

“JESUS IS THE CORNERSTONE”  
Isaiah 19:12-15, 28:16, I Peter 2:4-10, Ephesians 2:11-22  
175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Sunday, August 19 & 20, 2023

“In his book, *When There Is No Miracle* (Hearthstone Publishing Company, 1998), Robert Wise wrote about hearing a man named Cecil Henson tell his ‘death story’ many times. In 1940, Cecil was pronounced dead for twenty or thirty minutes, and after his resuscitation and recovery, he was a different man, no longer angry and now ready to pour himself into the raising of his young son, Van (who later became a successful oral surgeon).

“Cecil said that during his period of ‘twilight’ he encountered Jesus in person. In those moments he looked fully into the face of the risen Christ and saw Him in all His glory.

“Robert Wise said, *It is Cecil’s description of His face that has gripped my imagination through the years. He saw the face of Jesus as a marvelous mosaic made up of a hundred small facets. Each piece added a shade or line to the total picture. So in looking into this composite face he could see the countenance of Christ. But as he looked, he could see a hundred parts.*

“*The startling realization was that the mosaic pieces were not tile, metal, or glass. Each small section was a clear, distinct, cameo of someone’s face. As Cecil stared fixedly at the face there was a pulsating fluctuation between the total face and the cameo sections. One minute he could see the Face of Jesus and then in the next he was aware of hundreds of faces.*

“*In awe Cecil began to recognize what was revealed in each of those cameos. They were all people he knew. Moreover, they were all people who had loved him and given him kindness during his life. He could see an aunt and an uncle. And there was his mother, and on the other side his father’s face moved into focus. School teachers, friends, associates, people who had already become part of conveying the human picture of Christ.*

“*Overwhelmed in worship and amazement, Cecil bowed before the risen Lord. In the lingering moments of that experience, anxieties, fears and doubts were healed. When Cecil ‘returned’ to start his life again, the face of Jesus guided him through the years ahead. Christ and the Cross remained*

*sufficient for him until, over twenty years later, he died.”<sup>1</sup> Christ Jesus had become Cecil’s cornerstone upon which to live the rest of his life so that he could make a difference in others, as each one of those in the cameos in the face of Jesus, had made in him.*

The writer of Hebrews puts it this way, *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us...”* (12:1).

This is a great reminder for us, that the whole body of Christ, especially those who have lived in faith before us, make a difference in the lives of the people of the world. When the church lives in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, it brings salvation to so many more. It is only right, then, that the image of Christ could be made up of cameos of the faithful who have lived for Him.

We are celebrating the 175<sup>th</sup> ministry anniversary of this congregation today. The life of this congregation could also be composed of pictures of all those who have lived before us to establish this church, maintain this church, add on to this church, and sustain the ministry of this congregation, so that we can join forces with them to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ from this church. Today we get to remember all those who gave of themselves to reach out to those around them in presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people here in Sheboygan, and to people around the world. Today we get to remember those who touched our own lives so that we could carry on the work of making disciples who worship passionately, love extravagantly, and witness boldly to the love of Jesus Christ.

But it is important for us to remember that it all started with one man - Jesus Christ. From the start of the church, people have put their trust and faith in Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior, and they have given their lives to serve Him in all that they could do. Jesus is the cornerstone of the church, and we have built our foundations of faith upon Him with the assurance that He is our solid rock that can never be moved.

I shared with you the reading of Isaiah 19 today to demonstrate what the lives of those **who do**

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<sup>1</sup> (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 105-106)

**not have** Jesus as their cornerstone end up like. The people of Egypt made idols and man-made “gods” their cornerstones of faith, and Isaiah tells them, rightly so, “*The officials of Zoan have become fools, the leaders of Memphis are deceived; the cornerstones of her peoples have led Egypt astray*” (Is. 19:13). The empty worship of idols and ideologies and theories and mindsets that we have created to fulfill our innate need to worship, cannot guide us and direct our lives into anything but destruction. All that we do on our own to fulfill the God-shaped emptiness within us only leads us into deeper emptiness, and that creates confusion, fear, hostility and anger. We cannot satisfy our own God-shaped emptiness.

So when we put anything else as the foundation of our faith, ANYTHING other than the Lord Jesus Christ, there is nothing that can protect us, or provide for us, or guide us, or encourage us. Any other foundation except Jesus Christ leads us into destruction and ruin. The histories of many nations demonstrate that clearly as they put their hopes on something other than God for their cornerstone, and they became lost to the world.

So when the world cries out for us to follow this person’s leadership, when the world tells us to obey that humanistic ideology, when the world demands that we conform to its way of thinking, remember where you have your faith established. If it is on the world’s wisdom, if it is on the world’s ways, if it is upon human leadership - it will all come to ruin! God has called us to put Him first in our life, to establish our faith on Him, and to build our life on the Lord Jesus Christ. Only then can we have any hope of contentment, success, or peace for any extended period of time.

