

Christ, The Chief Cornerstone

A Sure, Precious Foundation

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Between today and last month's sermon on foundations—which I thought was a standalone sermon (I guess God did not want it to be a standalone sermon because between then and now all I thought about is what to do next, and I kept coming back to this)—I decided to continue the theme of foundations, as I spoke on the last time, and I thought I would expand on one particular aspect of our spiritual foundation.

Since it has been five weeks since I have spoken, I think it is probably good that I bring you up to speed on the central concepts of that last sermon. And it should only take a few minutes (famous last words).

I opened with an extended description of the tallest building in the world today. You probably remember all that—about the Burj Khalifa in Dubai and all the weight that building has and the massive foundation that they had to build for it where they had to use just tons and tons and tons of concrete and all that steel rebar, and they had to do all the different stuff to make it work right in that particular geology. We found out that it was a simply gargantuan undertaking.

I then defined what a foundation is, and it is really very simple. It is generally what underlies and supports something else. It is not a difficult concept to understand.

So a foundation could be either a physical foundation or a nonphysical foundation. It can be both. It can be an immaterial foundation as well.

Obviously, we know what a physical foundation is; we have one in our house; we have one in any kind of office that we go to, or a store—they all have foundations. You cannot build a building without a foundation. And if you build it badly, like Jesus says in Matthew chapter 7, your house is swept away in the flood.

But you can have a nonphysical foundation, and that is usually an idea or a philosophy or a code (like a moral code or an ethical code) that a group or a society or a culture would have. A foundation could also be a goal or a purpose for why a certain group exists and that forms the basis for their existence—for the group, for the culture. And of course, each individual has a foundation for his own beliefs and behaviors. There is a foundation there for everyone.

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But not all the foundations are the same. Some of our foundations are simply the way we grew up, the way we were taught, the things we were taught, and it is just kind of all been jumbled there, and once we try to stand up on top of it, it is kind of precarious because it really does not give us much support.

So after looking at that—at the physical and nonphysical definitions of foundations—we went to see how the Bible uses the word and how it also uses the concept of foundations.

And as part of this launchpad, I guess, for the real sermon that I am going to give today (the new material), I want to go back to two passages that we went to in the last sermon because I think they provide the foundation for this sermon, which is very necessary.

So if you would, go to Ephesians 2. Paul gives us, in a very quick sketch, the details of our spiritual foundation. I should mention here that he had been speaking to these Ephesians and talking about how they, as a mostly Gentile people, had been brought together by Christ taking away that wall that separated them from the Jews and from the covenant. Now they have the opportunity then to be a part of what God is building. So he says:

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God . . .

So now they have been brought near. They are not far away now. They are not strangers to us. We are all in one boat. We are all in the body of Christ. As he says here, he uses the term “the household of God” (he is already thinking about ‘building’).

Ephesians 2:20-21 . . . having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being [joined] together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord . . .

You see now he was not thinking just of a house; he was thinking of the house of God in terms of the Temple. That is what is really in the forefront of his mind—a temple.

Ephesians 2:22 . . . in whom you also are being built together for a [habitation] of God in the Spirit.

So he is not talking about the physical Temple; he is talking about a spiritual Temple—a spiritual building—in which the Spirit of God brings us all together because God lives in that and that is the holy place where God is.

So here we have, in a very brief sketch, the details of our spiritual foundation. The church rests on the writings and the works of the prophets in the Old Testament and the apostles in the New. So our spiritual underpinning comes from both.

We cannot (like some of the modern churches) pretty much forget the Old Testament. They give Bibles that have the New Testament, the Psalms ('We need comfort from the Psalms') and the Proverbs as if that is all the Old Testament that is needed. But no, the whole Old Testament is necessary. The Psalms and the Proverbs are just a small slice of the teaching that is in the Old Testament. So we need all of that. That Old Testament, which is three times the size of the New Testament, are the inspired words of God given to the prophets, and they wrote them down. That is a lot of inspiration that we are letting go if we do not use the Old Testament.

And of course, then there is the New Testament, which are God's words—Christ's words, more specifically—given by inspiration, and the apostles'.

It is dumbfounding to me, perplexing, that people can say, "Well, the New Testament is God's Word and we need to follow it," and they just ignore the Old Testament which is God's Word (why do they not follow it?)—same God.

So our foundation then includes the whole Word of God. That is what Paul said—that he preached the whole word (he says that in the book of Acts). It is the entire biblical canon—all that lies between the covers of the Bible.

Now it does not include the Apocrypha (if your Bible has the Apocrypha). They have not been canonized. The church of God has never recognized them. Some other churches do. But it is very clear that they are not canonical in terms of being able to help us in our spiritual life. They are full of errors and inconsistencies with the rest of the Bible which *has* been canonized.

