

Build Your Faith Upon Christ, the Chief Cornerstone

Acts 4:1-12, Trinity Sunday II
June 1, 2008

Beloved of the Lord..... In the construction industry, the time to pour and lay a foundation for a house, is in the Spring and Summer. When the cold and frost have finally left the ground, it is safe to dig down deep, and pour the concrete into footings. If the job is done right, and the concrete is reinforced with steel, the house that is built upon it will be level, straight, upright, and strong: well able to weather many storms and upheavals in its life. Of course before the days of concrete, builders formed and laid large stones in a row for a foundation. The first stone that was set, the cornerstone, was most critical. It had to be square and level so that the house would be square and level, its foundation being unmovable. If the cornerstone was crooked, all the following stones, even the whole house would be crooked.

The picture of a building, a temple, with its strong and firm foundation, is a picture of the Invisible Christian Church. Our foundation, our strength, our hope, is built upon Christ Jesus, the Chief cornerstone of our faith. We believe and hold that Jesus Christ of Nazareth, is the head, the cornerstone of the Christian Church. Upon Him, upon His grace, upon His holy and sacred Name, our faith is firmly built so that we can weather and endure any storm this world throws at us. Each believer is like a brick or stone, a member of God's Temple, God's house. Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith because Jesus is elect and precious, chosen by God to redeem us from our own sins. When we build our faith upon Him alone, our salvation rests securely. We by faith are a part of the body of Christ, and Christ would never do anything to hurt His own body, for His Church, His children of faith, are precious and elect to Him. The Bible says, "he that believeth on [Jesus] shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner." I Pet.

Here then is the difference, the Key to understanding all the differences in the many religions of this world - Christ is either the cornerstone of the Church, or He is something else. Where do the other religions place Christ in their theology? Is Jesus of Nazareth the only Name in which they trust, or do they set this Stone at nought. Do they put or place Christ in their theology in any other way than being the chief cornerstone? On an individual basis this means, is Christ the only name in which we trust for our salvation, or do we mingle our own good works into the picture? This is to say, are we saved by grace alone, or grace and works? You see

Christ is either the straight and level and firm cornerstone of our faith, or He is something less than a savior, perhaps a mere good man, a moral compass. In our theology, in our faith, Jesus Christ of Nazareth is all, but to the world He is something less than an adequate savior. Jesus said, "He that is not with Me, is against Me." He is either the cornerstone on which our faith firmly rests, or He is a stumbling block to those who don't believe.

This point is made clear in our lesson. For after the lame man had been healed, so that he was walking and leaping and praising God, Peter preached a wonderful sermon, urging the Jews to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus for salvation. Peter said, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." They were to give their sins to Jesus, by repentance and faith. "Many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand!" Such is the power of the Holy Spirit, working through the preaching of the Gospel Word! God's glory is punctuated when we realize that not long ago, these people were condemning the innocent Jesus before Pontius Pilate. Peter said to the Jews "you denied Jesus in the presence of Pilate, when Pilate was determined to let Jesus go! But you denied the Holy One and the Just.....you killed the Prince of Life, whom God has raised from the dead!" Acts 3 Imagine the guilt that gripped the people's heart, when they realized that they had judged and condemned the innocent Son of God! But are we any better? Isn't it true we would rather condemn an innocent man, than admit our own guilt? One of the greatest and most common sins of all men, is that we judge and condemn our neighbor, when it's not our business or place to judge. Moreover if we are angry with someone, our flesh rejoices in slandering the good name of our neighbor. Just as the people had no business in judging the guilt or innocence of Jesus, so we have no business in judging the guilt or innocence of our neighbor. God is their judge, just as He is ours. While we do have the responsibility to condemn the open and obvious sins of our neighbor privately, rarely is it our place to publicly condemn another. Even to judge them silently in our heart is a sin. The Bible says, "Let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor." It is a sin even to listen to gossip. The point of all this is that we are no better than those people who condemned the innocent Jesus. We therefore, like them, ought to repent of our evil deeds and seek God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ, the Lord. Every Sunday we sing the words of our liturgy, "Lord have mercy upon us. Christ have mercy upon us, Lord have mercy upon us."

