

### Jesus Rejected

Years ago, when Teresa and I bought our first house, we saved a bit of money by buying a house that was a bit dated and needed a little remodeling. We started with the kitchen. We didn't know any better, so we ripped everything out all at once. Floors, trim, counter tops, cabinet doors. We'd doomed ourselves to takeout for a month.

We had decided to keep the original cabinets for two reasons. One, they were from the days when cabinets were actually handbuilt and they could probably survive a nuclear blast. Two, it saved a little money. We would just put on a new countertop and reface the cabinets and they would be good as new.

However, we ran into a problem when we did our tile floor and new countertops. From one end of the kitchen to the other, it was more than two inches out of square. I don't know how they did it, but it was bad. When we laid out all of our tile squared with one wall, by the time you got to the other, it was obviously crooked.

It also created problems with the off the shelf countertop we were using, because, it too, was square. The craftsman who originally built the cabinets had been able to creatively work around this problem to hide it.

I learned an important lesson in that project. When you build something, you have to begin with something that is square and true. If you don't, everything else will be off. Our core verse this week tells us that Jesus is the true thing on which you can base everything else. You can square everything in your life off of Jesus. Our core verse comes from another Messianic Psalm, Psalm 118

#### Psalm 118 Background

Psalm 118 is one of what are known as the Hallel Psalms. *Hallel* was the Hebrew word for *Praise*. We know this word best from the fuller expression *Hallelujah*. The ending of that, was their term for God, the Lord, Yah, Yahweh. So, you put those together – *Hallel* and *Jah* you get *Hallelujah* which means *praise the LORD*. When you're reading the Old Testament and you see that phrase, "*Praise the LORD*," the Hebrew word there is *Hallelujah*.

Psalm 118 was also a processional song. Processional songs were sung by the Israelites as they travelled in a processional on their way to worship. This song in particular was sung as they were on their way to the temple to celebrate the Passover, to remember how God delivered their people from captivity in Egypt. They worshipped to prepare for worship.

If you look at the Psalm, you'll also see that the song was sung in two parts. Part one is sung by an individual, a worship leader. The first 21 verses are all singular pronouns. It's all *I, me, my*. But in the last 8 verses, the congregation in procession responds, we see we see the plural pronouns *us, we, our*. And the song begins and ends with the same call to worship, "*Oh, give*

*thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.*" So, you have the worship leader calling the people to worship, and then the whole body together issues the call to worship.

### **Preparing for Worship**

Let me give you a free bonus point in this message, not based on our core verse, but the idea of this Psalm as a whole. What do you do to prepare yourself for worship? Do you have any habits that prepare you for fellowship, for prayer, for praise, for learning, for worship? Do you do any meditation to focus your heart and mind so you can worship in Spirit and truth? Do you sing before you sing? Do you read the morning's sermon text ahead of time? Do you pray, and ask God to prepare you, to open your eyes, to give you understanding? Do you pray for those conducting the service, that God would speak through them?

One of my encouragements and challenges for you this morning is don't wait for church to start for church to start. If there is anything we're learning in this present crisis, it's that worship can't be confined to four walls and a time on a schedule. Worship begins well before 10:00 am on Sunday morning. What you're doing at work on Thursday is already helping or hindering your heart for weekend worship. How you talk to your spouse, or your parents on Friday is already setting the stage for Sunday. Your Saturday will either open the door to the Holy Spirit on Sunday, or lock the door. What do you do to prepare yourself for worship service? The more you are prepared for worship, the more you will get out of it.

Worship is not a spectator sport. It's not a concert where you have performers on the stage and an audience sitting in the seats. Certainly, I believe you should get something out of worship, you should be encouraged, confronted, stretched, deepened, inspired, humbled, or lifted up. But I want to reorient your thinking on who the performer is and who the audience is in worship. God is the audience, and all of are the "performers," if you will. Those on the stage as well as those of us in the seats.

Understanding this truth is all the more crucial in a time like now, where we have been forced out of our usual way of doing church. How do we do worship now when there is no stage, there is no live band, there is no worship singers guiding you. Now it's simply worship from you to God. You are your own worship leader and God is the audience of your praise.

### **The Cornerstone**

That gives us a picture of this Psalm as a whole, but our core verse this week comes from verse 22, *"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."*

This is a song they would sing on their way to worship at the temple, so the psalmist uses a building image. This picture is a metaphor for vindication and exoneration. A literal translation of the Hebrew says that the rejected stone becomes "the head of the corner." There is some

discussion and debate amongst Bible scholars as to which stone is being referred to here. Is it a headstone or cornerstone? Option A is that this is the top center stone of an arch. You have an arch that comes up, curves over, and meets in the middle. That middle stone is the keystone, headstone. It's essential because it holds the whole arch together and gives it strength. You take it out and the whole arch collapses and anything it was holding up falls down.