So I guess, if we want to put this all together, we can say, as is clearly stated in Deuteronomy 8:3 and in Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4: Man shall live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. And we have had them. God has made sure they have been collected in His Word—the Bible.

So this is our underpinning—the words of the prophets and the words of the apostles,

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inspired by God. We could go to [II] Timothy where it says that God breathed these things out to them. It also says in [II] Peter that He was the inspiration for these prophecies, in particular.

Now, back here in Ephesians 2, especially in verse 20, we find that the apostle places special emphasis on Christ Himself both in His example and in His teaching. We could say if the church of God or if our Christianity is built on the prophets and the apostles, then it certainly is built on Christ because He is the greatest of the prophets and He is also the greatest of the apostles; He fulfilled both roles.

So if it is founded on the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ then has to be the chief part of the foundation because He is the one that the prophets and the apostles pivot on. He is the one right in the center anchoring things down. So His teaching underlies all other spiritual truth that we find in God's Word and His teaching is the touchstone for all the rest of it.

If there is ever a question about something that is written in God's Word, between what Jesus says and what a prophet or an apostle says, we should always lean on what Jesus says first because He is the Boss. He is the one who is the Word, and so we should trust Him.

These interpretations that are written in the Bible by the apostles, especially Paul, can be hard to understand. But if we go back to what Christ says—perhaps the way He explains it, which is usually a lot simpler (sometimes it is not, but it is usually a lot simpler; it is said in plainer language)—we can understand things a little bit better.

The other scripture that we went to that I think is necessary for us to see is I Corinthians 3.

Paul here is reminding the Corinthian church that he and Apollos laid a proper foundation for them. They did their work. They did the job that they had been sent to do. [Verses] 9 through 11 here. He says that he and Apollos...

I Corinthians 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

So, again, here he is using this illustration again of a building because of all the facets of it that he can use to talk about the building of the church. He says:

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I Corinthians 3:10-11 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

So he says here, confirming what he says in Ephesians 2, that Jesus is the principal part of the foundation. It is the first part and the most important part. So he says here that he had taught them what Christ had taught him, which was Christ's word, His teaching—the gospel.

And if any other foundation is laid or if there is any foundation that does not faithfully convey the true gospel that Jesus brought—the gospel of the Kingdom of God, as well as its other facets—then it is flawed and it will not support what is built on it. A person who follows a flawed foundation of Christianity will not end up in the right place at the end.

If someone is on a trajectory, let us say, he has to go at 13 degrees from where he is. If he goes at 14 degrees and he has to go many miles, he is going to end up a long way off in the end because even one degree of deviation from the truth is going to put you in someplace else. In our case, we might not end up in the Kingdom of God at all if our foundation is flawed.

So we have to make sure that our foundation is true and square and right, and that in building on it we make the right decisions about what we believe and that they agree with the foundation.

So anything else—any other kind of foundation that does not include what Christ is and what Christ laid, or what God laid in Christ—would not really even be Christianity. Like I said, it will be flawed; it will be a counterfeit; and it is bound to fail.

That brings us to the end of these two passages.

But we saw in both of them that the apostle Paul was very careful in particular to stress the centrality of Christ as our foundation. And that is the point I want to expound on today.

I hope this sermon will help us to focus our thoughts on the truly essential elements of Christianity and, in particular, having this in mind as we move toward the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread because it is only about a month-and-a-half away, and it

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is important that we start turning our minds to what is most important.

What we will find is that what is most important is Christ. He is the Chief Cornerstone, as Paul said there in Ephesians 2:20. And as Paul says in I Corinthians 3:11, no other foundation can be laid than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus or Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:20 Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.

We just want to focus on that last half of the verse—"Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone."

There are some builders among us who know very well the modern methods of building. They know how to put up a house or they know how to put up a building of some sort that might be used for an office or a store. And that is fine. But it is rare today to build as they did back there in the first century where Paul was living and understanding the way things worked.

As verse 21 shows, it is clear that Paul had the Temple in mind. He says that we, "being joined together, [grow] into a holy temple in the Lord." So, in his mind's eye, as he is writing this letter to the Ephesian church, he is not thinking about building with concrete footings or a concrete pad and then having maybe some rebar in it, brick pillars, a wooden-framed house. He is not thinking about that at all. He is thinking of the Temple and how that was built.

The Temple was built of stone—of big rocks. It was not just filled with little boulders, let us say, the size of a person's head or whatever and some dirt. It was made of massive, massive—I mean, huge rocks—limestone rocks. Some of them weighed many, many, many tons and you really wonder how they got them there. They were ingenious in the way they can transport just tons of weight.

The largest stone on the present Temple Mount platform measures (now get this, this one stone) 45 feet by 11 feet by 16-1/2 feet. It is a huge stone. 45 feet long—that is three-quarters of the way down the first baseline for you softball players. That is a long way. That is a big thing. And then it rises 11 feet, and it is 16-1/2 feet broad. That covers over toward the pitcher's mound. That is a big stone. It weighs nearly 600 tons. Now you know what I mean when I say they were huge stones. They were massive. They were very very big.

