

Jesus Juva

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CHRISTOLOGICAL TITLES
LESSON TWENTY-ONE
THE STONE

“The Keystone State”

Embarrassingly, I must confess, I had little interest in the trades. The individuals who were employed by such tasks of manual labor were nice enough to converse with, but their actual work seemed very mundane and redundant to me. That is, until my church and parsonage burnt to their foundations in September 1985.

When the ground was broken I visited the construction site daily. Each trip heightened my engrossment and caused a weekly accumulation of respect. The first moment came when I viewed all of the pipes the plumbers had installed on the basement floor. It was to be noticed, but no call for excitement. Then the cement trucks pulled up, and several tons of concrete covered the pipes, permanently entombing them. Now, all my feelings turned to awe and admiration. If one pipe was a half inch off it would impact everything up to the second floor. Worse yet, under a foot of concrete the error could never be rectified. I was mesmerized at the precision of the plumbers work and the confidence they had; not one flinched at the pouring, forever sealing them.

The same could be true for the carpenters, whom I learned did more planning and measuring than pounding. In fact, pounding nails seemed to be the least of their responsibilities. Brick layers do not slap one brick upon another. There were chalk lines on the floor to be followed, string lines horizontal and vertical for additional guidance. Most astonishing, each brick laid had a level put to it before moving on to the next.

Perhaps the greatest feat of all is the one electrician who was on the premises. Single-handedly, he wired the entire building.

Before the building committee met with the architect, I had an art professor enlighten me with a short, almost in passing, conversation. He informed me that the exterior design and interior furnishings of the proposed building would speak for two hundred years or more of what we believed Jesus Christ to be in 1985. The building would be a profound theological statement. When the cornerstone was set, our statement of belief was solidified for multiple generations to follow.

A Christological title that one may never think of associating with Jesus is “The Stone.” An examination of the Scriptures will demonstrate that this is one of the most significant designations that can be afforded to him. Compelling, all the illusions originate in Judaism with the ensuing demonstration that Jesus, as “the stone,” is the long awaited and anticipated Messiah.

In the Psalms it reads, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.” (118:22) The confession is that Israel, rejected by all nations, will one day rule supreme over all the lands. Israel was repulsed and was never fully restored, calling into question the psalmist’ vision. Centuries later, Jesus repeated this Psalm, then went on to teach, “The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.” (Mt 21: 44) Similar to Israel, Jesus will be reviled and insulted, rejected and crucified, but all who do so will be crushed, for ultimate victory and glory belong to him. The word of psalmist was proven to be true for those who wait in faith. It must be noted that in reading the New Testament, Jesus never prophesied his own rejection and death without at the same time prophesying his resurrection and his triumph.

The prophet Isaiah spoke against Ahaz along with his conspirators contrasted to those who struggled in opposition to remain faithful to the Pentateuch. In doing so, he pronounced regarding the Lord, “He will become like a sanctuary, a stone one strikes against; for both houses of Israel he will become a rock one stumbles over – a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” (8:14) This at first may seem like a conflicting statement until its nuances are revealed. A man in conflict with Ahaz will find solace at

the altar of the Lord in the sanctuary of the Temple. An individual who is a cohort of Ahaz will find the altar a blockade, a group of meaningless rocks to stumble over, a hindrance to moving forward with Ahaz's materialistic and political agenda. Applied to Jesus, an individual who understand him to be the Messiah will be spirit filled and at peace. A person who greets Jesus with indifference or is actively hostile will be passing judgment upon himself or herself. Jesus can either be the altar of tranquility or an obstacle to worldly desires.

George Beverly Shea was taking a leisurely walk with his father, a Methodist minister, when they encountered the great hymn writer Clara Tear Williams. Rev. Shea introduced the two, and all had a pleasant conversation. Returning home, George shared the experience with his mother, noting especially the peaceful countenance of Mrs. Williams. Mrs. Shea went to the piano and played and sang one of Williams' most popular hymns, "Satisfied." So impressed by the hymn, eight-year-old George memorized the words, singing them often to himself. This perhaps was the beginning of his preparation to sing at the Billy Graham evangelistic rallies for over fifty years.

