

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Ephesians 2:19-22 on May 25, 2014 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: Stonework

Today's Focus: Cornerstone

"The Colossal Cornerstone"

- 1. It's big enough to hold the weight of the world**
- 2. It's strong enough to withstand the hate of the world**
- 3. It's hidden unless you tunnel into the Word**

In the name of Jesus Christ who died—more than that, who was raised to life—who is now at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us (cf Romans 8:34). Amen.

Hello Friends! The sermon series we're wrapping up today is called Stonework because the last couple weeks we've been seeing how God is the master Stoneworker. Last Sunday, each of our Jr High confirmation students received an actual stone with their name and a Bible verse on it to remind them that they are, like every single one of us who believes that Jesus is our Savior, "living stones." In other words we learned how even though each of us has our own cracks and our own flaws and our own unique features, yet God is building us into a spiritual house of living stones built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ.

Today is the grand finale to this Stonework series so we're going to be talking more about this cornerstone—this most important stone—Jesus Christ. It's really a neat picture. In ancient construction the cornerstone was the first stone laid in a foundation. Often the biggest stone it also had to have perfect angles because it would set the angles for every other stone in the wall. This was a big deal. If your cornerstone was straight, you'd have a solid building. If your cornerstone was crooked, your building would be in danger of collapsing.

Well it's fitting today that we would be talking about how Jesus is the colossal cornerstone because today we are also reminded of the day when Jesus ascended into heaven. 40 days after he rose from the dead, Jesus became the cornerstone of the church when he returned to his Father in heaven once his work of redeeming us here on earth was complete. Jesus' mission of coming into this world as one of us to fulfill the commands we have not kept, to take away the punishment that we deserved for our disobedience, and to rise from the dead in victory over death was complete. But his work of building the church was just getting started at his ascension!

We're going to read about the church in our sermon text from the Bible today in Ephesians chapter 2. Yet before I read our verses today I want to give you the context of Ephesians chapter 2 a little bit. If you've been in my Bible 101 class this is familiar territory for you. But if you haven't been in Bible 101 with me yet that's ok. I'd love to have you join me. In the meantime you can just go home tonight and read Ephesians chapter 2 for yourself. Download the Bible app maybe. You can read it right on your phone. It's free. Here's what you'll read about.

In a nutshell God says that we are by nature—every single one of us—born dead in our sins. So we are all born physically alive, but spiritually dead. What this means is that we are completely unable to earn God's love by anything that we do. Let that sink in. We cannot be good enough to get to heaven on our own or even with a little bit of help. We don't just need to be reformed a little bit in terms of our behavior, we need to be reborn through holy baptism like little Noah this morning. We need to be brought from death to life. Made *alive*!

The good news is that this is exactly what God does for us in Christ! He makes us alive through the gift of faith in Jesus Christ so that we can be forgiven of all our sins and we can be sure that we are going to heaven. The result of all this is that we are saved completely and freely by grace—God’s undeserved love for sinners like us. The key verse in Ephesians 2 says *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast.”* (Ephesians 2:8-9). And so here at our church we don’t boast about our good works that we do for God, rather we celebrate Christ’s completed work that he did for us. That’s what motivates us to do good works for others and give God glory. This is Ephesians chapter 2 in a nutshell. And here’s what Paul says at the end of the chapter in verses 19-22...

¹⁹ *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people (literally “saints”!) and also members of his household,* ²⁰ *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.* ²¹ *In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.* ²² *And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

Ok so let’s unpack this real quick. Who’s the cornerstone? *Jesus*. What’s the foundation? *The apostles and prophets*. Who are they? The men God used to write the Bible. So the only foundation of our faith is the Bible with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone. And who is the building that is being joined together and built on this foundation? Who is this “holy temple in the Lord” being built together to become “a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit”? You are! You who believe in Jesus Christ are the Church. You are the temple in which God himself lives.

