

## **THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM**

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**Easter Sunday, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022, 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2082**

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**Matthew 21:33-46 - "Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. [34] When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. [35] And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. [36] Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. [37] Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' [38] But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' [39] And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. [40] When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" [41] They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons." [42] Jesus said to them, "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." [45] When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. [46] And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet."**

Put yourself in Athens 25 years after the death of Jesus. You are a religious **pluralist**. You love to sit and think and talk of religion. You love to hear about the religious experiences of the people around you. You don't **judge** those views. You don't **impose** your views on anyone else. You **embrace** all the various forms of good in all of them. It's so fascinating to talk about God - to compare people's ideas and experiences. Perhaps you can learn something beneficial from them - something that will enrich your life, broaden your horizons, help you cope with life a little better than you do now. Above all, you don't want to be one of those intolerant dogmatics.

And as you sit and discuss in Athens, a man named Paul comes to the Areopagus - the center for learned debate and discussion. And after listening a little while, he stands and says this:

"I worship Jesus Christ. He was a Jewish teacher and wonder worker. He lived in Palestine about 25 years ago and taught a way of love and truth. He taught about God in a way that enriched my life. His wisdom was unsurpassed. Even in dying, He never gave any sign of anger or vengeance. He forgave even those who wrongfully put Him to death. To this day, His teachings live in the lives of many followers. His example and His words can have a tremendous influence and effect on your life too, if you will just meditate on all the things He said."

And then he just sat down. Period. That's all.

What would the response have been to those words? What would have been the reaction of the crowd? Nods, I'm sure. Much agreement. Some argument and discussion on some points. But over all, there would be polite recognition and thankfulness for the enrichment Paul had received. After all, they had *their* religious leaders, why shouldn't Paul have *his*? And certainly Jesus *did* seem to help Paul a great deal. He stopped persecuting the church. He was so much nicer to be around. They certainly would have been happy for the new Paul. God bless him.

But what if, while you were there in Athens, Paul had come up to the debaters and said something like this:

**"The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, [25] nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything....30-31....The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, [31] because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead"**

In fact, those words are **exactly** what Paul said to the Athenians. They are a direct quote from **Acts 17:24-31**. And the people didn't like those words. They began to shout Paul down like angry protesters.

And here's why. Like it or not, those words are more than polite discussion. They're a pronouncement. They **declare** rather than **negotiate**. They are words that are tailor made - designed - not to **begin** a discussion, but to **end** a discussion. No matter who speaks them - those words will make the Athenians stop nodding in 25 A.D. and they will make most Canadians stop nodding in 2022 as well.

Christianity is **uniquely offensive in a pluralistic age**. That's because in the New Testament everything hangs on very narrow, particular, factual bits of real history, rather than impressions of the heart and the philosophical or psychological or religious opinions of speculators.

In Charles Colson's old words, ***"Christianity doesn't just come to inform you. It confronts you. It socks you between the eyes because it says, 'The really marvellous and important things in life aren't the feelings of the heart, but the facts of history.' There is a world of difference between a subjective religious discussion and an objective, historical resurrection from the dead."***

Public opinion can do nothing to change a historical event. Good point.

That is always the message of Easter. Easter says, it's all very nice how you feel - even how you feel about God. And it's all well and good that you're finding purpose and fulfilment. But that's not the chief thing. The chief thing isn't how you feel about God. And the chief thing isn't even how you feel about yourself. The chief thing is what God has done for you in real, space/time history. The chief thing is what He Himself has revealed about His intended *meaning* in these historic events.

What I want to do on this wonderful Easter Sunday morning is look at four marvellous truths from our opening text - **Matthew 21:42 - "Jesus said to them, '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 marvellous in our eyes'?" - IPAD TEXT**

I want to look at that verse in the context of the parable where Jesus used it. Then, I want to look at how Peter interprets and uses those words of Jesus in his own ministry.

- 1) **THESE WORDS OF JESUS COME AT THE END OF A PARABLE HE TOLD ABOUT A VINEYARD OWNER WITH WICKED TENANTS**

This is one of only three parables carried in all three synoptic gospels. This is probably because its truths form the essential core of sound Christian belief and emphasis. The ***vineyard is Israel***, representing the people of God. ***God owns the vineyard***. We see His great love in the way ***He sends messenger after messenger*** to receive fruit. But ***the wicked tenants kill all of the owner's servants***.

