



## Christ is our Cornerstone – On Him Alone We Build

**Sermon:** Sunday 10:15 am – September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011 – At Living Hope Lutheran Church

**Matthew 16:13-20-** New International Version 1984 (NIV1984)

<sup>13</sup> When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

<sup>14</sup> They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

<sup>15</sup> “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ,<sup>[b]</sup> the Son of the living God.”

<sup>17</sup> Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you that you are Peter,<sup>[c]</sup> and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades<sup>[d]</sup> will not overcome it.<sup>[e]</sup> <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be<sup>[f]</sup> bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be<sup>[g]</sup> loosed in heaven.” <sup>20</sup> Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.



**Sermon: Christ is our Cornerstone – On Him Alone We Build**

Pentecost-15 Sunday – 10:15 am - September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011 – Pastor Todd Goldschmidt

It was the spring of 1983, and I was just weeks away from finishing my 5<sup>th</sup> and final year at Northwestern College in Watertown, WI—our Synod’s pre-seminary in those days. My roommate—now the long-time dean of students at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN—was part of a cadre of classmates charged with coming up with our class Bible passage that would appear on a banner behind and above us as we sat on the stage in the gymnasium clad in cap and gown at our commencement service. Being budding theologians, the group searched the Scriptures long and hard, debating the relative merits of each text as to its fittingness to serve as the portion of God’s Word that would send us off to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, WI. Though not a part of the esteemed committee, I did my own digging, and lit on a passage that remains one of my favorite to this day—Ephesians 2:19-22. It reads:

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Friends, that’s what God’s true church really is. It’s not a structure build by human hands. It’s God’s people—people like us—gathered around Word and sacrament, striving with the Spirit’s aid to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth, assisting and helping each other on the path to heaven. It’s clinging, tenaciously, to God’s saving truths and preaching, fearlessly, both law and gospel, both sin and grace. It’s building each and every program of ministry “on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,” that is the Spirit-breathed teachings of the Old and New Testaments, “with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” Back in the day when massive stone structures were built without mortar, cornerstones served more than just a commemorative function. They were the most critical component for a rock-solid foundation. As such, building foremen took great care in selecting the structurally strongest stone to shape into the cornerstone. It not only served to support the rest of the foundation, but it also set the angles in the building.



And so the heavenly Father carefully chose the only rock that could aptly serve as the cornerstone of His living temple! From eternity the Trinity determined that when it came time to save fallen mankind from sin and Satan, God the Son would be the One. Centuries of prophecy pointed ahead to the place, manner and even the type of mother that would usher in God's Anointed One. Then one day God's angel Gabriel appeared to a young Jewish virgin named Mary, and he announced to her at God's command: "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." We're told that "Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end'" (Luke 1:26-33). In the fullness of God's timing, the Cornerstone was laid, the Old Testament foundation stones were established, and the New Testament ones were set in place.

Throughout the centuries since God sent His one and only Son, Jesus, to serve as the Savior of mankind, countless church bodies and denominations have sprung up, each one claiming to have a better handle on God's teachings than the next. By the time Martin Luther entered the religious landscape, the good news, or gospel, of God's love in Christ had all but disappeared behind the smoke and mirrors of the medieval Roman Catholic Church. Instead of pointing frightened sinners to the wounds of Christ and His death on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for their sins, the Church developed an elaborate system of penance—including the sale of indulgences, pieces of paper pedaled by priests with the pope's seal and signature that permitted their purchasers to "indulge" their sinful nature however they saw fit because they'd paid for that privilege by buying what amounted to church-sponsored bonds to fund the building of St. Peter's in Rome.

In protest, Monk Martin's nailed his "95 Theses" to Wittenberg, Germany's Castle Church door. It served as the public bulletin board of his day. Luther, a lecturer at Wittenberg University, wished to publicly debate the merits of what it means to be truly repentant. His first thesis sets the tone of his tome: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." The hammer blows of that fateful day—October 31, 1517—echo to this day. Sadly, many who claim direct ties to that rugged Reformer have rejected, in whole or in part, the saving doctrine he restored to Christ's Church. Like fickle politicians, they've constructed their house of cards on the shifting sands of public opinion and revealed themselves to be the "foolish builders" Christ condemns in Matthew chapter 7. In stark contrast, He says, "everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock."

**Sunday Worship Service: 10:15 A.M. (Sunday School/Adult Bible Class 9am)**

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Purely by the grace of God—and not because of any merit or worthiness on our parts—we’ve been blessed by God’s Spirit to be among those who still labor, diligently, to preach and teach God’s Word the way He intended it to be preached and taught in the first place and for all time: truly and purely. May we never, ever, become arrogant about our adherence to the Scriptures as if we were somehow better than those who have departed from the Word. Inherently, we’re equally damned by our sinful natures and the actual transgressions it produces every day. Like Peter of old, we boldly confess Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” by the power of God’s Spirit one moment; while in the next we do what he did in the verses right after our text: try to stand in the way of His plan of salvation by “having in mind the things of men” and not “the things of God.” God have mercy on us for our consistent failures to honor Him above all else! May He pardon the multitude of missteps we’ve made along the path of our faith in Him!

We’re “blessed” this morning, brothers and sisters, because we still walk in the saving truths of God’s Word which Luther restored to the Church five centuries ago. We’re blessed to cling to Christ by the power of His Spirit who works so incredibly through that same Word. God has called each one of us to use His Word to condemn those who refuse to repent of their sins and to pardon those who do. What a wonder of wonders & miracle of miracles it is to witness the Holy Spirit work through the law and the gospel to rescue one more soul from certain death in hell!

That’s why we’re here folks. That’s our purpose in life: to keep on building the Lord’s living temple one stone at a time! As those who know and confess Jesus as the only Savior of mankind, we’ve been commissioned by Him to share that saving message with others as often as He gives us the opportunity to do so. Friends, we live in the “terrible times of the last days.” I’m convinced of it. In view of this final chapter in our planet’s history, Paul wrote to Timothy:

“Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, & how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed & is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting & training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:14-16).

How blessed we are today and every day, to have the privilege of delving into the Bible and mining its priceless treasures for the strengthening of our faith and for a better, deeper insight into God’s unimaginably fantastic plan and purpose for us as we live our lives to His glory!

Christ is our cornerstone; On him—and Him alone—we build.  
With his true saints alone The courts of heav’n are filled.  
On his great love Our hopes we place  
Of present grace And joys above. Amen.

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