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So that is what Paul is trying to get across when he is saying that Jesus Christ is our Chief Cornerstone. He is that big huge stone rock at the very bottom of things that lifts up, holds up, supports the whole rest of the building. He is describing massive, weighty, strong, and very impressive stones.

And you know what they were? Just stuff that they said, “Oh, that’s a big one! Let’s drag it down the hill.” No. They were *cut* stones. And they had to be cut to such fine specifications, they were cut roughly in place.

This is kind of interesting what they did. They would, I guess, chisel down partway and create a slender opening, and then they would put a stick down in that—a block of wet wood. As it was in the rock, they made sure that it was always under water. And of course, the piece of wood would soak this water up, and when it soaked the water up it would expand, and in expanding it cracked the rock away from what it was attached to.

So they got it out fairly roughly and they lugged it down the mountain [however they did that—on road rollers or whatever] and then when they got it on site, they chipped to flatten the sides and make it smooth and make it perfectly fit into the space where it is going. Because that is how those buildings worked.

They did not have the mortar to put in-between the cracks to hold it together, like we do a brick building. We stick one here and we make sure that it is all mortared up and then we stick another one on and we get it all working together. But they did not do that.

These stones were so big they did not need mortar. They were heavy. You were not going to move it. So they had to make sure they put it exactly in place. But every stone was perfectly fitted in the building to interlock everything, so it did not move. They did not need mortar.

They just made sure that the rock that they put in that space fits exactly in that space and there was no wiggle room anywhere. It was stuck, the whole building was stuck, and the whole building would stand. Only something like a huge earthquake with all those massive forces would bring it down. That is why they lasted for so long—because they were built of very strong stuff. So their weight and those interlocking shapes made the structure firm and immovable.

That is what Paul has in mind when he is talking about Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. The chief cornerstone is exactly what it says it is—it is the most important and it is in the corner. Psalm 118:22 uses the phrase ‘head of the corner’ and that is what it means—chief cornerstone. It is the head (the big rock), the most important one,

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and it is in the corner.

Now the Greek word (let us see if I can pronounce this word) *akrogoniaios*—that is the Greek word that is found here in Ephesians 2:20. *Akrogoniaios* (I do not know how those Greeks ever made a world empire). Anyway, that word is literally ‘the extreme corner’ or ‘extreme angle.’ So *akro-* means ‘extreme’—that is where the translators used ‘chief’ because the chief is the one on the extreme top of something.

In this case, though it is turned upside down, the chief stone is on the bottom but it is in the extreme corner, meaning, it is right where it is supposed to be on the farthest angle of the building where it can be at the intersection of two walls and uphold both of them. So the chief cornerstone was the one—that big stone—in the load-bearing corner of the building that made that corner able to hold the two walls that was intersecting there at it.

If you think of the Temple, it was built on a slope going from north to south. The north part was the high part and the south part was the lower part.

That big massive stone was put there on the bottom to hold up everything that went back up northward on that slope. It had to be a massive massive stone to hold up all that weight that was pressing down on it from actually both sides—both the eastern wall and the southern wall, as they came together right there, and so the chief cornerstone supported and aligned both of those walls and all the weight of the entire platform fell on it. It was the load-bearing corner.

Jesus is shown as the load-bearing part of the foundation of the church. We could say that He is the keystone on which the whole edifice of God’s Temple—God’s spiritual Temple—rests.

So Paul certainly means that Christ functions as the central and most important part of the foundation of the church. That is what he is drawing our minds to—that the building does not even exist without the chief cornerstone. It has got to be put in early and all the other things rest on top of it. And it says very explicitly—let us look at verse 21. After it talks about Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone, he says:

Ephesians 2:21 . . . in whom the whole building, being [joined] together . . .

Remember, it joins together those two walls and essentially it joins together the whole building. Because if you take that one piece out, the whole building collapses.

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Ephesians 2:21 . . . in whom the whole building, being [joined] together, grows [or 'is growing'] into a holy temple in the Lord.

So He is the chief, the key, the most important, the vital part of the foundation.

Now just in case some of you have a study Bible or a commentary that says that what Paul means here is the capstone, and there are some out there that think this is true because this word can also imply a 'capstone' in some situations. But if we use 'capstone' then it ruins the entire word picture.

It has got to be 'chief cornerstone' (the one at the foundation) because a capstone is a finishing stone. It goes at the top of things. A capstone of the Pyramids, like in Giza (the one that is not there anymore)—it was the last stone on the top that finished it out.

But that is not what he is talking about here. He is talking about a stone that is right there at the beginning in the foundation, a support stone—something that undergirds and stabilizes so the rest of the building could be put on top of it. And so it has got to be a cornerstone, not a capstone. He is talking about a beginning, not an end. So it is a stone that is built on, not a stone that finishes. So it has got to be a cornerstone, a foundational cornerstone—not a capstone. So just in case any of your stuff says that, I thought I would just mention it in passing.