Now notice something here. There’s a progression of thought to show how special a relationship you now have with God because of Jesus. Remember, you were dead in your sins. You were outsiders when it comes to the kingdom of God. Foreigners. Strangers. But then it says here first that you are *“fellow citizens with God’s people”*. So that’s the image of a nation, right? Citizenship. It’s special. When you feel patriotic, you have an affinity to your country. We thank God for all the men and women who have died fighting to protect our country this Memorial Day weekend. Patriotism therefore can be a powerful connection. But then it says that you’re also *“members of God’s household.”* So that’s the image of a family. A person’s connection to a brother or a sister or their parents is usually even closer than one’s connection to their nation, right? But then it says that you are a *“holy temple in the Lord”*, a dwelling place in which God actually lives by his Spirit. So you’re not just living in the same country with God. You’re not just part of the same family with God. We are all practically cemented together as living stones in whom God dwells.

So deliberately, I think, each of these three images are more intense than the one before regarding our relationship with God. A king lives in a country with his people. But there’s some distance there. A father lives under the same roof with his children. But in a temple, God actually lives in the temple. He doesn’t just live near the stones. He lives within them.

So go ahead and take a deep breathe now, everyone. I’ve been intentionally packing in here a lot of content because it’s important to know this stuff. But now I’m going to show you a 3 minute video clip I found on the internet. In this video you’re going to see what remains underground of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem—the very temple that Jesus himself would have visited before his ascension when he walked the earth. I’m showing

this to you because I think that what you see with the largest stone in the temple of Jerusalem can serve as an illustration of what it means that we are now the temple of God built on cornerstone of Jesus Christ. Let's [watch](#).

Don't you love how excitedly that guy was talking about that largest stone at the base of the Western Wall? Almost as excited as I am to talk about how Jesus is that the Colossal Cornerstone of the Church!

First of all, Jesus is **The Colossal Cornerstone of the Church because 1) it's big enough to hold the weight of the world.** In the video the guy said the stone in the western wall itself weighs 600 tons. That's crazy heavy, isn't it? Heavier than 200 elephants. So heavy and so big they don't even know how it got there or could've gotten there. Because it's so heavy it can also support a lot of weight.

In the video he also said you could put two 747s full of people and cargo on it. It's that big. But here's the thing about Jesus Christ. **He is the Colossal Cornerstone because it's big enough to hold the weight of the world.** Not just two 747s full of people...but all the people of this world with all their baggage and all their troubles and all their worries and all their sins. Friends, what's weighing you down right now? Jesus can handle it. He can support it. He can bear you up beneath all your problems.

That stone at the base of the western wall weighs more than 200 elephants. Well let's talk about some elephants here. You know what I mean? The proverbial "elephant in the room." What's yours? What's the elephant in the room when it comes to your family? Your personal life? That thing no one wants to talk about. That thing you don't want anyone to know about out of fear that if people knew that about you or your family that they wouldn't want to be your friend or they wouldn't want to love you? What's your "elephant in the room"? Well Jesus is the colossal cornerstone that can carry that elephant too. You see, Jesus Christ, God's Son, loved you so much that he went to the cross carrying the weight of all your sins—all those elephants in the room. In fact the Bible says, *"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world"* (1 John 2:2). And so Jesus invites, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28). **Jesus is the colossal cornerstone. It's big enough to hold the weight of the world.**

Second, **Jesus is the Colossal Cornerstone because 2) it's strong enough to withstand the hate of the world.** I think my favorite part of the video I showed you came right at the end when they guy who was talking about how the Roman army tried to destroy the largest stone but couldn't. Eventually they gave up. He said, "Instead of them breaking the stone...the stone broke them." On the one hand this serves as a warning to anyone, to any of you, who would dare to try and chip away at Jesus Christ, his teachings, or his church. This is almost exactly what Jesus himself said in Luke 20:17-18... *Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone"? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed."* A serious warning!

