

Vision 20/20

*“Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes”?”
(Matthew 21:42 ESV)*

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

*“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”
(Matthew 25:13 ESV)*

Cornerstone
September 22nd, 2019
Isaiah 28:14-29
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning church! And Happy Anniversary to our friends down at RCC. This is the 7th anniversary – if you can believe that – of our branch plant that meets down at the Christian School on Gill Street. So we are cheering for you them – and we are launching out into something very new. As many of you know we are heading into some new territory as a church. Facing new challenges, celebrating new milestones, embracing some new opportunities and facing a very new cultural context and so we decided to spend this season – between RCC’s anniversary and our anniversary in late November – revisiting our vision and mission as a church.

Now before we get into that I want to anticipate a couple of questions that you might have this morning. The first question is this:

Why are we doing this again?

By my reckoning this is the THIRD mission and vision series that we have done in the 13 years that I’ve been here – so why are we doing this again?

The simple answer is that VISION LEAKS.

Just like we were talking about in the Radical series, there is a pull from the culture and a pull from inside of us, that left unaddressed will cause a warp and distortion in our understanding of the Christian faith. We will change it. We will forget it. We will drift from it – because that’s what people do. We leak and so as with doctrine, so with mission and vision, we need to come back to the basics every once in a while because we leak.

The second question you might ask is this:

Why does this sound a little different than last time?

You might not be asking that yet, but you will be as we go further on in this series. We decided to recast our vision – not because it has changed but because sometimes it can be helpful to talk about the same realities using different forms and phrases.

Jesus did this all the time. He would say: “The Kingdom of God is like a wedding banquet that a King wanted to have for his Son. He sent out invitations but many people didn’t come” – do you remember that one? But then another time Jesus said: “The Kingdom of God is a like a sower who went out to sow. Some seed fell on the path, some on the shallow soil, some fell among the weeds and some fell on the good soil and produced a harvest, 30, 60 and 100 fold” – do you remember that one?

Well Jesus is describing the SAME REALITY in both parables; he is talking about the Kingdom of God – but to help us grow in our understanding – he uses different forms and phrases. That’s just good teaching and that’s what we’re trying to do here.

Our mission hasn’t changed – it’s been the same now for 2000 years.

And our vision hasn’t changed. We believe that we are who God made us to be, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he determined in advance to be our way of life – Ephesians 2:10. We believe that, we did the work and we continue to hold to a certain trajectory – a certain belief about who God made us to be and what God intends us to do, in this city and in this world as a gathered people.

That REALITY hasn't changed but over the next couple of weeks and months together we want to speak about those things using slightly different forms and phrases. Because sometimes it is helpful to hear the same thing in a different way.

So that's what we are going to do – and we are going to begin by talking about our identity as a church. Ephesians 2:10 says that who you are is a reliable indicator of what God intends you to do – so you always have to start with identity, and for us as Christians that means starting with Jesus. We are Jesus people. Whatever we are to God is because of who we are in Christ. So we're going to start there because the church is only the church to the extent that it is being built upon the Cornerstone of Christ – amen? Amen.

Open your Bibles then to Isaiah 28:14-29; that's on page 588 in your pew Bibles.

While you find that, let me explain why I have you looking for it. That's one of the main Cornerstone passages in the OT. As I'm sure you are aware Jesus picked that imagery up and applied it to himself in the Gospels. In Matthew 21 he says:

“Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.⁴⁴ And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” (Matthew 21:42–44 ESV)

And then Peter – filled with the Holy Spirit said:

“This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.¹² 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 4:11–12 ESV)

The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2 says:

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,²⁰ built on the foundation of the

apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:19–20 ESV)

So, obviously this is a critical piece of Old Testament imagery. God said something to his people in Isaiah 28 that became part of their Messianic expectation and that Jesus said was being fulfilled in his own life and ministry – and that the Apostles said was now being worked out in the growth and development of the church – so obviously we need to start here. Who we are and what we need to do needs to be rooted in the greater reality of who Jesus is and what he came to do – so in pursuit of that we are going back to ground zero, you might say. Hopefully you have your Bible open now to the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 28 verse 14. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

¹⁴ 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”;

¹⁶ 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.’

¹⁷ 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.”

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ For the bed is too short to stretch oneself on, and the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in.

²¹ 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!

²² 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.

²³ Give ear, and hear my voice; give attention, and hear my speech.

²⁴ Does he who plows for sowing plow continually? Does he continually open and harrow his ground?

²⁵ When he has leveled its surface, does he not scatter dill, sow cumin, and put in wheat in rows and barley in its proper place, and emmer as the border?

²⁶ For he is rightly instructed; his God teaches him.

²⁷ Dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is a cart wheel rolled over cumin, but dill is beaten out with a stick, and cumin with a rod.

²⁸ Does one crush grain for bread? No, he does not thresh it forever; when he drives his cart wheel over it with his horses, he does not crush it.

²⁹ This also comes from the LORD of hosts; he is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom. (Isaiah 28:14–29 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

Well, because this passage is so frequently used and commented upon in the New Testament most of our work has been done for us this morning. We’re trying to answer the question:

What Are We Saying When We Call Jesus “The Cornerstone”?