Let us go back to Isaiah 28. Because Paul did not just pick this idea out of the blue. It comes from the Old Testament. It is interesting here to understand the context. There are 15 verses that have gone on up to this point, and they are important because basically what it is, is God saying "Woe" (woe to Israel, woe to Judah.) And the reason for His saying 'woe' to them—why they were coming to their doom, why they were going to be destroyed—is because they had continually sinned and they had been disloyal to Him. Let us look at verse 15. It says:

Isaiah 28:15 Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we are in agreement. When the overflowing scourge passes through, it will not come to us, for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood we have hidden ourselves."

Well, what he is talking about here is that they should have made a covenant with Him and they had, but their actions showed that they had really made a covenant with death. What happens when you sin? You die. The wages of sin is death.

And so the way they looked to God was not that they had made a covenant with Him and had been doing all the things that He had wanted them to do (because His way produces life) but He saw them in all their sins, all their lies, all their disloyalty to Him—all their idolatries and everything else that they did—that they had actually made a covenant with the grave. They had actually decided that sinning was more fun and so they had decided to live the sin way.

And God said, “Okay. Fine, if that’s what you’ve decided to do. You’ve convinced yourselves that when the destruction comes, you’re going to go through without any problem. But I’ve got news for you. Your sins have finally come up and you’re going to have to be destroyed.” That is essentially what He is saying here. That is why He says ‘woe’ to them.

Verse 16 begins with ‘Therefore’ and that is always a concluding statement—what has come before this sets this statement up. And He says:

Isaiah 28:16 Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily.

What He says is, He says “Okay, you say you’ve made a covenant with death? Fine. This is the real solution though.” He is saying, “You think that you can go along and sin, however you sin, and it’s going to be fine. But that’s not a solution. That’s not going to do anything. I’m going to destroy you because that is your wages—that is what you are going to get.” But the real solution to the problem is the cornerstone that He is going to lay in Zion.

This is not just a Jew’s problem or the Israelites’ problem because the whole world has made a covenant with death. The whole world has decided that sinning is more profitable to them in the short-term and so they are going to do it. They are going to reject God and they are just going to live in rebellion. That is what Romans 8:7 says. It says that the carnal mind cannot submit to God, and that is what they had decided to do. But what God says here is that the precious cornerstone that He would lay in Zion would be the beginning of things in bringing the solution to the problem of sin.

He [Jesus] is called ‘a tried stone’ [“Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone”]. This is an interesting construction in Hebrew because the way it is presented is that it makes the translators make a choice: it could either be ‘a tried stone or it can be ‘a trying stone.’ And you might as well flip the coin because it could be both.

Here it is in Hebrew, a 'tried stone' could be either active or passive. That is it could mean that He is a 'tried stone' meaning that He has been thoroughly examined and tested and found to be pure and perfect. God ran Him through the gauntlet and He came out the other end absolutely perfect. Or you could say that He made the test on the rock and there were no cracks, no flaws; it was perfectly wonderful for the job that it was going to do.

But on the other hand, if we take in the active sense, it can mean that He is a 'trying stone' meaning that others (like you and me) would be tested against the standard that He is.

Both fit Christ because He was tried very severely in His own life and He came out wonderfully (He had done everything right; He had never sinned; He was the perfect sacrifice for sin). But on the other hand, He is our standard and everything we do is in comparison to what He set as the standard. So either ways work; He is a 'tried stone' or He is a 'trying stone.' Either one works just fine.

Now it also says that He is 'a precious cornerstone.' So not only does this show us that He functions as that cornerstone—the central part of the foundation—but He is precious. And what this says in the Hebrew is that He is rare and excellent, absolutely well-suited to the job, and oh-so-valuable (priceless).

And of course, we know that Jesus Christ is the only one that could do this job, the only one in all creation and beyond that can bring salvation to us. So He is precious to us in that sense, and He is precious to the Father for what He does because He is the Mediator. Jesus is the Mediator between us and the Father.

This phrase is literally "He is 'a stone of preciousness'" and this implies to us that everything about Him is precious; everything is valuable; everything is well suited; everything is excellent. There is not one thing in Him that we can see as a flaw because there is no flaw. He is special and precious in every aspect.

So not only is He precious in His character and in His works and His example, but everything that comes from Him is precious. If He gives us gifts, they are precious gifts. His grace is precious, the faith that He gives us is precious, the love that He shows to us is precious. You can go on with all these character traits because they come from Him who is precious, then they are precious to us and they are precious and valuable—priceless—gifts to us. So everything about Him is of ultimate value and excellence. You cannot get any better than that!

