

PM Isaiah 28:1-29 A Precious Cornerstone

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[0 : 00] It comes from the prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 28. And we're going to read the whole of this chapter.

! There's a famous verse in this chapter that you'll see in the middle of the chapter.! Isaiah 28 at the beginning.

Behold, the Lord has one who is mighty and strong, like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, like a storm of mighty overflowing waters.

He casts down to the earth with his hand. The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim will be trodden underfoot. And the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of the rich valley, will be like a first ripe fig before the summer.

When someone sees it, he swallows it as soon as it's in his hand. In that day, the Lord of hosts will be a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of his people, and a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.

[1 : 43] These also reel with wine and stagger with strong drink. The priest and the prophet reel with strong drink. They are swallowed by wine. They stagger with strong drink.

They reel in vision. They stumble in giving judgment. For all the tables are full of filthy vomit, with no space left. To whom will he teach knowledge?

And to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from the milk, those taken from the breast. For it's precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.

For by people of strange lips, and with a foreign tongue, the Lord will speak to this people to whom he has said, This is rest. Give rest to the weary.

And this is repose. Yet they would not hear. And the word of the Lord will be to them, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little, that they may go and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

[2 : 58] Therefore hear the word of the Lord, you scoffers, who rule this people in Jerusalem.

Because you have said, we've made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement.

When the overwhelming whip passes through, it will not come to us, for we've made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we've taken shelter. Therefore thus says the Lord God, behold, behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation.

Whoever believes, will not be in haste. And I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plumb line, and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter.

Then your covenant with death will be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol will not stand.

When the overwhelming scourge passes through, you'll be beaten down by it. As often as it passes through, it will take you, for morning by morning it will pass through, and by day, and by night, and it will be sheer terror to understand the message.

For the bed is too short to stretch oneself on, and the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in. For the Lord will rise up, as on Mount Perizim, and in the valley of Gibeon he will be roused, to do his deed, his strange deed, and to do his work.

[4 : 31] Alien is his work. Now therefore do not scoff, lest your bonds be made strong. For I have heard a decree of destruction from the Lord God of hosts against the whole land.

Give ear and hear my voice. Give attention and hear my speech. Does he who ploughs for sowing plough continually?

Does he continually open and harrow his ground? When he's levelled its surface, does he not scatter dill and sow cumin and put down wheat and rose and barley in its proper place, and emmer

as the border?

For he's rightly instructed, as God teaches him. Dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over cumin, but dill is beaten out with a stick and cumin with a rod.

Does one crush grain forever? For bread, does he not thresh it? No, he does not, sorry, but he does not thresh it forever. When he drives his cartwheel over it with his horses, he does not crush it.

[5 : 40] This also comes from the Lord of hosts. He's wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom. Amen.

Turn back to Isaiah chapter 28. Isaiah 28, and we're going to be considering the whole of this chapter tonight.

Last time when I was with you, some of you might remember that we were considering the way the Apostle Peter quoted from Psalm 118 in his famous sermon in Acts.

He quotes that famous verse from Psalm 118 that speaks of the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone or the capstone. And we saw that that was something of a theme, that that verse from Psalm 118 about the stone the builders rejected was quoted in quite a number of places throughout the New Testament.

And it was unambiguously speaking of Jesus. And we thought last time about something about what it means that the fact that that prophecy has been fulfilled in Jesus means that we too, through our union with Christ, come to experience something, to know something of what it is to be rejected and have something of the hope of ultimately being glorified.

[7 : 21] That that's part of our experience as Christians through our union with Christ. But there's a number of places throughout Scripture where this theme of a stone, of a foundation stone is mentioned.

and Isaiah chapter 28 that we read just now, that's one of the most famous. This verse that we see that speaks of laying a stone, a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone of a sure foundation.

Whoever believes will not be in haste. This is one of those verses that speaks of the same theme.

And tonight I'm hoping that we can consider this and we'll look in due course at the key places where it's picked up on in Romans and in 1 Peter.

But really what I want to do tonight is to look at this verse in its original context in chapter 28 of Isaiah. And hopefully we'll see how that sits in its original context.

[8 : 44] It's my usual practice to try to give some sort of overview whenever we come it's not good to pick on a verse in isolation.

And it would be my normal practice to try and give some kind of background to say where have we reached in Isaiah's prophecy. But this verse as it happens is right in the heart in chapter 28 of Isaiah and it's quite a challenge to try and give some sort of overview of Isaiah's prophecy up to this point. Because on every page there's something of the glory of Christ in this prophecy. prophecy. And I was hesitant as to whether to even try this but if you'll bear with me have a quick look and see some of the themes that have come out so far in the book of Isaiah.