The first thing it means, obviously, given the text and given the inspired interpretation of the New Testament is that Jesus IS THE ONE.

1. He is THE ONE

Look at verse 15. This passage here in Isaiah 28 was written at a time when northern Israel was being decimated by the onslaught of the Assyrians. The Assyrians were passing through Israel – the northern tribes – like a hot knife through butter. They were grinding down town after town after town and sending whole cities – whole tribes into exile. Isaiah refers to this as:

“the overwhelming whip” (Isaiah 28:15 ESV)

And as:

“the overwhelming scourge” (Isaiah 28:18 ESV)

This is a time of serious and nearly fatal discipline by the Lord. You noticed that our passage began with the word “therefore” and of course you’ve been told that whenever a passage begins with the word “therefore” you should probably take a look to see what it is THERE FOR. In the previous verses we found out what was so terribly and tragically WRONG with Israel.

In verse 13 the prophet says that the Word of God had become to them:

“precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little” (Isaiah 28:13 ESV)

They were INDIFFERENT to the Word of the Lord – they HEARD IT but they didn’t pay attention to it. J. Alec Motyer says here:

“Theirs was a basic unreadiness to bow before the voice of God.”¹

They ignored it because they didn’t want to obey it – they wanted to live like the nations so God begins a SEVERE PURGE.

A severe purge.

It is strange and alien work – look at verse 21:

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! (Isaiah 28:21 ESV)

So this is STRANGE WORK – this is almost out of character for an ultimately loving God. People are going to scratch their heads when they see it. They’re going to wonder how it goes with what we know about the Lord. But it has to be done.

The nation must be disassembled.

¹J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 210.

That's what it means for God to rise up as on Mount Perazim – that refers to the seminal victory by David over the Philistines that effectively established Israel as an independent nation. I am going to undo that God says. I built you up and now I am going to break you down.

But not entirely.

I will break you down, God says, to a single STONE.

That's the meaning of this prophecy.

Look at Isaiah 28:16:

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.’ (Isaiah 28:16 ESV)

To “not be in haste” means to “not panic”. God is saying here that he is going to tear down Israel to a single stone – a tested stone, a reliable stone, a never going to crack stone – and the one who believes on him will never PANIC. He or she will never need to fear because this is the stone that never moves. That never fails. That only grows, holds and perseveres.

And Jesus says – that's me!

“Have you not read this Scripture: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Mark 12:10 ESV)

That's me, Jesus says.

When God broke down Israel – when God ground down his covenant people to a single stone – that stone was me.

I am all that remains of TRUE ISRAEL. God is starting again – today – from Ground Zero.

I am Ground Zero.

I am the One.

That's what it means when we call Jesus the Cornerstone.

He's the ONE – he is the only stone left from the strange work of God in grinding his people down into the dust.

But God didn't do that to END his people, he did it to rebuild them. And so that's the second thing we need to understand. When we call Jesus the Cornerstone we are calling him the foundation for a whole new work of God.

2. He is THE FOUNDATION

The Apostle Peter understood that very well. In 1 Peter 2:4-6 he says:

“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

⁶For 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.” (1 Peter 2:4–6 ESV)

Are you seeing that? Understanding Jesus as Cornerstone is absolutely critical to our understand of what it means to be saved and what it means to be a church. To be saved is to believe on Christ – the Word of God in the flesh.

You remember that Israel was rejected because she had grown indifferent to the Word of God. To be saved therefore is to EMBRACE the Word of God – Jesus as revealed to us in Holy Scripture. If you come to him and believe on HIM then you will never be put to shame. You will never need to panic because you are being incorporated into a FOREVER BUILDING OF GOD.

That's what it means to be SAVED – and that's what it means to be the church!

The church is that which God is building upon the one remaining stone of TRUE ISRAEL. Jesus is the ONE STONE REMAINING from the Old House, but now we all like living stones are being built into a SPIRITUAL HOUSE ON CHRIST in order to offer sacrifices acceptable to God – are you seeing that?

That's what it means when we call Jesus the Cornerstone.

He is the beginning of a whole new work of God.

And thirdly, to call Jesus the Cornerstone is to understand that he is the future.

3. He is THE FUTURE

Look back at Isaiah 28:23. God tells a little story there about a farmer:

²⁴ Does he who plows for sowing plow continually? Does he continually open and harrow his ground?

²⁵ When he has leveled its surface, does he not scatter dill, sow cumin, and put in wheat in rows and barley in its proper place, and emmer as the border?

²⁶ For he is rightly instructed; his God teaches him.

²⁷ Dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is a cart wheel rolled over cumin, but dill is beaten out with a stick, and cumin with a rod.

²⁸ Does one crush grain for bread? No, he does not thresh it forever; when he drives his cart wheel over it with his horses, he does not crush it.

²⁹ This also comes from the LORD of hosts; he is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom. (Isaiah 28:24–29 ESV)

He says: “Does the farmer tear up the earth out of spite? Does he do it to injure his field? No he does it because he wants to sow seed, he wants to raise a crop, he wants to realize a harvest. Does he bring out the threshing sledge because he hates the grain? Is that why he pulls that huge stone over the heads of wheat? Because he wants to kill the wheat? No – he does all these hard and

brutal things because he has his eye on the future. He sees the harvest and so he does the hard work necessary to get there.