And finally, it says here that He is 'a sure foundation.' It kind of adds on to this idea of a precious cornerstone, but it is adding on it in a way that makes us understand that He is really stable. Literally, this phrase 'a sure foundation' is a 'founded' foundation. It is one of those Hebraisms—a phrase like 'holy of holies' or 'song of songs'—in which the same word is doubled to express the superlative.

So not only is He wonderful in everything, He is the foundation of foundations (you might want to put it that way). He is the best foundation ever. Just as the 'holy of holies' is the holiest of all and just as the 'song of songs' is supposed to be the best of songs ever, well, then He is the foundation—the ultimate foundation.

And He is. There can be no surer foundation upon which we can have absolute unflinching faith. It is not going to give in. It is not going to allow the building to crash. It will never crack. It will never crumble. It will never be moved. It is that big Rock of Gibraltar, as it were, that is just going to stand and stand and stand. It will never, ever be destroyed; never even moved a millimeter. That is the foundation that undergirds our faith.

Peter interprets Isaiah 16:28 in I Peter 2:6 in this idea of unflinching faith. He uses the Septuagint, which seems to have a little bit better translation of this last phrase 'whoever believes will not act hastily.' If you would go to I Peter 2:6, he says those who believe on Him will by no means be put to shame. The foundation is so sure, if we follow it, there will never be shame; there will always be glory.

So we can trust that foundation of Jesus Christ for everything. If He says it, we should not have a doubt. If He says He is going to do something for us, if He is going to be in us, if He is going to give us this gift, if He is going to be with us all the way, if He has all the power to do it (of course He does), then we should do what He says because He is a tried stone, a precious corner stone, and a sure foundation, and there is never going to be any movement there. He will be as He is.

Let us go to Psalm 118. I have already referred to this a time or two. I want to get the whole section here. The whole context is important once again, as it was in Isaiah 28, because this comes near the end of the psalm but we need to understand what the author is trying to get across here.

Psalm 118:21 I will praise You [meaning 'God'], for You have answered me, and have become my salvation.

Aha, now we come to understand what the context is. The context is salvation—that

God has become his salvation. So the very next verse says:

Psalm 118:22-27 The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone [or 'the head of the corner', as it is said—I think it is in the King James]. This was the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We have blessed you from the house of the Lord. God is the Lord, and He has given us light.

That is as far as I want to go.

What he is talking about here is salvation, and though the psalmist had called upon God in distress and things just looked so bad for him, what he came to understand is that God Himself was his salvation.

And he describes this (the basis of his salvation) in terms of a cornerstone—that strong rock that holds everything up—and what he does in this way is show that the cornerstone is laid by God to provide real salvation; not just deliverance from a problem, but the cornerstone is laid to provide salvation.

The 'marvelous' day that is mentioned here is the day of salvation. God has made that day possible by laying the Chief Cornerstone. Until that chief cornerstone was laid, there was no real possibility of salvation because salvation depends on Christ.

Remember I said He was precious, He was the only one, He was rare? 'Jesus Christ' had to be 'laid'—and in that sense He had to be put through all of what He was put through while He was here on earth—in order to provide our salvation.

Now, before this time, it was understood that salvation would be provided, but until Jesus Christ actually went through it all and did the work, the foundation stone really had not been laid completely.

David, Abraham, the others in the Old Testament, they had faith that it was going to happen and so they did what they had to do in their lives and they were promised salvation. But the works still had to be done and they could only be done through that rare person—Jesus Christ.

So He had to do it. And when He finally breathed His last and then three days later, God

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raised Him up and He ascended to heaven, it was done. It was completely finished. Salvation was assured to those who were going to be given it. That is when the foundation was completely laid. It was done (Jesus Christ's last words, right?). "It is finished." Construction is over. He had done the work; the foundation was laid; and now salvation was truly, literally, really possible and it opened up the day of salvation. It is marvelous in our eyes.

It is a wonderful thing that God has done for us in laying Jesus Christ as the foundation, as the chief cornerstone.

Malachi 4:2 says "the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings." He was looking forward to it. He was looking for the dawning of a day, a new day—the day of salvation.

Peter speaks of the day dawning and the morning star rising in our hearts in II Peter 1:19.

Jesus Himself says in Revelation 22:16—one of the last things that is mentioned in the Book—that He is the bright and morning star. When He was laid as the chief cornerstone, bringing light and grace, He became our salvation; He opened the day of salvation; and then He is going to finish it. He will be the capstone as well. Does He not say Himself that He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, and the author and finisher of our salvation? See how complete He is. It is an amazing thing.

Let us go back to Deuteronomy 30 just to pick up one verse here just to kind of sum up what I said here.

God urges us here, with everything that is in Him, that we choose life. And notice why He says that. He says of course, at the end of verse 19, that we will live—us and our descendants. Then He says:

Deuteronomy 30:20 That you may love the Lord your God . . .

See, if we do not choose life, we do not really have the ability to love God.

