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

Evidently the healing of the lame man was seen by the religious leaders as some kind of exorcism and they wanted to know how they had done such a thing and by what name they had done this. It wasn't that the Sadducees were opposed to these kinds of things, which they saw as a magical sort of thing, but what concerned them was that this guy named Jesus, who they had been a part of crucifying, seemed to keep resurrecting and giving them a hard time. And here's part of the problem: Sadducees didn't believe in a resurrection. So they certainly didn't believe Jesus had literally resurrected bodily, and they were more than annoyed that the disciples kept invoking His name! And here's the other part of their problem: They were responsible for keeping the peace and the disciples were constantly causing an uproar with their revival meetings! The Sadducees were held accountable to keep the peace by the Roman occupiers and they felt like these disturbers of the peace were going to bring some type of retribution from Rome and threaten their political power! In other words, they were once again worried about themselves. How sad that they were rejecting the power they really needed! Peter was about to point this out to them. Listen...

Acts 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people!

Acts 4:9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed,

Acts 4:10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

Once again Peter and John amaze and astound me with their boldness! Andrew will preach a sermon on the boldness of the New Testament Church next week! But let me say this: Peter and John had seen the power of God work in their own lives! They had seen God work in the lives of others like this man who was lame from birth and they knew God wanted so much to show the religious leaders the power of His love to forgive their sin, and to heal their spiritual sickness! The early disciples were so motivated to reach their own people with the Gospel! We'll see in the coming weeks that some of the religious establishment did finally accept Jesus as their Savior! Yes, some of the very religious leaders who had given Jesus and the early disciples such a hard time would eventually come to follow Jesus as their Savior. Peter would later write a letter with a beautiful explanation of the difference the Power of Jesus can have in a believer's life. Listen...

2 Pet 1:1 Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:

2 Pet 1:2 Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

2 Pet 1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

2 Pet 1:4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

These words lead us to the very important implications of Peter's words to his captors in our text where he gives us one last reason it is so important for Jesus to be the Cornerstone of the Church...

The fourth Reason it is so important for Jesus to be the Cornerstone of the Church is because Jesus is the True Salvation of the Church!

Acts 4:11 He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone."

Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Where did Peter get this exclusive idea? He got it from none other than Jesus Himself...

John 14:5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 14:7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

John 14:8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

John 14:9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father..."

Jesus is truly the way, the truth and the life! People are saved by Jesus and what He did on the Cross, not by church attendance or membership! It's a wonderful thing to attend church and grow in your faith, but don't put your faith in a church, put your faith in Jesus! And it's not a bad thing to commit to membership in a local church, but you don't have to be a member of a church to be a member of the Body of Christ! Membership in the Body of Christ comes through Jesus because He alone can save your soul! That's why at Northshore Church, Jesus is the Cornerstone of our purpose, our mission and our vision as a church and if we lose that then we cease to be the church. The reason, as I've often said, is that a church is not a building, but a people, a redeemed people of God who have allowed their faith in Jesus to transform their lives and to save their souls! Many in our culture today take exception to Jesus' exclusive claim of being the way, the truth and the life. I know there are many who don't accept this truth. There are many other religions in the world and I happen to have friends who are different religions and even family members. I don't agree with them and they don't agree with me, but we are still friends and close friends at that! Will the world ever learn this? Will Christians ever learn this? Listen, if a person rejects Jesus, I'm sad for them, because I know what they are missing by not having a personal relationship with Jesus. But I'm not mad at them and I don't hate them or reject them, I love them! And I try to live my life in such a way that they will see what I have and want what I have in my walk with Jesus. I know I'm not perfect, but I do have peace in life, purpose in life, passion for life, power for life and the promise of eternal life! But here's the thing, if we are mean spirited and judgemental towards people who don't agree with us then we are not being Christ like! Why do I say that? Because Jesus said this...

Matthew 5:43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’
Matthew 5:44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,
Matthew 5:45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.
Matthew 5:46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?
Matthew 5:47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

In fact, listen to this truth pointed out by John Kramp in his book “Out of Their Faces and Into Their Shoes...

“Jesus ordered His life around lost people. Rather than sit in a Lay-Z-Boy with the religious types, He left the comfort zone. Jesus went to the people. When they saw He was approachable, the people came to Him:

Prostitutes sought Jesus when they needed help, sensing that He was a man who would help, not hurt them.

Tax collectors, the group most hated by the Jews, felt so comfortable with Jesus that they invited Him to parties as an honored guest.

Those suffering from leprosy—the social scourge of that day—made their way to Jesus after hearing that He loved rather than rejected people with their disfiguring disease.

Crowds of common people followed Jesus wherever He went. Lugging their needs with them, they dogged Jesus’ path in hope that He would touch their lives with the miraculous.”

And did you know what Jesus got by doing this? A reputation! Jesus said...

Luke 7:34 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’

If we want to reach our world and change our world, we must approach our world and the approach must be Christlike regardless of the reputation we get! Robert Coleman put it this way...

“One can not transform a world except as individuals in the world are transformed, and individuals cannot be changed except as they are molded in the hands of the Master.” Robert E. Coleman

I want Jesus, the true Shepherd of the church, the true message of the Church, the true power of the church and the true salvation of the church to be all of those things for Northshore Church

and for me personally, so that others will want what we have! And I pray that we'll gladly give them Jesus! Let's pray!