

“Christ our Cornerstone”

(Luke 20:17-18)

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Introduction: Sometimes *rejection* can be a really *painful* thing.

- A. And I’m not speaking of the pain of being rejected when you really want something. In basketball if a defender blocks a shot attempt, we call that a “rejection!” In that case, it’s the shooter who has to swallow his pride, but rejection is infinitely magnified when our dream job is given to someone else or -- even worse -- when someone we love rejects us. All of these things can be construed as bad, but I’m talking about the rejection going the other way.
- B. Sometimes we are presented with a choice and with full awareness, volition, willingness, and perhaps even with gladness, **we choose** to reject something that comes our way.
 - 1) In 1995, I returned a call to go to a very large congregation in Edina, Minnesota. I know that if I had accepted that call, my life would have taken a significantly different path. Just a year later, I received a call from this congregation. I don’t see how I would have connected to Saint Paul’s if I had gone to Minnesota.
 - 2) Around the same time, I resigned my commission in the U.S. Army. If I had become a full-time chaplain in the Army, I would have made it just in time to serve during the Iraq War.

- C. Back in college, Traci was confronted with a choice she had to make: whether or not to accept or reject me when I proposed to her. I’m sure that if you ask her, she will tell you how ecstatic she is -- to this very day -- that she didn’t let me get away. ☺
- D. The truth is that I thank God that she said, “yes!” How I thank God that she did not reject me! I honestly believe that she is the only woman who could possibly withstand living with this man who is preaching to you and yet still love him at the end of the day! ☺
- E. There are, however, instances that our volitional choice to reject can turn out to be a **catastrophic** decision.
- F. Sometimes when we reject, it can spell our doom.
- G. I know that this simple concept might mess with us Lutherans. We are clear about biblical doctrine:
 - 1. God chooses us, we do not choose Him. This is clearly taught in John 15:16 where Christ is recorded as saying, “You did not choose me, but I chose you...”
 - 2. It is also true that our very faith is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). Indeed, it is the very work of God (John 6:29).
 - 3. Now this Scriptural teaching often invites the **assumption** that since God is responsible for salvation, that He must also be responsible for reprobation or condemnation. But God did not elect Pharaoh or anyone else to be damned (thank God!), but reprobated them on account of **their rejection of Him!**
 - 4. Remember that God desires all to be saved (1st Tim. 2:4) and that Jesus died for the whole world (John 3:16 & 1st John 2:2).

5. **But rejection is not on God.** Remember the words of Luke 13. Jesus cried out to Jerusalem: "...how I longed to gather you as a hen gathers her chicks, but **you were not willing!**" **God is warning us in our Gospel about rejection...don't reject Him!**
- H. So dear Christian yes, you may be wise to reject a free offer for an ocean cruise on Carnival. You may be wise to reject the invitations of certain visitors who come knocking on your door offering another testament of Jesus; and if you're married, you should always reject any and all temptations to be unfaithful. The list of good rejections abound don't they?
- I. But today's Gospel is a powerful warning that there is one thing in our lives that we can never reject and what is humbling is that this message is as much for you today as it ever was. We are never supposed to arrive to a place in our lives where we assume that we are no longer in danger of rejecting. We are always in danger because of our sinful flesh and our sinful hearts which are tempted to reject the One that we need more than anything else every, single day.
- J. And let me put as simply and as clearly as I can: If you reject Christ, if you turn from Him and His Word, your life will turn into a complete and utter disaster.

Part I: So Jesus told a parable.

- A. In today's sermon I'm not going to focus on the parable itself, but what the parable sets up. I should, however, mention just a couple of things from the parable:
 1. Like last week's Gospel, Jesus knew that His enemies were listening to Him to try to trap Him. They were the religious leaders of Israel.
 2. They were the tenants who were supposed to take care of God's vineyard (Israel), but they were unfaithful. God, therefore, sent His Son to the religious leaders, but they rejected Him. That is, they crucified Him.
- B. It is the part after this parable, however, that helps us to focus on the terrible threat of rejection.