Deuteronomy 30:20 . . . that you may obey His voice . . .

Because if we do not choose life, we do not have the ability to truly obey Him.

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Deuteronomy 30:20 . . . and that you may cling to Him . . .

We cannot cling to Him without Him first offering to us a hand, through His calling, and our choosing that. But the next phrase is what I want.

Deuteronomy 30:20 . . . for He is your life and the length of your days . . .

That is how important the Chief Cornerstone is to us: He is our life and He is our eternal life. How long do you want your days extended—to 70 or 80 years by human strength? Or do you want them extended eternally, everlastingly through the strength of Jesus Christ's life? That is what is being offered us here.

Deuteronomy 30:20 . . . and that you may dwell in the land [the Kingdom of God] which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.

Abraham looked for a city, remember? God made a promise to him and it falls to us as his spiritual heirs too. But we have got to stand on the Chief Cornerstone. We have got to be built on the Chief Cornerstone.

So in its most basic form, we can say that our salvation is a person—Jesus Christ. He is to us all-in-all. That makes me recall that song (I am very surprised we do not have a hymn in our songbook of Psalm 27:1) but we do have an old favorite that was often sung as special music: “The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom then shall I fear?”

This is exactly what God said in Isaiah 28; that if we stand on the foundation that He laid, then we will not have anything to fear, we will never be ashamed because we are standing on Christ, and He cannot be moved.

Alright, for the rest of the sermon, which is little bit over 20 minutes, I want to concentrate a little bit more on ‘Christ is our cornerstone’ as our sure foundation. But I want to do it in terms of what He said that He is to us. As an easy way to organize this, I am going to use the ‘I AM’ statements in the book of John. This should give us a well-rounded perspective of His importance to our Christian lives.

Now most of the things in these ‘I AM’ statements in the book of John contain seven of them. So He did seven statements where He said ‘I am this’, ‘I am that.’ But I count

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nine. The two that are usually left off the list, I think, are two of the most important. If you were to put me up against a wall and put a gun to my head, I would say these two are the most important.

And if you ask me then why are they left out of the list most often, I could lean on two things: that they are a slightly different formation in the Greek than these other ones, but I would say the spiritual reasons why they are left off the list is that they are the two that reveal Christ's authority to demand our obedience. And like I said before—Romans 8:7—the carnal mind does not want to submit to God and His law.

So we are going to look at all nine. We are going to go through them at light speed because we do not have the time. But I want to give just a brief summary of their meanings and I am going to leave it to you to meditate on them in the next days or weeks, as you get ready for the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Speaking of the Days of Unleavened Bread, let us go to one we most often talk about during the Days of Unleavened Bread, and that is in John 6. We are going to go through these in Bible order—from front to back.

Jesus says that He is the bread of life. I am not going to read all this, I am going to skip through here, but I think we will get the gist of it.

John 6:35 And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

Drop down to verse 41.

John 6:41 The Jews then [murmured against] Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven."

John 6:48 I am the bread of life.

John 6:49-51 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.

John 6:54 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Like I said, every year before Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, we invariably speak about Jesus as the Bread of Life, and I think it is the 'I AM' statement that we are probably most familiar with because we rehearse it all the time. It is most basic, and I think this is one of those things where we have to take it at its basic level, first of all—at its most basic 'Bread is the staff of life.' Bread is what sustains us, bread is food, and when we eat food, we get energy and we remain alive. That is the basic understanding of what Jesus is trying to get across here.

But it is better than that, because this is the kind of bread that if we eat of it, we will not die. Not like the Israelites in the wilderness who got physical bread, but they all died. Their bodies were scattered throughout the wilderness because they did not follow the Rock, as it were.

But Jesus says that if you eat the bread that He gives you (He is the Rock; He is the Bread that came down from heaven)—if we follow Him—we are not only going to live forever, there is going to be glory and wonderful things happen all the time because that is just how good His bread is. So that is what we have got to think of this. This is what sustains us as God's children.

The symbol then revolves around what we ingest, what we put, not in our mouth, but what we put into our minds (into our hearts, you could say). So it is not what we ingest physically; it is what we ingest spiritually, what we allow our minds to dwell on—the words that we allow to impact us. And He says that we have to eat and drink Christ to have eternal life.

To us, then, Jesus is our spiritual food that we have to take in, we have to learn, and we have to make it a part of ourselves.

In verse 54 (and the reason why I went to verse 54 is specifically for this) He says: "Whoever eats My flesh"—it is a different word than He used in the other parts where He talked about eating Him. It is really neat, or kind of gruesome. Because what He says there is that we have to munch on Him, or chew on Him. It is not just the normal Greek word for eating, but it means really gnawing on, chewing, like eating beef jerky. You have to really chew it before you can swallow it. That is the impression that He wanted to make on our minds, that it takes time and effort to assimilate His teaching into

our lives. It is not just simply having a wafer melt on one's tongue.

