

Broken to Pieces

Matthew 21:33-46 Text: vs. 44 *"Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed."*

In our lesson today, the word "cornerstone" means much more than just a stone with an inscription placed at the corner of a building telling when it was built. A cornerstone used to be the most important part of a building. The whole building depended on it. It was the most crucial part of a foundation. Today, an "engraved marble slab" is added to a completed building and called a cornerstone. It's *not* the most important part of the foundation. But the message in our text this morning shows how Jesus used the image of a cornerstone to illustrate the important choice you must face by believing in Him or rejecting Him. Jesus should be the cornerstone of your faith. The foundation upon which your faith in God is built. He is your hope. He is your salvation. He is your guide in this tumultuous journey called life. Just as a cornerstone supports and stabilizes a building, Jesus should be your support and foundation giving your life stability, purpose, and meaning.

But there are consequences when He's not! Our text says, *"the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces"* meaning there is brokenness that comes from being without a Savior. Acknowledging your sins, acknowledging your weakness, acknowledging your need for redemption might be painful, but it leads to spiritual healing and restoration. On the other hand, when the stone falls and crushes you, it is the consequence you of rejecting Jesus. Rejecting Jesus leads to eternal spiritual separation. Separation from God. Eternal hopelessness.

The Israelites had been God's chosen people. He took that privilege away from them and gave it to a special people—the Gentiles – who, would become His church and would bear the fruits of His righteousness. Paul said, *"I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"* (Acts 28:28) Jesus referred to Himself as *the Stone* when He described Himself to His hearers. The consequences of their opposing Him intensified and they became *"the subjects of the kingdom to be thrown outside into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* (Matthew 8:12) Those who opposed Jesus out of ignorance, or weakness, would suffer harm. But if they *deliberately* rejected Jesus, the Stone would crush them into dust and scatter them to the wind. *"His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."* (Matthew 3:12)

This warning was not lost on the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders! It only increased their anger toward Jesus. It confirmed His accurate portrayal of them. It revealed the authority Jesus had as God's Son, the Heir, and the Judge, as well as the unpleasant fate of those who rejected Him. So, there was a choice to be made. And the message of this verse is very clear. *You must make a choice!* You can choose to humble yourself and acknowledge your need for Jesus in your life, and by your brokenness find forgiveness, grace, and eternal life. Or you can reject Him, which will pave the way for your spiritual ruin.

One day a family was driving from Fort Lauderdale to Tampa. As far as the eye could see, orange trees were loaded with fruit. They stopped for breakfast and ordered orange juice with eggs. "I'm sorry," the waitress said. "I can't bring you orange juice. Our machine is broken." They were dumbfounded. Surrounded by millions of oranges, and knowing they had oranges in the kitchen because orange slices garnished their plates, what was the problem? No juice? Thousands of gallons of orange juice were hanging from the trees just outside the restaurant. The problem was, they had become totally dependent on a machine to get it.

Sometimes, Christians are like that. They have a Bible at home. They have religious literature by their bedside. But if something happens and they can't get to church on Sunday morning to hear the sermon, they feel they have no nourishment for their souls. Even when it's right there in front of them at home! The problem's not a lack of spiritual food. It's that many Christians haven't grown enough spiritually to know how to get spiritual food for themselves. When you welcome Jesus into your life, your life is transformed. You experience God's love. You have His grace. His peace goes beyond all understanding. Your brokenness is healed because you have been made whole in Him. But having Christ in your life doesn't free you from having challenges in your life. Your faith is what gives you the strength to face and overcome your challenges!

One of the most tragic events during the Reagan Presidency happened Sunday morning Oct. 23, 1983, when a truck bomb exploded at a Marine compound in Beirut, Lebanon, killing 241 U.S. service personnel, including 220 Marines and 21 other service personnel. The bombing was carried out by Iran-sponsored terrorists and was the single deadliest day for the Marines since World War II. There were 1,800 Marines stationed in Beirut at the time. Maybe you can still recall the terrible scenes as the dazed survivors worked to dig out their trapped brothers from beneath the rubble. Marine Corps Commandant Paul X Kelly was there as President Reagan's emissary and watched the survivors uncover the dead from the rubble. Later he said, "When you see 144 caskets loaded onto an airplane, it will have an impact on you for the rest of your life." A few days after the tragedy, General Kelly visited some of the wounded survivors who had been transferred to a military hospital in Frankfurt, Germany. Among them was Corporal Jeffrey Lee Nashton who had been severely wounded in the bombing. He had so many tubes running in and out of his body a witness said he looked more like

a machine than a man. Yet, he survived! As General Kelly neared his bed, Nashton struggled to move for a piece of paper and a pen. Racked with pain, he wrote a brief note and then passed it to General Kelly. On the slip of paper, he had written two words -- "*Semper Fi*." The official motto of the Marine Corps. *Semper fi* is a rallying cry. A greeting among those who have served in the United States Marine Corps. It stands as a symbol of loyalty, dedication, and unwavering commitment to duty. The Latin phrase "*semper fidelis*," from which *semper fi* is taken means, "*always faithful*." This powerful phrase has been used by generations of Marines to instill a sense of brotherhood and devotion to their fellow Marines and to their country. With those two simple words, "*Semper Fi*", Nashton spoke for millions of Americans who have sacrificed body and limb and life for their country. They *have* remained faithful.

And those same words could be spoken by every Christian who remains faithful to their calling in Jesus. "*Semper Fi*." "*Always faithful*" So today, I am inviting each one of you to consider the stone of salvation, who is Jesus Christ. Embrace Him. Accept His love. Find refuge in His grace. Let go of the crushing consequences of rejection. "*Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces. Anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.*" Instead, experience the power of a life surrendered to Jesus Christ by holding on to the *cornerstone* where you will find not only salvation, but you will also have a purposeful, abundant life both now, and for all eternity. As Jesus began His ministry, His disciples didn't understand that He was the salvation sent by God not just for the Israelites. But after His death and resurrection, all doubt about who He was, was removed. ⁶ *A week after His death His disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"* ²⁷ *Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe."* ²⁸ *Thomas said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"* ²⁹ *Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed."* (John 20:26–29) That's you! The spiritual Rock had now become a *living* rock.

And on the day of Pentecost, the disciples' bold preaching demonstrated with certainty that Jesus truly was *the* Rock. Peter preached, "*Jesus is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone'.*" (Acts 4:11) Its meaning should now be even more deeply embedded in your heart. It relates not only to God's deliverance within the physical realm. It relates to the ultimate spiritual deliverance God provides to His people through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Rock of your salvation. He is your sure and eternal refuge. The foundation on which rests your hope of heaven. And "*the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.*" (1 Peter 2:6) That should make everyone here want to call out, "*Semper Fi*." AMEN