

## **“Believe in God’s Precious Cornerstone”**

Isaiah 28:14-22

by Pastor Jason Van Bommel

*Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scoffers,  
who rule this people in Jerusalem!*

*<sup>15</sup> Because you have said, “We have made a covenant with death,  
and with Sheol we have an agreement,*

*when the overwhelming whip passes through  
it will not come to us,*

*for we have made lies our refuge,  
and in falsehood we have taken shelter”;*

*<sup>16</sup> therefore thus says the Lord GOD,  
“Behold, I am the one who has laid<sup>[d]</sup> as a foundation in Zion,  
a stone, a tested stone,*

*a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation:  
‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’*

*<sup>17</sup> And I will make justice the line,  
and righteousness the plumb line;  
and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies,  
and waters will overwhelm the shelter.”*

*<sup>18</sup> Then your covenant with death will be annulled,  
and your agreement with Sheol will not stand;  
when the overwhelming scourge passes through,  
you will be beaten down by it.*

*<sup>19</sup> As often as it passes through it will take you;  
for morning by morning it will pass through,  
by day and by night;  
and it will be sheer terror to understand the message.*

*<sup>20</sup> For the bed is too short to stretch oneself on,  
and the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in.*

*<sup>21</sup> For the LORD will rise up as on Mount Perazim;  
as in the Valley of Gibeon he will be roused;*

*to do his deed—strange is his deed!  
 and to work his work—alien is his work!  
<sup>22</sup> Now therefore do not scoff,  
 lest your bonds be made strong;  
 for I have heard a decree of destruction  
 from the Lord GOD of hosts against the whole land.*

- Isaiah 28:14-22, ESV

### **What is Holding You?**

In our recent sermons in Isaiah, we've been asking ourselves some challenging questions, like What's your driving passion? Or What crown are you chasing? These questions are aimed to get us to see what's driving our lives, our values, our decision-making. Today, I'd like to ask a different question, related to these others: What is holding you? In other words: In your life, what's holding you up? What's holding you close? Where is your security? What is your foundation when storms come?

Jesus taught about how we answer this question in Matthew 7

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” – Matthew 7:24-27, ESV*

I've been thinking a lot about what holds us when storms come because so many of us have been through such fierce storms lately and many of us are still in the midst of them. What holds you when storms come is the same thing that is the real foundation of your life.

Recently, someone challenged me about what difference Jesus would really make in their lives. They didn't see how their life would really be changed if they were to

trust and follow Jesus. Everything would still be the same for them. So, I told them of 10 ways that Jesus makes a difference in my life –

How Jesus makes a difference in my life:

1. I know I was personally and lovingly created by God. – fearfully and wonderfully made, knitted together in my mother’s womb.
2. I know I am completely forgiven of all my sins. – There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
3. I know my life has purpose, even if I don't know all the details. – All the days ordained for me were written in His book before I lived a single one
4. When I'm at my lowest, He comforts me as no one else can. – he is near t the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit
5. I regularly read truth in the Bible that directly applies to my life and my struggles. – His word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path
6. I can offer other people real help and hope. – God comforts us in our affliction so that we can comfort others with the comfort with which we have been comforted by God
7. The good in my life is not an accident but a loving gift. – Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow or turning
8. The bad in my life is not accidental or tragic but purposely and lovingly intended for my good - which makes it bearable. – God is working all things together for my true and eternal good in Christ
9. I have someone in my life I can always talk to. – There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother
10. I'm privileged to be part of the most important thing happening in the world. – The Great Commission to take the Gospel to the nations and see the kingdom of God spread to every tribe, tongue, people and nation

This got me thinking: why is it that I so often don't live in the full light of the reality of these 10 truths? Why is it that so many of God's people don't daily experience the joy and freedom that these truths should be bringing into our lives? As a pastor, I

long to see God's people living in the freedom and joy and purpose and strength that Christ died and rose again to give us. So why aren't we?

I think the real answer to this question is that, while we profess these things to be true and affirm them with our minds, we are not actively building our lives on the cornerstone of Christ. We are not spending time in God's word every day as we should. We are not thanking him for every good and perfect gift he gives us as a personal gift from our loving heavenly father. We are not clinging to him and crying out to him in the midst of our trials, but we are turning to other healths and other things to distract us or numb the pain. We do not see the Great Commission as the greatest thing happening in the world, but we get distracted by sports and politics and 100 other lesser things.