On the other hand this is serious comfort. **Jesus is the Colossal Cornerstone that's strong enough to withstand the hate of the world.** Our 21st century modern world isn't the first time people have tried to destroy the cornerstone of our faith. Remember as early as Jesus was born, King Herod sent his henchmen to Bethlehem to have every baby boy under the age of two slaughtered. As long as Jesus walked this earth people were plotting

to end his life. I remember one of my Seminary professors saying, “The world always wants to crucify whatever is of God.”

And so it has continued to this day—opposition to Jesus Christ. Throughout history there have been waves of persecution against his followers, against Christians. Sometimes violent. Sometimes economic. Sometimes academic. Sometimes political. There always have been and always will be people who hate the gospel of Jesus Christ and want to see it destroyed. Last week in the country of Sudan, a pregnant woman was arrested and sentenced to die simply because she is a Christian. Stuff like this is happening all over the world though you’d hardly know it with what our media chooses to report.

Now in our country maybe we don’t face such threats upon our lives. Yet we increasingly live in a society where to voice the teachings of the Bible out loud is to have your TV show cancelled or to have your business boycotted or to stand condemned in the court of popular opinion for being guilty of intolerance by those who ironically like to think of themselves the champions of tolerance. The world seems to be tolerant of almost anything so long as it doesn’t come from the Bible. If you criticize the world then you’re being intolerant, but when the world insults you it’s almost a sport. The message of the media increasingly seems to be “Fall in line with our agenda, or we will make you face the consequences.” Have any of been made to keep silent about your faith because you feared what people might say or do to you? Have any of you been worrying about the future of our country where we have for so long enjoyed the freedoms of religion and speech that so many people have died to protect?

But on the other hand God gives us this comfort: **Jesus is the Colossal Cornerstone because it is strong enough to withstand the hate of the world.** Friends, Jesus is still at the right hand of the Father in heaven ruling all things for the good of his church (cf. Eph. 1:22). He promises that the good news of his victory over sin and death will continue to be proclaimed until he returns on the last day (cf. Mt 24:14). He promises that in the meantime not even the armies of hell can destroy his church (cf. Mt. 16:18). So if you are connected to him by faith, if you are therefore a member of his Church through holy baptism, then there’s nothing or no one that can ultimately harm your soul. *“For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame’”* (1 Peter 2:6).

Finally today, **Jesus is the Colossal Cornerstone because it’s hidden unless you tunnel into the Word.** In the video the guy was all excited because he got to show us that largest stone hidden underground in a tunnel. Tourists can walk in this tunnel because people there took the time to excavate it. And so it is with Jesus Christ and the promises. They’re hidden unless you tunnel into the Word, unless you excavate for yourself the promises of God.

Think about this. When Jesus ascended into heaven, his small little church of that time stood there looking up into the sky as a cloud soon hid Jesus from the sight. He was hidden. And yet Jesus’ last words should have been ringing in their ears. *Surely I am with you always till the very end of the age* (Matthew 28:20). So here’s how God works. One by one as we tunnel into his word, the Holy Spirit works as the construction worker to strengthen your faith and cement your connection to Christ the cornerstone. The more often you tunnel into the Bible, by going to church, by going to Bible study, by reading the Bible on your own, there you will find the promises of God that the Holy Spirit uses to give you confidence in the face of every kind of danger, every enemy, even

death itself. Remember friends, **Jesus is the Colossal Cornerstone. It's big enough to hold the weight of the world. It's strong enough to withstand the hate of the world. Yet it's hidden unless you tunnel into God's Word.** Amen.

My Next Steps

Point to Ponder: Through faith in Jesus Christ you become a member of the Church, the "holy temple" in which God actually lives by his Spirit!

Treasure to Share: *"For in Scripture it says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.'"* (1 Peter 2:6).

Action to Take: When you tunnel into the Bible, there you will find the promises of God that the Holy Spirit uses to give you great confidence in the face of every kind of danger, every enemy, even death itself.

*Consider making plans to attend the special Ascension celebration service at Centennial Lutheran Church this coming Thursday, May 29th. See page 15 of the worship folder for details.