We lay our sins on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God. He is our firm foundation, the chief cornerstone of our faith. Christ is the solid Rock upon which we stand - all other ground is sinking sand. It is through the Gospel

that Jesus forgives us, He strengthens us, and He comforts us with His grace. He forgives you all your sins, through His body and blood "give and shed for you for the remission of sins." When you have had a bad week filled with sin or shame, Jesus says, "Come unto Me ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." When you have had a bad day filled with many regrets, Jesus says, "I am thy righteousness." When you wish you could undo what you have done, Jesus is not ashamed to call you His brother (Heb. 2:11). If you hunger to be forgiven, Jesus says, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

This is why Jesus is indeed the chief cornerstone of the Church. If only our faith rests upon Him, and is built upon Him, we will endure the many trials and temptations of life. We need to understand this, for the day will come when our enemy, the devil, will accuse and remind us of our sin. The devil will say, "You indeed are not worthy of heaven, you are a sinner and God will never forgive you for what you've done!" But what should be our reply to such accusations? By faith we ought to say, "Dear devil, the blood of my Savior Jesus Christ, is stronger and more powerful than my sin or your accusations. Though you are right by saying I do not deserve heaven and only hell because of my sin, God through Christ and His blood has already justified me and declared me righteous. Therefore devil, you go to your place, and I will go to mine. For Jesus said even to the thief on the cross, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise!"

What confidence!!!! What boldness we can have against the accuser when we speak by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me! Such confidence comes from the Holy Spirit, who breathes and strengthens our faith by the Gospel. Consider the boldness of Peter and John as they stood before the scowl and condemnation of the Sadducees. For when the priests and Sadducees were grieved at the preaching of the Gospel, they put Peter and John in prison. In like manner if we preach and teach the truth of God's Word in our world today, we should expect the same treatment. "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you." God's Word offends or hurts the feelings of the world who stumbles over Christ, but we should not apologize for speaking the truth. Indeed God's Word offends our own flesh! But whereas the believer will always repent of their sins whenever they find them, the unbeliever will always deny their sin, no matter how large, flagrant, or open.

In the case of Peter and John, they had not sinned. The problem was the Sadducees and priests had stumbled over the name of Christ. When they asked, "By what power or by what name have ye done this?" Peter answered, "If we this day be examined of the good deed

done to the impotent man,.....Be it known unto you.....that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole!" Here was the stumbling block of the Jews! Here was the point of contention! It was the Name, the one and only Name given by God whereby man can be saved.....the name Jesus Christ, of Nazareth. They had dealt with that Name before, they had crucified and ridden themselves of that Name, but that Name God raised from the dead!.....and now the power and strength of that Name was now evident before them! For there before their eyes, the forty year old lame man stood along with Peter and John! No one could deny that by the power, by the name of Jesus Christ, this lame man stood healed and whole!

Brethren in the Lord, it is by the same Name, it is by the same power, that the Lord has healed you of your sins. If you wish to be saved from your sins, there is only one Name, one sacred and glorious Name you need know, the Name of Jesus Christ! The Bible says, "Neither is there salvation in an other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Let us not stumble upon this name as the Jews did, by trusting in our own less than good works. All the works, every work of man is tainted by sin and Isaiah says, "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." If Christ is anything less than the chief cornerstone, our faith will stumble and falter. We cannot save ourselves by our works. But "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." In His holy name, the name of Jesus, you will not be ashamed nor confounded. For a faith that is built upon Christ, is a faith, a house that can endure any storm. Since His name is holy, we too are holy through His name. "Believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." May God grant that our faith, our hope, is built on nothing less, than Jesus blood and righteousness. Amen.

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