Option B is that it refers to a cornerstone. This isn't the symbolic cornerstone we use in buildings today that has a date or some other important information inscribed in it. This comes from a day when buildings were built from bricks, or blocks carved from stone.

The cornerstone was important because everything else was trued from this stone. One wall would go this way, and the other wall would go that way. Everything else in the building depended on those two walls being square and true. The cornerstone also gave strength to both walls by giving them something to tie into. So, you pull that one block out, and both walls lose structural integrity. Next thing you know, the whole building comes crashing down.

Whichever image the Psalm originally intended, doesn't matter, because the point is still the same. You don't just pick any piece of stone to be your headstone or your cornerstone. It has to be a good stone, a strong stone. It can't have a bunch of cracks. It can't be misshapen or filled with voids. Only the best stones, only perfect stones were used for these key positions.

Our core verse is about a stone where the contractor said, "No, not that one. It will never do." The builder took one look at it and said, "Find another." The workers tossed it off to the side as a reject. They don't even want to use it as a part of a wall.

### **A God Who Chooses Rejects**

But this isn't just any building the builders are working on. It's the temple of God. This Psalm in history was likely first sung at a time when the Jews had returned from captivity to rebuild Jerusalem. They had rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple. It had been destroyed. For 70 years, they had not been able to go to the temple for Passover. Now, once again, they could. That's why they sang this song. It was their comeback song.

The symbolism here is that the stone that all the builders said wasn't good enough, God, the architect, came along and said, "That's the one I want. That stone's perfect. I will use it as the most important stone in this temple I'm building." Ultimately, it's not talking about the physical temple. It's not about a building, a structure.

God loves the underdog story, the Cinderella story, the story of the little train that could. He loves to pick the kid that always sits on the bench to make the winning play. He loves to turn the failure into a success. He loves the twist at the end. He is the God of second chances and the Author of surprises. We have a God who loves to choose the rejects.

This was the story of Israel— a vagabond tribe chosen as a special people and given a Promised Land. It was the story of so many of her people. It was the story of Joseph, rejected by his brothers and sold into slavery only to rise to second and power and save everyone from famine.

It was the story of Moses, rejected by his own people and forced to flee, but chosen by God to lead his people out of captivity. It was the story of David, rejected by his brothers, but chosen by God to be king. It was the story of Zerubbabel, mocked and ridiculed for trying to rebuild Jerusalem, but called by God to finish the task.

However, when the Holy Spirit inspired this verse to be written he was thinking of something bigger than Joseph or Moses, bigger than David or Zerubbabel or even the whole nation of Israel.

He was thinking of Jesus. Three of the gospels record something that happens not long after Jesus entered Jerusalem the final week before his crucifixion. We'll follow the story in Matthew 21. The first day after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, he goes right to the temple and violently throws out the money changers, who are price gouging the people to exchange their Roman money for official temple currency, to buy priestly approved sacrificial animals. In verse 13, Jesus throws a pair of prophecies from Isaiah and Jeremiah in the faces of the religious leaders, *"It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."* (Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:11)" The religious leaders were running quite a racket during Passover week and Jesus kicked them right in the money bags.

We might easily miss the Old Testament background of what Jesus is quoting here, but it isn't lost on the religious leaders. Jesus quoted from Isaiah 56:7 which says in part, *"for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."* Vs. 8 goes and says, *"The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, 'I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered."*

God's intention all along wasn't just to gather the outcasts of Israel, but the outcasts, the rejects of the whole world. The religious leaders had made the temple their own personal fiefdom, but Jesus was laying God's claim on it for all the people.

### **Jesus Rejected**

So, when Jesus comes back the next morning, the religious leaders immediately challenge his authority. Jesus tells them two parables, both of which cast the religious leaders as the villains. In the second story, Jesus tells of a vineyard owner who leased his vineyard while he tended to business in another country. When it came time to collect his due, the owner sent his servants which the tenants preceded to beat, stone, and murder. Finally, the owner sent his very own son to take care of matters, and they threw him out of the vineyard and murdered him.

Let me quote Mark Moore here from the Core 52 book,

Though most parables are pretty cryptic, this one was clear as crystal. God is the owner. The servants are the prophets of old. The assassinated son is Jesus himself. This story publically exposed the Sanhedrin's plot to murder Jesus.