It's really amazing that the owner would continue to send messengers. Why not just destroy the tenants after the first rejection? We'll never really know. He just keeps trying and trying and sending.

Finally, ***he sends his own son***. And we're meant to pay attention to that word ***"finally"*** in the parable. The son is the ***last offer of the owner***. There will be no more messengers - no more offers. We are meant to see that ***everything hinges on what they do with the owner's son***. There are lots of ***messengers***. But only one ***son*** is sent. What they do with the son is crucial and central. It ***determines*** the rest of the story.

And that's how the parable itself ends. In story form, it tells of the mission of Jesus. It tells what the people did to Jesus. It tells us Jesus is God's final word - God's final offer. He's ***different from the messengers***. Religion always has and always will go way off track when it confuses the ***son*** with all other ***messengers***. Those two roles are not the same. Saving faith must always maintain this distinction about the owner's son. And, in Jesus' parable, they killed the son.

2) **JESUS TELLS US WHAT HAPPENS TO THAT MURDERED OWNER'S SON TO POINT TO HIS OWN FUTURE - HIS OWN LIFE AFTER HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD**

**Matthew 21:42 - "Jesus said to them, "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 marvellous in our eyes'?" - IPAD TEXT**

Jesus quotes these words from **Psalm 118:22-23 - "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. [23] This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes."** - IPAD TEXT

But, even that isn't the end of those words in the Bible. Peter picks these very same words and interprets them for us in **Acts chapter 4**. Most of us know the story of Peter and John on the way to the temple and the healing of the lame man by the road. They are arrested. They are warned about doing these kinds of things and stirring up the people. They are then asked **by what power** they had performed this miracle.

And you can pick up Peter's answer to that question in **Acts 4:8-12 - "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, [9] if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, [10] 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. [11] 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." - IPAD TEXT**

So this idea of the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone is repeated these **three times** in the Scriptures. Before a hand is laid on Jesus He knows and He says this stone (speaking about His own life) will be **killed**, but it will **rise**. And He says this stone will be the **chief stone** - the central stone in the whole structure of God's universe - the cornerstone.

We're going to look at some disturbing truths about those words in a moment, but, before we do that, let me ponder two central ideas:

- a) The first truth most of us already know and expect. **Jesus rose from the dead**. That's what Easter is all about. It's His day, like none other. He was born on Christmas. But He became the **"firstborn from the dead"** on Easter.

But what does Christ's resurrection from the dead have to do with me? **Why** has He risen? Well, it means that I too will live. He is uniquely qualified to give eternal life. He makes death **work backwards** for those who put their hope and trust in Him. He gives eternal life to all who will **obey Him** as Lord of their lives. But there is something else in these words:

- b) ***The corner stone becomes the judge of all who rejected him.*** They killed the son in Jesus' parable in Matthew 21. And that's the end of the parable, ***until*** Jesus utters those words about the rising of the rejected stone to the position of corner stone.

And then Jesus says something else about the ***role*** of that corner stone: **Matthew 21:44 - "And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."** - IPAD TEXT

What do those words mean? I think Paul explains them in his words to those thinkers in Athens as they discussed religion: **Acts 17:30-31 - "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, [31] because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."** - IPAD TEXT

The risen Son becomes the judge of all men. Those who believe in Him and those who don't. Those who love Him and those who don't. Those who choose to live life thinking about Him and those who don't. That's what that reference to the cornerstone is all about.

The corner stone determined the foundation for every other stone in the structure. This is why this particular promise - the promise about Jesus becoming the **chief corner stone** after His crucifixion - is repeated over and over again so we won't miss both the **wonder** and the **power** of its fulfilment at this Easter season.

Let me close today looking again at Peter's words - the same words Jesus used in His parable about the owner and the tenants and the son: **Acts 4:10-11 - "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. [11] This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone." - IPAD TEXT**

**“Let it be known to all of you....”** This is something everyone has to know. You don’t have to know everything, but you **must** know this. Jesus is not only the cornerstone for those who happen to live in western culture or are interested in pursuing a study of Christianity.

These men to whom Peter spoke already **had** their own religion. They were devout Jews. **But Jesus Christ overturns all of that.** People now must not only forsake their immorality. They must turn from their own religions and philosophies and acknowledge Christ Jesus as Lord of all. We must give the same place to Jesus Christ that God has given in raising Him from the dead.

Easter is the proof.