

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED

Scripture: Matthew 21:42-46

Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious;
and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

When we think of the corner stone of a building today, we are apt to think of a small symbolic stone, which is laid with more or less ceremony in the early stages of building operations, and which is frequently hollowed out to hold certain mementos of the occasion. In these days of structural steel re-enforcement, a corner stone is structurally unimportant; but in Jesus' day the corner stone was all-important. Many buildings were built on the side of a hill, where the walls might slip and pull away from each other at the corners. Ofttimes the walls were not made of carefully cut stones fitted together, but of odd-shaped field stones or pebbles, filled in with a simple clay or mud mortar. In such a building, it was also highly important to have a fairly large, sound, carefully cut stone at the corner to bind the two walls together and keep them from pulling apart.

In the larger public buildings where more cut stone was used, the lack of structural steel made the use of a corner stone still more essential. The greater height of the walls, the shifting nature of the soil, and ofttimes the slope of the hills upon which the buildings were placed, made it absolutely imperative that there should be some permanent, binding re-enforcement to tie walls together wherever they met at an angle, and where one might pull away from the other. The temple at Jerusalem, for example, is said to have had some stones of white marble which were $67\frac{1}{2}$ feet in length, $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet

high, and 9 feet wide. That is why the Pharisees, who did not understand Jesus' reference to his own death and resurrection were so shocked and skeptical at his statement, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," for including the surrounding courts and cloisters, it had been forty-six years in building.

It would be helpful to read all of the 21st chapter of Matthew as a background for Jesus' statement (quoted from Psalm 118:22) "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner." This chapter opens by recounting Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem to the shouted "Hosannah's" of the populace; the cleansing of the temple; the healing of the lame and blind in the temple courts; the displeasure of the scribes and chief priests, and their questioning of Jesus' authority. It was against this background that Jesus told two parables. The first was the parable of the two sons who were asked to go work in their father's vineyard. The first said, "I will not," but afterward repented and went. The second said, "I go sir," and went not. In response to Jesus' question, "Which of these two did the will of his father?" the chief priests themselves answered, "The first." Jesus replied, "The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you."

Then followed the parable of the householder who planted and equipped a

vineyard, and went away, leaving the vineyard in charge of husbandmen. At the time of fruitage, he sent back servants to collect his share, but one after another, year after year, the servants were stoned, abused, rejected, and killed. Then he sent his son, thinking the greater authority would impress the wicked husbandmen, but the son, too, was cast out and killed. Again the scribes condemned themselves out of their own mouth, when they recommended that the wicked husbandmen should be destroyed, and the vineyard let out to men more loyal and faithful. It was at this point that Jesus said: "Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?" Then the scribes belatedly perceived that he had been speaking of them all the time.

The principle laid down in these two parables and the following saying still holds good. When we reject God, he cannot accept us. When we reject his prophets, servants, and apostles who are sent today by his authority to labor in his vineyard, or to require an accounting for the use we make of the fruits of the vineyard, we reject him, and make it impossible for him to accept or recognize us, or to continue to bless us as he desires. When men climax their rebellion by rejecting his Son, the kingdom is taken from them, and given to others who will bring forth the fruits thereof.

Jesus came into his own, and his own received him not. As a consequence, the last vestiges of the Jewish nation were destroyed in the Roman conquest of 70 A.D., and the "vineyard" of the kingdom was given to the Gentiles. The Jews were rejected because they did not bring forth the fruits of the kingdom, or acknowledge the ownership of the King. Note well, however, that this rejection came not at the return of the householder, but at the time of the rejection of his Son. According to the parable, the householder is yet to return to demand a final accounting for the use made of his vineyard. If the Gentiles, who now are the husbandmen given possession of the kingdom, should prove unfaithful in their stewardship -- if they go on and on, giving only a nominal allegiance to Christ, but bearing no fruits of the kingdom, they, like the Jews, will not be continued indefinitely in possession. When the Lord of the vineyard returns for the last time, what will he do according to the promise and warning laid down in this last parable? He will again miserably destroy those wicked men who will not return to him the fruits of his vineyard, and again let it out to different men, who will

render him the fruits in their seasons.

To those who will accept him as God's Son, and who will accept God's other servants, prophets, and apostles who come in the name and in the authority of the Son, Jesus Christ is the chief corner stone. In him we find that bond which unites the two diverging lines of Jewish and Christian culture and religious thought. He was the culmination of all the Jewish hopes for a Messiah, and the beginning of a new Christian hope of immortality in an eternal, everlasting, and universal kingdom. He is the corner stone on which all other stones are laid -- stones of diverse form and shape and size. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." He is also the "head of the corner," the stone which caps the top of the wall to tie the two walls of the angle together. He is the beginning and the ending, the first and the last, the foundation and the capstone of the building.

Peter likens the church of Christ to a house built of different stones, but on the foundation of Christ, the corner stone. He says that as we come to him "as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore who believe, he is precious; but unto them who are disobedient a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence. For the stone which the builders disallowed, is become the head of the corner." (I Peter 2:4-7, Inspired Version.)

Many men, many nations, have tried to build their lives on some other foundation -- have rejected this living corner stone, and tried to build without its cohesive force and influence. Many men and nations have found too late that the stone they rejected is the only stone which could have made their building secure, and that having built without it, their whole building comes down in destruction to be dashed to pieces against this impregnable stone. Our own civilization is being tested today. Is Christ its chief corner stone? Have we accepted him, and rendered him the fruits in due season? If not, the kingdom shall be taken from us and given to others who will bring forth the fruits thereof in acknowledgement of their Lord and King.