Isaiah tells us the only way that we can have life. Chapter 28, verse 16 says plainly, “*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.’”* If we put our hope and trust in God’s Cornerstone, the Lord Jesus, we will have the assurance that He will always be with us to protect us, guide us, provide for us, and walk all along our journey with us.

I Peter 2:4-10 also tells us of the value of putting our hope and faith upon God’s Cornerstone. He says, “*As you come to Him, the living Stone - rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to*

*Him - you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (2:4-5).*

This church has been established on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ. We have words written on the doorway into the church, “The House of Prayer.” We have dedicated this place of worship to Him so that we might be open to sharing the Good News of God’s Saving Grace to all those around us. We have committed ourselves to following only the Lord Jesus Christ as a lighthouse to the community so that others can come to know Jesus and find His salvation. Having done that, God has established us as part of “His People,” as long as we put Him as the very foundation of our lives.

Though many in the world have rejected Jesus as the One they can put their trust and faith in, He has become the cornerstone for us. The importance of the cornerstone for any building is that all the rest of the construction depends upon that one cornerstone. The walls are built depending upon the juxtaposition of that one stone. If that cornerstone is out of alignment, the walls will be built on those same misalignments, and there will not be any structural integrity. If that cornerstone is not a solid rock, the whole building will be in danger of collapse as that rock degrades and weakens. And if the rest of the edifice is built with the wrong coordinates - out of alignment and out of plumb - the roof is liable to fail and come crashing down upon all who are within that building, since the foundation is not secure. The whole building’s integrity is dependent upon the accuracy of the cornerstone.

So when God gave Jesus to us, He is the accurate, perfect cornerstone upon which we can build our whole lives upon, with no fear of failure, or fault, or collapse. When He is the cornerstone of our life’s foundation, we have nothing more to fear because our lives will be on solid rock, and we are able to stand strong in all that we do. And we will have the blessings of the Lord our God as we let Jesus be the cornerstone of our lives.

Paul explains what the results are when we let Jesus be our cornerstone. Listen to Ephesians 2:11-22. (READ Ephesians 2:11-22) Paul starts out by telling us that without Jesus Christ, we are outside of the family of God, we are “*excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants*

*of the promise, without hope and without God in the world” (2:12). Without Jesus, we have no place to call our home, we are aliens and strangers from God, and we have no benefits from God. Without Jesus, we’re on our own, destined to live with only our own wisdom, fated to live only in our own power, and limited only to our own strength. Without Jesus, we are left with living under the leadership of Godless authorities, forced to follow selfish and narcissistic laws, having to endure all sorts of atrocities, with no hope of any security, privacy, honor, or peace. Without Jesus, everyone lives according to their own standards, and there is no order to society. Without Jesus, the ones with the most resources and power win over those with less. Without Jesus there is only chaos and anarchy and destruction. In essence, there is no hope for real life!*

But Paul goes on to tell us that WITH Jesus, *“you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He, Himself, is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...” (2:13-14).* As we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior, He renews us to become His people, so that we might be near to God. He took our sin upon Himself and paid the price for that sin so that we could live in freedom and peace with God and be called His children. Jesus has made it possible for us to be welcomed into the gates of Heaven, because when we accept Him as our Savior, we are washed clean of all our sin. So He has destroyed the barrier of sin within us and we are able to come once more into the presence of God with rejoicing. *“For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (2:18).* We become brothers and sisters with all of the faithful of Israel, and we become brother and sister with Jesus, Himself. And then the Holy Spirit gives us the power of God to continue to do the work of Jesus in the world today.

It works like this: “A sculptor once fashioned a magnificent lion out of solid stone. When asked how he had accomplished such a wonderful masterpiece, he replied, ‘It was easy. All I did was to chip away everything that didn’t look like a lion.’ [As God works in our lives] He chips away everything in our lives that doesn’t look like Christ,” and we begin to resemble the image of Christ.<sup>2</sup> The closer we

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<sup>2</sup> (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 103

get to Jesus, the greater we begin to look like Him, and the more we are able to do for Him in this world of ours. And then our cameos are added into the picture of Jesus as we influence the lives of those around us and encourage their faith walk, too.

But the best part about having Jesus as our cornerstone is the fact that we “*are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of His household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone*” (2:19-20). That means that we are no longer on our own, to fend for ourselves or to follow the ways and peoples of the world. We are now God’s own family, and when we find that in our lives, we come to recognize that God takes care of His own. He empowers us to enable us to live boldly for Him in the midst of this dark and wicked world. We no longer have to rely upon our human frailties to try to make a life for ourselves. God now steps up to grant us His blessings so that we can be fruitful in all that we do. But we have to have Jesus as our cornerstone! He makes all the difference for us.