It means that we have to really struggle with it and we have to eat it, we have to masticate it, we have to beat it fine. We have to do whatever it takes, take whatever time it takes, to digest what He is and incorporate it into our lives—and into our character, I should say, as well. Not just what we do, but we have to make it what we are. So it is really a very vivid illustration of the effort we have to go through.

This next example comes right at the end of the woman caught in adultery. In my Bible it is at the end of the paragraph; it probably should be the beginning of the next paragraph because it actually goes better with what comes after it rather than what comes before it.

John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying [that is obvious, that there is a new paragraph], “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

This is the opening salvo of a teaching on Christ bearing true testimony to who He is. They were telling him, “You testify of yourself. You bear witness of yourself and that’s not right.” But He says, “It’s okay if I bear witness of Myself because what I say is true, and then the Father backs Me up.” And of course then they want to kill Him.

But what He is saying here is that when He says that He is the light of the world, He means it. He is telling them the truth. And the Jews react so strongly later on (after verse 13) because they realize what He is actually saying when He is saying “I am the light of the world.”

We already mentioned Psalm 27:1: “The Lord is [our] light and [our] salvation.” Well, if Jesus is saying He is the light of the world, then He is saying—what? That He is equivalent to the Lord in the Old Testament. Numbers 6:24-26 says that God’s people enjoy grace and peace in the light of God’s presence. The servant of the Lord, in Isaiah 49:6, is the light to the nations. And so He is essentially telling them at this point that He is the Messiah.

The Word of God or His law is a lamp and a light to guide our paths—that is Psalm 119:105. Proverbs 6:23 says something very similar. Jesus is saying to these Jews that He embodies these things. He is the Lord. He is God. He is Savior. He is Messiah. He is the Word of God. He is the revealing, illuminating guide to righteousness and truth. Now you understand why they wanted to pick up stones to throw at Him?

John himself says in John 1:4 that His life was the light of men.

So, to us, He does what light does. He makes things visible that were not visible before. He illuminates. He reveals things to us. He makes things plain and clear to us. If we follow Him, our way toward the Kingdom of God will be clear and free and result in eternal life because He is showing us the way. He is lighting it up so we do not run into doorjams, so to speak.

So He and His teaching revealed the way. What He reveals is the truth. He is our light.

I am not going to go into this next one very much.

John 10:7 Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

John 10:9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

I did a sermon on this at the Feast of Tabernacles in 2011, so I am not going to go into this in any great detail. But a door is an entryway. It divides one space from another. So Jesus, as the door of the sheep, is an access point. He is the means of entry for the sheep into the fold.

And in that sermon that I gave at the Feast, I gave five meanings to Christ as the door. These are the five things:

1. A door provides access to what is behind the door. So that means we have access to salvation and to the Father. We are able to go through Christ to the throne of grace.
2. A door provides protection when it is shut. Those who are outside cannot come in. So Jesus provides protection from Satan, this world, from false doctrine and all those bad things, if we trust Him.
3. A door separates one space from another. Jesus Christ Himself separates us from the world, and it is through Him we become holy—set apart, different. We are separate.

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4. A door, especially an open one, is a sign of fellowship and so Jesus is the one who allows us fellowship with the Father. We have fellowship with Him, and of course through Christ, we have fellowship with one another.
5. A door allows us to go in and out. So, Jesus, as the door, is a symbol of our daily activities. If we go in and out in the Spirit of Christ, we have abundant life because we are living the kind of life He lived. We are going in and out like He did.

So that is the door. He is important in all those ways.

Here in John 10 is another one just down the way.

John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd” [He says]. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”

And then in verse 14:

John 10:14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.

The ‘good shepherd’ imagery here is the care Christ takes of us, His sheep. He laid down His life for us. That is how far He was willing to go to provide for all of our needs.

So this one, this symbol—this ‘I AM’ statement—illustrates the Shepherd’s intimate knowledge of the sheep and His ability to lead them safely to their destination, and to care for them all along the way. More specifically, He not only leads the sheep (plural), but he leads each sheep (singular) all along the way, and He knows each sheep by name. He knows them inside and out. So this tells about how intimately He is involved with the entire process of bringing us into God’s Kingdom. You can just write down Psalm 23 which flushes out this metaphor of this shepherd’s care for us.

The next one is in chapter 11 verse 25, and Jesus says to Martha:

John 11:25 I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

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This of course is at Lazarus' resurrection. Some people try to split these two into 'I am the resurrection' and then 'I am the life', but they go together. Jesus wants us to take them together. He is not only our guarantee of rising from the dead, but He is also our guarantee for living forever as God does. It would be just stupid to rise from the dead and then not have eternal life on the other end; I mean, that would be just like what He did with Lazarus—He raised him physically and that was it. Lazarus had a whole lot more to do after that before He got the resurrection Jesus is talking about.