"Satisfied"

v.1

All my life I had a longing
For a drink from some clear spring,
That I hoped would quench the burning
Of the thirst I felt within.

Refrain

Hallelujah! I have found Him
Whom my soul so long has craved!
Jesus satisfies my longings,
Through His blood I now am saved.

v.2

Feeding on the husks around me,
Till my strength was almost gone,
Longed my soul for something better,
Only still to hunger on.

Refrain

v.3

Poor I was, and sought for riches,
Something that would satisfy,
But the dust I gathered round me
Only mocked my soul's sad cry.

Refrain

v.4

Well of water, ever springing,
Bread of life so rich and free,
Untold wealth that never faileth,
My Redeemer is to me.

Refrain

Those who encounter Jesus not as a stumbling block to ill perceived worldliness but as the true nourishment of life, will be satisfied.

Isaiah once more used the analogy of a stone to illustrate the plight of Israel. Speaking for the Lord, "See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: 'One who trusts will not panic.'" (28:16) Even though the Jews had made a covenant with death by aligning themselves with the Assyrians, God is promising to restore them to the holy city of Jerusalem. Jesus used this as the basis for his parable of the foolish man who built his house upon the sand, and the

wise man who built his home upon a rock. (Lk 6: 47-49) Jesus is once again declaring that he is the sure foundation in life. Doubt is a plague that attacks us all. A lack of faith is its single root, but its tentacles are numerous as worries beset us all. But if we believe in Jesus as the sure foundation, it is known that “one who trusts will not panic.”

Peter uses the inference of stones to confess the coherence of church fellowship. The Keeper of the Keys writes, “Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (I Pet 2: 4-5) Peter is saying each Christian is like a stone. Each stone comprises a part of the church. The foundation stone upon which all rest is Jesus Christ. The church is not built on creeds and doctrines, bishops and district superintendents, pastors and church administrators, and talented lay persons. As important as all these are, they often prove to be divisive and unstable.

The church which I described earlier was an artistic expression of faith as a structure, but housed within a congregation violently divided into three factions. Secret meetings abounded and hate mail flourished. I can only imagine the heightened volume of incantations if we had E-mail in ’85. Self-righteous to a fault they sallied forth, Bible in tow. There was the group who would spend no more money than that collected from the insurance, or, better yet, merge with the Presbyterians and keep the money. The second group would accept indebtedness to accentuate programming. The third, my favorite, left altogether and built a white clapboard church, Bethany Chapel, promenading as a “Bible Believing, Bible Preaching” church, as if our Methodist church was not. So, one-by-one the stones slipped off the pile, placing in question the solidarity among the reverent in a time of spiritual crisis.

“Charity” did abound as the pastor’s family was relocated to a wealthy and prominent parishioner’s rental property for which tenants could not be secured, as it was rodent infested. The pastor became adept with three to five kills daily. More so was his ability to take a broom and at bedtime remove uninvited guests from the curtains and walls of the single room shared by a four daughter and a five year old son.

This is why Peter realized the church must be built upon Jesus, who can neither crack nor crumble. Believers must always have one foot firmly planted on the rock of Jesus; the other in a congregation of choice. One foot can never be moved, the other often blows with the winds of self-centeredness.

My home state, Pennsylvania, is known as “The Keystone State.” Several origins are listed for this nickname, but there is one I always hold prominent. A keystone is the center stone that holds an arch together. Among the thirteen original, Pennsylvania’s geographic location made it the keystone of the colonies, North and South.

Jesus is the keystone that holds our lives and our congregations together in times of adversity in addition to being our spiritual building block.

Soli Deo Gloria,

Ron Love