Then, in vs. 42, Jesus quoted this Psalm, *"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes."*

Then Jesus drops the hammer in verse 43, *"Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits."*

The religious leaders recognized right away what Jesus was doing? He was claiming to be the Messiah. He was saying, you have rejected God's chosen one, so God is rejecting you, and now God will accept all those people of the world you have rejected. The tables have turned. The accepted are rejected, and the rejected are accepted. The proud are humiliated, and the humiliated are exalted.

The religious leader's plot was this— if we kill Jesus, it will prove he isn't the Messiah. Jesus point was this— when you kill me, it will prove that I am the Messiah. God knew all along that the Messiah would be rejected, and they would be the ones who rejected Him. It was in the plan from the beginning.

### **God Chooses Even Us**

Here where all this hits us this morning. You see, this isn't just Joseph's story, or Moses' story, or David's story, or Israel's story. It isn't even just Jesus' story. It became Jesus' story because it's our story too. It's my story. It's your story. Jesus was rejected because he wanted to reach the rejects. Jesus was denied by his own people, because he wanted to reach those who were not his own.

None of us deserved to be a part of the church. Church isn't for those who are good enough. We're all a bunch of failures, screw-ups, disappointments, and never-agains, but God chose us anyway. 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 says,

*26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,*

If you feel like you don't deserve God's goodness. You're right. None of us do. If you feel like you're not good enough. Then join the crowd. If you feel like you don't belong here, then your exactly where you need to be.

Can I be honest? We are a church of liars, cheats, perverts, addicts, and a bunch of no-good, rotten, mean, selfish jerks. If you find a church that claims they aren't, they're a bunch of liars too.

Just to drive the point home, listen to what Paul says about these Christians in Corinth later on in chapter 6.

*9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. (This was their own biography. Their own resume.) But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

Do you hear what Paul is saying? You're all a bunch of rejects, but God chose you anyway. He made you into something new, something better. We're all a bunch of rejects, but God chose us anyway, and he says I have an important place for you in this building project.

In Ephesians 2:22 he says, *"You also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."*

### **Where Your Life is Squared**

Now, fast forward to six weeks after this big showdown between Jesus and the leaders. Jesus has been executed, risen again, appeared alive to more than 500 people, and has ascended into heaven. The Spirit has been poured out on the disciples, and Peter and John and the other apostles are now preaching Jesus the Messiah in defiance the very religious leaders that had Jesus crucified.

They arrest Peter and John for violating their orders not to teach in the name of Jesus. So what do Peter and John do? They quote this very same core verse from Psalm 118. They threw right in their face.

What they're saying is that Jesus is the cornerstone that God has chosen. We're going to square our lives off of Him.

Earlier, I quoted Paul about how we're all being built into a dwelling place for God. In the two verses before that one, Paul shows us the blueprints for God's building plan. The foundation, he says is the apostles and prophets. Their words we have in Scripture are the foundation. And in verse 20 he declares that *"Christ Jesus himself [is] the cornerstone."*

He's the stone that gives everything else in the building strength. He's the stone that holds it all together. He's the stone without which it all falls apart.

Now here's the steak and potatoes of this message. If Jesus is the Cornerstone, then our lives must be squared off of him. If He's the Cornerstone, then we must be trued according to Him. If Jesus is the Cornerstone, we must be connected, tied in to Him.

If you square your life off of anything else, cracks are going to appear. If you are aligned according to anything else, it will crumble. One of the things this Coronavirus pandemic is doing

is exposing all the false things we tend to base our lives on. All of these things, right now, are coming up short.

If your life is squared off your job, off your investments in the stock market, off your health and well-being, off your friends and relationships, off your hobbies, all of that is being threatened right now.

Terry shared a post on Facebook this week that points this out so clearly.

In just three short months, just like He did with the plagues of Egypt, God has taken away everything we worship.

God said, "you want to worship athletes, I will shut down the stadiums.

You want to worship musicians, I will shut down Civic Centers.

You want to worship actors, I will shut down theaters.

You want to worship money, I will shut down the economy and collapse the stock market.

You don't want to go to church and worship Me, I will make it where you can't go to church"

Everything we base our lives on for meaning, and purpose and happiness is now gone. If your life is squared off of anything else, it isn't going to work. It isn't going to last. Only Jesus is the cornerstone. Only He is strong enough. True enough and big enough to hold you when everything else falls away.