So, today, as we reflect on this passage here in Isaiah 28, may the Lord be pleased to use this passage to strengthen our trust in his precious cornerstone. May the spirit move our hearts to more fully rely on and rest in who Christ is and who Christ is in us and for us as children of God and as the Church of Jesus Christ.

### **Foolish Covenants with Death, vv. 14-16**

Before we get there, we need some background, which we find in verses 14-15:

*Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scoffers,  
who rule this people in Jerusalem!  
15 Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death,  
and with Sheol we have an agreement,  
when the overwhelming whip passes through  
it will not come to us,  
for we have made lies our refuge,  
and in falsehood we have taken shelter";*

Here we see the Lord as addressing the rulers in Jerusalem period last week, we saw that earlier in Isaiah 28, Isaiah was prophesying about the rich and drunken rulers in Samaria, the northern Kingdom of Israel, which was the first to fall to the

Assyrians in 722 BC. But Isaiah 's main audience is always Judah and Jerusalem, the people of god who lived right around him. So, even the message about northern Israel was really meant as an example for southern Jerusalem and Judah. Here, the lord is making that very clear.

The rulers of Jerusalem have entered into a covenant with Egypt for their protection against the Assyrians. Later, when Egypt would fail them and the Lord would directly come to their rescue in a supernatural way, they would turn and enter into an alliance with Babylon. They trusted in their political alliances with Pagan superpowers to protect them against invasion rather than trusting in the Lord. God calls this kind of covenant a covenant with death. He is mocking their earthly political trust.

Anytime we build our lives on anything other than the Lord Jesus Christ, we are making a covenant with death. If we find our core identity as Americans or middle-class suburbanites or college educated professionals or political conservatives, or if we find our security in our financial portfolio or our retirement accounts or our real estate holdings or if we are staking our hope in the future on the outcome of the next election, these are all false trusts in things that are not God. The more we rest our weight of hope and security on them the more they are covenants of death to us because they separate us from the one who alone is worthy of our trust and who can hold us through everything in life and death.

### **The Precious Cornerstone, v. 16**

Verse 16 is one of the most wonderful verses in all of scripture because here God presents to us the promised cornerstone of the Lord Jesus Christ:

*therefore thus says the Lord GOD,  
 “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion,  
 a stone, a tested stone,  
 a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation:  
 ‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’*

Whenever you want to know the true meaning of an Old Testament verse, look first to see if that verse is quoted in the New Testament. The New Testament is

concealed in the Old Testament, and the true meaning of the old testament is revealed in the new testament. Another way to put this is that the new is in the old contained while the old is by the new explained. In 1 Peter 2, which we read earlier in the worship service, peter quotes this verse as a reference to Jesus:

*For it stands in Scripture:*

*“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,  
a cornerstone chosen and precious,  
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*

Then, Peter immediately quoted Psalm 118:22, when he says in 1 Peter 2:7 –

*So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,*

*“The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone,”*

Contrary to what some people have claimed, the New Testament writers never quote Old Testament verses out of context or change their original meaning. They are always unfolding and explaining to us the true meaning of that verse as it was originally given by God period to see this clearly, here is the context of Psalm 118:22, which is one of the most important verses for the early church:

*Open to me the gates of righteousness,  
that I may enter through them  
and give thanks to the LORD.*

<sup>20</sup> *This is the gate of the LORD;  
the righteous shall enter through it.*

<sup>21</sup> *I thank you that you have answered me  
and have become my salvation.*

<sup>22</sup> *The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone.*

<sup>23</sup> *This is the LORD's doing;  
it is marvelous in our eyes.*

<sup>24</sup> *This is the day that the LORD has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it. – Psalm 118:19-24, ESV*

The LORD has become our salvation. How? By being rejected by the builders, the stone the LORD has chosen has become the cornerstone of the new and living Temple. How?

Peter explained this to the Sanhedrin – the rulers in Jerusalem – when he was on trial before them in Acts 4 for the crime of healing a lame man in the Temple Gate –

*<sup>5</sup> On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, <sup>6</sup> with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. <sup>7</sup> And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” <sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup> if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. <sup>11</sup> This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” – Acts 4:5-12, ESV*

I just love that Peter – under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – quoted to the rulers of Jerusalem in his day a message that God gave to the rulers in Jerusalem in Isaiah’s day 750 years earlier. The rulers of Jerusalem in Peter’s day had made an alliance, not with Egypt, but with Rome. They had allowed pagan Rome to rule over them and to be their identity and their security. They had made their own covenant with death and in so doing had rejected God's cornerstone who was prophesied to them 750 years earlier. They scoffed at the word of God who was Incarnate among them, and they crucified him. In other words, the more things change the more they stay the same, and when God’s people look to other Saviors, other security, other foundations than what God has provided, very bad things happen.