It is vital, however, that if Christ Jesus is our cornerstone, we align ourselves to His desire and His demands for us. Even as Christians, we might think we have Jesus as our foundation, only to find ourselves way off from what He expects of us in the way that we are living our lives.

Tony Evans relates an account that may help us comprehend this. He says, “While in seminary preparing for ministry, I was enrolled in a class that one day brought me great discouragement. Our class was asked to do a paper. Now I always loved to do challenging things in class and I was committed to making an A on this paper; I was determined to spare no research effort, not dedication, nor any steadfastness to make an A on this paper. It was a particularly difficult class and it was rare that anyone ever made an A with this professor. I was sure that I would be the exception to the rule. My Type A personality kicked in and I was committed to ace this class, which meant acing this research paper. I was committed to it.

“When I got my paper back, there was an F on it. Not only did I not make an A, I did not make a B, C, or a D either. There was an F in bold red across the top. You can imagine how crushed I was

because I did my work, I clocked all-nighters, I researched, I studied the original languages, and I dug in. Even though the paper was only to be ten or twelve pages, I had eighteen to twenty pages. I had footnotes. I had gone the distance. How dare he give me an F!

“I noticed a handwritten note on the bottom of the paper below the big red F. It said, ‘Great scholarship, great detail, and magnificent effort, but you answered the wrong question.’ All that work mistakenly addressed the wrong thing. It wasn’t that I was not sincere; it wasn’t that I was not working hard; it was simply that I had addressed the wrong thing. I had been so focused on myself and what I wanted to achieve, that I missed the professor and what he wanted from me. In my desire to score high, I missed out on what could have been a wonderful assignment because I did not understand what the professor wanted from me.”<sup>3</sup>

Even as Christians, we sometimes get mixed up and find ourselves outside of the body of Christ because we’re thinking that we have Jesus as our cornerstone, but we’re living our life by our own guidelines and according to our own standards, often following the world’s ways. It is absolutely essential that we evaluate our lives to make sure that we have Jesus as our cornerstone, AND that we are building our life upon His will and His ways. We have to let Him be the one who determines our direction, and our focus, and our attitude. It is so easy to think we have a solid foundation in Jesus, but find ourselves following the world’s ways more than God’s ways, and then we find our lives with a big red F on it. We have to conform to the teachings and the commandments of Jesus, and the whole Bible, in order to build our lives successfully on Jesus as our cornerstone.

Paul tells us plainly, “*In HIM the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord*” (Eph. 2:21). As we build our lives, we have to always have Jesus as the cornerstone, and everything that happens, everything that we say, and everything that we do, even everything that we think, has to be in line with our cornerstone. Unless we follow His teachings and His commandments, we can easily build our lives into something that is really catty-wampus and out of perspective, all

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<sup>3</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations & Quotes*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 57-58, #142)

because we didn't keep Jesus as the foundational cornerstone of our life. We have to always go back to Him as our source of truth, our source of justice, and our source of righteousness. Anything else and we'll find that the building we have created with our lives is way outside of His desire for us, and we are destined for destruction because we have not kept Jesus as that precious cornerstone upon which to build a true and right and honorable and pleasing dwelling for the Lord Jesus to be in.

So if you find your life off kilter and in rough condition, it is best that you search hard at how you built upon Jesus as the cornerstone. He is willing and able to rebuild your life again if it has crumbled, but it has to be on His terms, following His guidelines and His standards. We have to have Jesus as our solid rock and cornerstone in order to build our lives that brings glory and honor to the Lord our God.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for the lives we have here on this earth. Thank You for our creativeness and ingenuity and inspiration to live our lives well. Thank You for calling us to follow You so that we might have success in this world. But God, we are so easily led away from Your truth, Your righteousness, and Your way because of that very creativeness and ingenuity and inspiration. When we seek to live outside of Your laws and commands, we may build what we think is successful lives, but in reality, they are failures, because we haven't answered the right questions and have failed to build our lives on the Way, the Truth, and the Life of Jesus Christ. Forgive us, Lord!

Today we look at those who have gone before us to establish this church, and we thank You for guiding and directing them so as to influence us in our walk of life. Give us the courage we need to learn from them, and to make Jesus Christ the very foundation and cornerstone of our lives, so that all we say and think and do are in alignment with Your guidelines, and Your commands, and Your desires for our lives. Give us the courage to live boldly for You so that as we live out Your will and Your way, we may continue to make a difference in the lives of those around us. Enable us to draw others close to You so that the body of Jesus grows larger because we made a positive difference in the life of even one more. This we pray in Jesus' Name, and to Your glory. AMEN.