

October 27th, 2019 The Cornerstone of The New Testament Church Acts 4:1-12

“And the enemy can't take what I have Or change who I am, I belong to You!” What an amazing statement! If you want to know what gave the people of the New Testament Church the courage to share their message in the face of extreme dangers, you have it right there! The enemy can't take away what God has given us or change the fact that I am now a child of Almighty God! I belong to the Creator of the Universe, the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, the Prince of Peace, the Blessed Messiah, and the Cornerstone of God's Church, His family, His people!! Talk about a confidence booster. Let's pray and we're going to see how some things Peter said in his second message that followed his message on the Day of Pentecost, rearranged the power structure for God's people, by letting it be known that Jesus was the Cornerstone, the Headstone, the real High Priest! Let's pray.

So far in this series, called Mission Critical, we've talked about the foundation of the Church, the Decision Making process of the Church, the Spirit of the Church, and the Message of the Church. Today we're going to talk about a brand new leadership structure for God's people as Jesus is given the title of Cornerstone, Capstone, Headstone, of the New Testament Church! Last week, we looked at the context of Peter's second sermon, to discover the message of the church. Today we will look 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 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 mission critical 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 are 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 born much of the weight of a building. Some have said the corner stone had to be precise because it set's 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. Let me remind you of something we discussed a few weeks ago. There was this conversation in Matthew's Gospel between Jesus and Peter...

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, the Cornerstone, the Capstone, is Jesus Himself. And here's one of the reasons we find it mission critical for Jesus to be the Chief Cornerstone...

**The first reason it is important for Jesus to be the Chief Cornerstone is that under the old system the men who were supposed to be the shepherds of the flock had become corrupt!**

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.

We'll talk about why they were upset in just a minute, but let me let you know who these people were. These priest, according to the Broadman 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. It was this guy who had gone out with his guards to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. We also know when the questioning takes 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 of them and to want to keep them from false teachers and people who would lead them away from God. However, listen to what had happened with the religious leaders of God's people, and this was no new thing. We find this description back 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 was being fulfilled in Jesus. Of course, we do need to remember that 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. Again, it's ironic and sad that the very fulfillment of prophecy was right before their very eyes, but they were to blind to see it. In fact, one of the reasons they were so upset with Peter and John was their message that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy! They were especially distraught over the teaching of the resurrection. Another reason it's mission critical for Jesus to be the Cornerstone of the Church is...

**A Second Reason it's Mission Critical for Jesus to be the Cornerstone of the Church is that the Message of Jesus, however unpopular or even when outright opposed, is the message that can change hearts and lives!**

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.

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 Mega Church 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 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 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, who at the time of our text, was still named Saul and was a part of the corrupt religious establishment, this Saul would later become a follower of Jesus and write these words...

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.

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 mission critical that Jesus never be dethroned or removed as the cornerstone of our message and ministry. But there is yet another reason it is mission critical for Jesus to be the Cornerstone of the Church...

**It is mission critical for Jesus to be the Cornerstone of the Church because He is the power behind our message and mission!**

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! 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 more of a magical sort of thing, but what they were concerned about was 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 disturbances 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 when the power they really needed they were rejecting and Peter was about to let them know this with and by the very power the religious establishment had rejected. 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! We will discuss the impact of that boldness, next week. But let me say this: they 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 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 were he gives us one last reason it is mission critical for Jesus to be the Cornerstone of the Church...

**It is mission critical for Jesus to be the Cornerstone of the Church because Jesus is the One and Only way for us to secure eternal salvation!**

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 non 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..."

Once again, I'm going to say this: Jesus is the Cornerstone of our purpose, our mission and our vision as a church and if we loose that then we cease to be a church. The reason 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! Many in our culture today take exception to Jesus' exclusive claim. But let me just say this: It's amazing that in every

school of thought at universities, whether it be in the field of mathematics, medicine, science, physics, engineering, architecture, and the list could go on and on, but suffice to say that in each of these schools of thought, there are accepted standards and absolutes which form the basis or the foundation for those disciplines. However, when it comes to spirituality, many of these very educated people say that in this one school of thought, there are no standards, no absolutes and you can just make up anything you want to make up and that will be just fine. When it comes to spirituality, you can just create your own truth! That makes zero sense to me and defies the very rational logic they claim to follow. So I simply plead with people who are questioning what truth is when it comes to spirituality, please give Jesus a chance and take Him up on His challenge:

Luke 11:9 "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Luke 11:10 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

I also encourage folks to not make accepting Jesus just about heaven or hell. If there were no heaven or hell, there is, but if there wasn't, I would still want people to know Jesus because of the difference His love and His principles could make in their lives on this earth. But some people want ask me to answer questions none of us humans have the answers to. Like when someone asked me if Ghandi will be in heaven? I told them I cannot make that judgment, I'm not God, but if Ghandi is in heaven it's because of what Jesus did on the Old Rugged Cross! How God applies the precious blood of Jesus is above my pay grade! Let's pray!