But Peter explained to the Sanhedrin that though they had sinned against God and rejected his Christ, they had actually fulfilled scripture. Jesus is the stone rejected

by the builders in Jerusalem which has become the cornerstone and the only salvation for the whole world.

The declaration of God's cornerstone here in Isaiah 28 builds on something God had said about himself earlier in Isaiah 8:

<sup>13</sup> But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. <sup>14</sup> And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. <sup>15</sup> And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.” (ESV)

Let's think for a minute about this cornerstone.

1. The Lord God Himself has said that He is the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation. The fact that this stone was laid by the Lord God himself is attested by the fact that God Himself raised Christ Jesus from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.
2. The fact that He has been laid as a foundation in Zion refers both to the heavenly Zion, where Jesus sits and throned in glory, and also to the fact that Jesus is the foundation for the church. The church on earth is Zion among the nations, the church militant, the church as leaven that's being worked throughout the world, as salt of the earth and light of the world, as the company of the redeemed gathered for the praise of God and his chosen cornerstone. The church in heaven is Zion glorified, the church triumphant, the communion of saints and company of the redeemed souls made perfect. Jesus is the cornerstone of His church. This means that if we belong to Jesus, we belong to His church.
3. He is a tested stone. The Book of Hebrews tells us how He was tested: He has been tempted in every way just as we are and yet was perfectly without sin. He learned obedience through the things he suffered, and so He has become qualified to be the head of a new humanity, the source of the perfect human



righteousness we need. Jesus was tested in every way and passed every test!

4. He is a precious cornerstone. The cornerstone is the most vital stone in the building. It must be strong enough to support the weight of the building, and it must be perfectly straight so that everything in the building can be aligned to the cornerstone. If Christ is the cornerstone of your life, then He bears the full weight of your life and everything in your life is aligned to Him. If Christ is truly the cornerstone of Forest Hill Presbyterian Church, then He bears the full weight of His church and everything in His church must be aligned to Him. He is not a decorative stone added for an enhancing and pleasing effect. He is God's precious cornerstone. He will not adorn a building you are building on some other foundation for some other purpose. He alone provides a sure foundation for life.
  
5. *'Whoever believes will not be in haste.'* This means that everyone who believes in Jesus, who receives and rests upon him alone for salvation as he is offered in the gospel, will not flee in haste from before their enemies. We will not be shaken and disturbed and terrified by Satan or sin or death or hell because we are secure in Him.

Hear the end of Romans 8:

*<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written,*

*“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;  
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

*<sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

This is what it means to not be in haste, to not be shaken and to not flee in the face of our enemies. Not only does Christ provide us with a sure foundation and a perfect Plumb line by which to align everything in our lives, but he also provides us with unshakable security in the face of any danger.

### **Rejecting God's Cornerstone, vv. 17-22**

Verses 17 to 22 give us a sober warning of the consequences of rejecting God's cornerstone:

*<sup>17</sup>And I will make justice the line,  
and righteousness the plumb line;  
and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies,  
and waters will overwhelm the shelter.”*

*<sup>18</sup>Then your covenant with death will be annulled,  
and your agreement with Sheol will not stand;  
when the overwhelming scourge passes through,  
you will be beaten down by it.*

*<sup>19</sup>As often as it passes through it will take you;  
for morning by morning it will pass through,  
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and it will be sheer terror to understand the message.*

*<sup>20</sup>For the bed is too short to stretch oneself on,  
and the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in.*

*<sup>21</sup>For the LORD will rise up as on Mount Perazim;  
as in the Valley of Gibeon he will be roused;  
to do his deed—strange is his deed!  
and to work his work—alien is his work!*

*<sup>22</sup>Now therefore do not scoff,*

*lest your bonds be made strong;  
for I have heard a decree of destruction  
from the Lord GOD of hosts against the whole land.*

If you take refuge in anything other than Christ, your refuge will not stand in the face of God's coming judgment. If you want to wrap yourself in self-righteousness or hide yourself in the American dream or secure yourself with self-esteem or pop psychology, these things will fall apart very quickly in the storm of judgment. Do not scoff at God's word. Do not bind yourself to things that fail. Stand on Christ and Christ alone!