Luke 20:17-18: ***"But he looked directly at them and said, 'What then is this that is written: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?' ¹⁸Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."***

Part II: We need to know about the Cornerstone:

- A. This is a unique reference to Jesus.
- B. Many teachers and commentators treat the term as being synonymous with a foundation. And while it is true that it is biblically correct to refer to Jesus as foundation that is not what is being said here. Jesus is **also** cornerstone.
- C. If Luke 20 were teaching Christ as our cornerstone *in the sense of foundation*, then this would be the image:



- D. Again, the idea is biblical enough, but this *isn't* the image in Luke 20.
- E. The language goes back to the Old Testament. Psalm 118:22 says, ***"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."***
- F. Once upon a time Israel was rejected by her neighbors, but Israel was lifted up and was destined for greatness.
- G. I'm being intentional to talk about greatness, because it helps us to visualize something greater and ***higher*** than ourselves. Something we would ***look up to***.
- H. The idea is to look ***up*** at something glorious. When the Israelites became the cornerstone, people could look ***up*** at the glorious temple representing God's presence among His chosen people!

- I. Thus, the cornerstone takes on a different character. It is not the foundation below, but the cornerstone ***above that governs every angle in the building itself.***
- J. Here is a picture of the cornerstone:



- K. This is quite deliberate, because it explains a fundamental reason as to why the religious leaders hated Jesus and rejected Him.
- L. Jesus was bringing all the "angles" or "sides" together. To put it simply, He was calling Gentile sinners, outsiders, people without hope, people thought to be beyond redemption, He was calling people that the religious leaders were accustomed to rejecting. But Jesus brings all of His people together. Picture one side of the arch in the picture to represent the Jews and the other side of the arch to represent the Gentiles...they both rise up and are unified through Jesus! This was one

reason Jesus was in turn summarily rejected by the Jews.

M. Furthermore, the early church viewed Psalm 118:22 as evidence of the resurrection. To be the cornerstone above was to be the sign of the resurrected Messiah! "The Crucified is the rejected stone which in the resurrection is made by God the chief corner-stone in the heavenly sanctuary (Ac. 4:11)...(Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, volume 1, 793)."

Part III and Conclusion: So what?

- A. This proper image of the cornerstone above dear Christians quite frankly confronts our pride.
- B. And according to this Scripture, **"everyone will be broken or crushed."** (Just, *Concordia Commentary Luke 9:51-24:53*, 765)
- C. *The cornerstone above confronts your pride dear Christian. And when this happens, we do one of two things:*
 - 1. *We accept Him by the grace of God.*
 - 2. *OR we reject Him.*
- D. *If we accept Him by His gracious work in us through the Word and Sacrament, then the Word teaches us that it is like falling on Him and being crushed. Our pride is*

crushed...and this is the key to spiritual healing and wholeness. We must die in order to live; we must become broken in order to become whole.

- E. *When we see that Christ is above us, we must humble ourselves. We must confess our sin. We must see that our way is inadequate, and that our only hope is in Him...to trust Him to bring us to unity with God and with those others who know Him. To know that He does this because He's conquered our sin and our death...He's covered us in His blood and His refreshing water which drips down on us from above. We know this...you know this, because He died for you and because He rose for you!*
- F. *We fall...we repent...we know brokenness and as we bow before Jesus, He restores us. He heals us. He imparts His strength to us, our magnificent Cornerstone Savior saves us...saves you.*
- G. *But we must beware of the other possible response, that response is to reject Him...but if this occurs, we will go far, far, far beyond brokenness...we will be utterly crushed...we will be judged and condemned...then Christ will be a stone which obliterates and utterly destroys...not because this is what God wants (not by any stretch of the imagination), but because we would REJECT Him! May this never, ever be.*
- H. *Yes, there are some things we should reject...reject the temptation to turn from God's Word, reject the temptation to turn from your marriage, reject the temptation to turn*

*from loving and properly raising your children, reject things like this...but never, ever reject Jesus...and by holding to Him, you shall be blessed...because He has not rejected you, you **are** blessed!*