

## Acts 4. Jesus as Cornerstone

Part.1 of the sermon delivered 09-06-24

### Acts 4:8-12<sup>i</sup>

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: 'Rulers and elders of the people! <sup>9</sup> If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, <sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> 'Jesus is, "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone."'

<sup>12</sup> Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.' (NIV)

### Setting the Scene

The scripture we've just heard is Peter's response to charges made against him and John. They'd got arrested by the Temple authorities for 'proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead' (Acts4:2 NIV).

As a point of interest, the formerly lame man was with Peter and John at the hearing and so perhaps he had been arrested with them too? I tried to imagine the scene from the perspective of the accused and pictured the man standing there as a witness to Peter's defence of the faith, in awe of the occasion as leading teachers of the law questioned them but finding himself surprised at Peter's courage in attacking their principles.

### A New Form of Attack?

'If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness [...] then know this [...], Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected which has become the cornerstone."' (Acts4:9-11 NIV)

Typically, we focus on the teachers' surprise (see verse 13) but as a foundation to our study today I suggest that defence of the faith must be more than a passive affair, for proclamation of the resurrected Jesus is a form of attack against the principles of the secular society in which we live.

In case I was letting my imagination run wild, I checked my commentary and found that theologian F.F. Bruce said, 'the apostles are technically on the defensive, but actually they have gone over to the attack.'<sup>ii</sup>

First the lame man was healed from physical disability and next he was introduced to dynamic faith in Christ. His experience of active Holy Spirit-led spirituality is about as far from the modern lame version as we can get.

Lame Christianity in the secular world is two-fold:

- (1) the influence of 'keep-it-to-yourself',
- (2) and an expectation that any public show of faith should match societal values, expressing only a people-centred philosophy, not a Christ-centre one.

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I think we should learn from Peter's example and so we will look at two questions today, the first centred on Peter's public declaration of Jesus as the cornerstone and the second on how Holy Spirit-led acts of kindness are proactive and healthy to correct a people-centred philosophy.

- Part one, 'what does the declaration of Jesus as cornerstone mean?'
- Part two, what is God's standard for 'acts of Kindness'?

I hope to show that Christians can move from defence of faith to attack of a cultural mind-set that denies Christ as the Cornerstone and only one by which salvation comes.

### **Part One.**

#### **What does the declaration of Jesus as cornerstone mean?'**

Peter is quoting Holy Spirit-inspired words of God, as said by Isaiah & David, the latter of which was also quoted by Jesus.

We'll go in time order...

#### **First, As an exclamation of praise and relief:**

Psalm 118:22, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.' (NIV)

The Psalm expresses utter delight in the Lord, giving him praise and glory for his victories and the freedom he brings in contrast to worldly oppression. Other verses of the Psalm include,

- <sup>5</sup> 'When hard pressed I cried to the Lord; he brought me into a spacious place.'
- <sup>6</sup> 'The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?'
- <sup>8</sup> 'It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in humans.'
- <sup>17</sup> 'I will not die but live and will proclaim what the Lord has done.'

Which leads into the description of cornerstone:

<sup>22</sup> The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;

<sup>23</sup> the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

<sup>24</sup> The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.

(Ps.118:5 6,8,17,22-24 NIV)

It's delightful and uplifting, isn't it? Praise God!

Those that rally against the Lord and his people, rejecting him are poor builders says the psalmist. Little do they know that they are rejecting the very one who is the foundation of the world and the cornerstone of the Lord's temple.

It is better then, to have active faith in the Lord than it is to have faith in humans. What can humans do against his people? Quite a lot from embarrassing and confusing the Christian, to killing their body. However, only the Lord's kingdom is eternal and so the psalmist says, 'I will not die but live and proclaim what the Lord has done.' (Ps.118:17 NIV)

#### **Second, As a comfort in difficult times:**

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'So, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic.' (Isaiah 28:16\_NIV)

Here the description of 'precious cornerstone' is used to communicate its huge value. The stone is prized, treasured, of great worth.

The word given by God's spirit to Isaiah communicated comfort and hope to a people feeling lost and desperate. 'It is ok' says the Lord, 'your life has value to me, and I will give you stability in your life, emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually. Rest and rely on me.'

We see that pictorially in Jesus' ministry where,

- he renames Simon as Peter-the-rock, the one on whom Jesus will build his church. Peter later uses this scripture to say that all Christ's followers become living stones in Jesus' house (see 1Pet.2:5).
- he talks of the field that contains a precious treasure.
- he saves people into a right mind, health and new relationship with Father God through him.

### Third, as a form of attack:

Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22 to the Jewish religious leaders,

'Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures:

''The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes''?

<sup>43</sup> 'Therefore, I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.

<sup>44</sup> 'Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.' (Matt.21:42-43, NIV)

Attack: Jesus reframes the scripture as statement against those religious leaders of his day who would not accept him as Son of God and Son of David.

Remember the context of Psalm 118? It was about the Lord's saving work against those who reject him. The religious leaders were happy to view other nations who warred against them as being the 'bad builders' but Jesus goes on the attack, turning it against them to accuse them of being the bad builders who rejected him as the cornerstone and telling them that new builders are being called in,

'Therefore, I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.' (Matt.21:43 NIV)

Ouch! That hurt them, to think that they stand accused of being the bad builders, of failing to build God's Kingdom and consequently others, who were not of the Jews, would be God's chosen people. This is why the religious leaders were so angry and upset. They fully

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understood the accusation that Jesus made against them. Would their pride and bias win the day, or would they go home and re-think their beliefs?<sup>iii</sup>

### **... an attack against culture, not individuals.**

Jesus tells them, 'Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed'. (Matt.21:44 NIV)

Is this part of the attack? Sounds like it but no, it is a reminder that those who rest and rely on the precious cornerstone receive comfort.

Did Jesus simply want to upset them? No, he wanted to shock them out of scriptural complacency, inviting their repentance, so that they might be built into his house.

Those who do not give themselves up to the Lord will find their spirits crushed by the forces of the world.

Church leader John Tyson, says, 'no-one in all history has held humility and power in one person. [He is not] a teaching to follow,[...] a morality to uphold'.<sup>iv</sup>

Jesus is The Cornerstone. He is the personal God whose call is for the people to repent, rest on his sure foundation and proclaim that same rest to the world. In part two we will consider how Holy Spirit-led acts of kindness example Jesus' humility and power as a proactive correction to a people-centred philosophy.

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<sup>i</sup> All Scripture references are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version, Anglicised Edition (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2011).

<sup>ii</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Revised edn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p93.

<sup>iii</sup> Some did. Nicodemus is one such example as a teacher who made the effort to investigate Jesus' claims. See John 3:1-21&19:38-39.

<sup>iv</sup> Jon Tyson, *Controversial Faith: The Exclusivity of Jesus* [podcast], Church of the City of New York, 08/04/2024 < <https://www.church.nyc/> > [Accessed 27/05/2024].