Jesus is talking about His resurrection and us following in His resurrection. So He is saying that He is the one that guarantees that if follow Him, even though we die physically, we are going to be raised to life like He has.

You can just jot down I John 3:1-3 which says that we are going to be like Him; we are going to see Him as He is. We do not know exactly how that is going to be, but that is how it is. If we have this hope, then we are going to make ourselves pure like He is.

That is what He said. If we follow Him—if we believe in Him—these same things are going to happen. So He is the guarantee of that—guarantee of immortality and incorruption and everlasting life.

I am not going to go through this next one very much either. In a way, this one encapsulates several of the other ones. He says:

John 14:6 I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

There are several ways we can take this. As 'the way' He is the means to salvation; as 'the truth' He is the embodiment of the truth; as 'the life' His life is real life, abundant life, eternal life.

Yet we could take it as more than that. He is not only the means to salvation, but He is the example of salvation. We can say that He does not just embody truth, all His words are truth. We can say that He does not just model life, He is the source of all life.

There are lots of ways to look at this, lot of levels of meaning here. But the immediate one in context, seeing what He says there, "No one comes to the Father except through Me." (which is His very next sentence), the immediate thing He wants us to get out of this is that He is the means of accessing the Father and having eternal life.

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So He is our point of contact with God, and whatever He says or does, that is how we have fellowship with the Father.

He goes on and talks about “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.” Well, another way we can look at this is that Jesus is how we see God. If we see Him, we see the Father. We can look at His example as the way, the truth, and the life. That is how we come to have a relationship with God. That is how we come to realize and really know God—through Christ.

John 15:1 I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

That last bit is what this is all about—“Without Me you can do nothing.”

This one shows how we are connected to Him and to one another, and how the Father is the one in charge. We are an organism with Christ. We are in Him, Paul goes later to explain. And then He does too. He says in chapter 14 here: “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” Then He says He and the Father (in verse 23) are going to live in us. That is how organically connected we are.

But we are attached to Him like branches to a tree, and if we want to be productive, we have to submit to the care and discipline of the Father. He is the pruner, He is the vinedresser.

So Christ as the vine, and does what a vine does—on a stem, on a tree. It supplies the life and nutrients that we need, pulling them up from the roots and giving us all the grace, all the favor, all the gifts that we need to produce fruit. He does most of the work. He has all the strength. He has all the power. He is that big thick trunk—the same kind of illustration as the great cornerstone that can provide all that we need—and we are these little dangling branches out here on a part of the vine and we are attached and we get all that sustenance from Him.

If we want to produce fruit, we have to submit to the Father and continue with Him. This is how we please Him: By producing the fruit. We produce the fruit by submitting to His training and hanging on. You do not want to be cut off. He warns us there in verse 6 that if we do not abide in Him, we are cut off and we are put in the fire. But He says our job

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is to submit to the training, the discipline, the pruning of the Father and hang on—endure.

Okay, now we get to those two that I felt are the most important. I am going to have to do them quickly.

John 18:37 Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?” Jesus answered, “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

Jesus is a King. He is the King of kings. He has great power and authority and if He says “Jump” we better jump, and we should ask “How high?” on the way up. Just do it, because He is the King. He is our Lord and Master, and we are servants—we are very lowly compared to Him. We can choose to disregard and disobey Him, but we do that at our eternal peril.

When we deal with Him, we are dealing with supreme authority. He is the lawgiver and the judge of all. He is a very scary person. You do not want to be on His bad side.

Matthew 28:18 All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

That is who we are dealing with. That says it all.

The other one [the other ‘I AM’ statement] is back in John 8 verse 58.

John 8:58 Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”

You may also jot down John 13:19 and John 18:5 because in both of those He also says that ‘I AM.’ The translators have stuck in a ‘He’ there (‘I am He’) but He is actually saying ‘I AM.’

He is God. He is not only the King of kings; He is God. He is the ‘I AM’ that revealed Himself to Abraham and to Moses. He is the Creator of heaven and earth. He is the power and the glory. He is the Almighty One.

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At the very base of our Christian foundation, that chief cornerstone upon which we lay, and build our entire lives is God Himself—the perfect, the pure, and the Holy One. And that is why we can have faith. This is why we do not ever need to feel ashamed.

In John 20:28 Thomas recognized this finally. He says:

John 20:28 Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

He finally figured it out. I wonder how long on the route it takes before we really figure that out too. Jesus says:

John 20:29 Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

Do you really believe that He is God?

Let us finish in I Peter 2.

I Peter 2:1-6 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all [guile], hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones [we are here compared to Christ as a living stone], are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”

Just as Jesus Christ, our chief cornerstone, is a living stone in God’s house, we too are living stones in it and we have been designed to honor and glorify God by our lives. As Paul writes in I Corinthians 3:10, let us be careful how we build on that sure foundation.