That's who God is.

This season of purging and breaking down, Isaiah says, isn't because God is DONE with his covenant people – it's because he is not done. He sees the future. He sees the harvest. He has his eye on the prize and so he does the strange and alien work of judging and purging and straining. He does it all so that he can SOW THE SEED and gather into his barn all those who delight in the Word of the Lord.

Are you seeing that?

To call Jesus the Cornerstone is to recognize that there is a great and glorious future for the people of God.

The Apostle John saw that future. In the Book of Revelation he said:

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”” (Revelation 7:9–10 ESV)

Do you see that?

That's the future!

A great multitude of people from every tribe, tongue and nation on planet earth. All standing before the throne AND BEFORE THE LAMB! He is the ROCK ON WHOM THEY HAVE BELIEVED and they didn't need to panic – they didn't need to scramble – they didn't need to bow before the pressure of the culture or the gods of their various ages – because they had set their hopes and they had built their lives upon the STRONG AND SURE FOUNDATION.

They have a future because they believed on the LORD.

That's what it means to call Jesus the Cornerstone. It is to understand that he is Israel now. He is the only stone left from the Old House. But he is not alone. He is the beginning of a whole new work of God. Stones are being brought to him every day from every tribe, tongue and nation on planet earth. The church is being built up on the foundation of the prophets and Apostles with CHRIST AS CORNERSTONE.

This is the LORD'S DOING and it is marvelous in our sight.

Thanks be to God – JESUS IS THE CORNERSTONE!

Now, what does that mean for us as a church?

What Does That Mean For Us As A Church?

That's the second and last question that I want to look at in our time together today. If that's who Jesus is then what does that mean for us as a Christian church? I think there are at least 3 very important implications that we need to quickly take a look at this morning.

First of all, if that's who Jesus is, then obviously, Jesus is the Head of this church.

1. Jesus is the Head of this church

He is the one with authority. Not the pastor. Not the board of the elders. Not the congregation. Our job as pastors and elders and congregation is to DISCERN the will of the Lord so as to do it. So we read his Word with the help of his Spirit. We look at his life. We examine his character. And we take heed to his commandments. JESUS is the authority in this church and no one else HAS any authority unless they STAND ON HIM.

Does that make sense?

Jesus Christ is the Head of this church.

And secondly, Jesus Christ is the centre of our Bible.

2. Jesus is the centre of our Bible

The Apostle Paul said that the church is being:

“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20 ESV)

So Jesus is the CENTRE and FOCUS of everything that God has been revealing to human beings across the ages. Martin Luther said that “Scripture is the cradle wherein Christ is laid.”

That’s a very helpful bit of imagery isn’t it? We think of those old V-shaped cradles. That’s what he is talking about. He is saying that the Old Testament prophets looked forward to Jesus and the New Testament Apostles looked BACK on Jesus – that’s how your bible is put together. If you think there is any other CENTRE to the Scriptures than the life and work of Jesus then you are reading it WRONG.

The whole Bible is about Jesus – Jesus himself said that! He said:

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39 ESV)

There is no point in reading the Old Testament unless you are looking for Jesus because it’s all about him. The Old Testament looks forward and the New Testament looks back – and Jesus is the heart and centre of it all.

And then lastly, if Jesus is the Cornerstone – if he is the Head of this church and the centre of our Bibles then obviously he ought also to be object of our love and worship.

3. Jesus is the object of our worship

Now I want to be careful here. Obviously we believe in the Trinity. We believe in Father, Son and Holy Spirit – so why am I saying that Jesus is the object of our worship? The key there is the word “object”. It means focus and direction.

Let me quote from A.A. Hodge – one of the oldest and most reliable of systematic theologians. He says it this way:

“The Father is all the fulness of the Godhead invisible, without form, whom no man hath seen or can see. The Son is all the fulness of the Godhead manifested. The Spirit is all the fulness of the Godhead acting immediately upon the creature, and thus making manifest the Father in the image of the Son.”²

So the Father can’t be seen by mortal man – he lives in unapproachable light – but to see Jesus is to see the Father – Jesus said that to Philip. So Jesus is the Father revealed to us. We look at him when we turn our faces to worship. And we do that with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit doesn’t want us looking at him, he wants us to be looking at Jesus. That’s his job. To help us see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

That’s where all the POWER IS. That’s where LIFE IS. That’s where CHANGE IS. That’s where GROWTH IS. When we all, beholding the glory of the Lord as though in a mirror – as though reflecting off a Human Face – are being transformed by one degree of glory to the next into the same image – this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

That’s where it all begins.

When we SEE JESUS. When we DELIGHT IN JESUS. When we place our faith ON JESUS. When we SINK DOWN and are BUILT UP IN JESUS – that is the start and beginning of it all.

He is the ONE. He’s the foundation, he’s the future and this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God, let’s pray together.

² A.A. Hodge, citing W.E. Boardman in *Outlines Of Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 194.