Page one we see redemption set before us. Isaiah chapter one chapter two the mountain of the Lord.

Here is a foretaste a glimpse of heaven a time when we'll beat our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks.

[10 : 22] Turn the page again. The righteous branch. Jesus is set before us in the pages of this prophecy clearly.

Turn the page again. Chapter six. The famous vision that Isaiah has of the Lord. And bear in mind that the apostle John tells us that Isaiah saw the glory of Christ when he saw this vision.

Holy holy holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory. Next chapter the virgin will be with child.

The promise of the Messiah. A little bit further on chapter nine to us a child is born wonderful counselor mighty God everlasting father prince of peace.

And so Isaiah is full of the riches of the glory of Christ and yet as we work our way towards chapter 28 where we are this evening there's a build up of of judgment judgment there's judgment for the nations and yet sprinkled all through these chapters there are also these wonderful and glorious hints that salvation will also be extended to the nations and so if you've reached chapter 28 again you can turn back a couple of pages and you'll see a feast of rich food for all peoples on the

mountain of the Lord chapter 25 there and in chapter 26 we see him kept in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you to trust in the

[12 : 37] Lord who is the everlasting rock and so we see that Isaiah in his prophecy up to this point has been presenting the glory of the gospel in amazing detail and at the same time is presenting this theme of coming judgment and of an extension of the grace and hope of the gospel beyond the borders of Israel and so that is where we have reached when we come to chapter 28 and like these other chapters chapter 28 is another place where there is this glorious promise that this foundation will be laid in Zion and those of you who are familiar with your Bibles I know that some of you are very aware that this verse is picked up in Romans and in 1

Peter and we know that we're on absolutely solid ground we know that this verse is about the Lord Jesus Christ because the New Testament explicitly tells us that it is and yet when we come back to look at this verse set in this chapter we see that it comes in the context of a coming judgment verse 2 you'll see there that it's not an empty threat it's not a final warning it's a true statement of fact God is coming in judgment upon these people and we've had a succession of prophecies proclaiming judgment against the nations and now judgment falls even on God's own people on Israel and Jerusalem and though this judgment is coming

God's people and especially their leaders are oblivious to the danger that they're in they're described as being drunk and in fact no doubt they were actually drunk but there couldn't be could there not be a better metaphor for describing somebody whose faculties are so dulled that they're oblivious to the danger that they're in their grasp of reality is clouded and they don't see that they're in danger from this coming judgment and just as it is with these of God's people here as we read reeling and staggering and worse because of the wine and the strong drink they've taken so it is with us and those around us in many ways oblivious to the danger that we're in oblivious to the coming judgment and what's particularly serious about this is that those who were standing in the path of this judgment had access to

God's word they should have known better these references to line upon line and precept upon precept are a kind of as if those who had access to God's word are mocking it they're making it into a childish and stupid rhyme they're mocking God's word and so it is friends with many people today frighteningly many of those around us and perhaps amongst us have full access to God's word and yet we at times almost seem to mock it and certainly the gospel message sometimes seems so childishly simple that people do mock it and the message here in this chapter is that for those who do mock it

God's word itself will come back against them and they will ultimately fall well what can we learn from this very often when we want to present the gospel to friends and preach the gospel we're at pains aren't we to present the gospel as a positive message and we want to make it acceptable to our age and our culture and we're embarrassed and ashamed of the cartoon version of a Christian prophet with an old fashioned sandwich board that says the end of the world is nigh and it's true isn't it that we do need to be careful we need to be wise as serpents and as innocent as doves when we present the gospel message we need to be careful I need to be careful if I'm going to stand here and preach and all of us need to think carefully every time we interact!

[18 : 18] with anyone we need great wisdom I heard once of someone who was criticized for doing door to door evangelism and the quip that they responded with was to say I prefer the way I do evangelism to the way you don't do evangelism but what's much more important friends than our mechanism or the technique that we use in trying to spread the word of God and proclaim the good news is that in the way that we present the gospel message we need to be faithful to the balance of scripture and the only way that we can really achieve that is long term familiarity with all of God's word we need to soak ourselves in the Bible such that our reactions our instinctive responses are all influenced our choices influenced by

God's word in so many small ways such that the message of God's word as a whole will come across I wonder how many of us when faced with questions about natural disasters or suffering or accidents would any of us ever say unless you repent you too will perish probably not but I don't even know if I have the courage to say that that is what my Lord said when faced with these questions and even the most acceptable of all parts of scripture the sermon on the mount beloved of atheists perhaps we forget that sometimes the sermon on the mount itself ends with a parable about a coming flood a storm of judgment that will test the basis on which we have built our lives and so do we have the courage to tell people of their need to build their house on the rock their

need of a foundation in

Zion for their lives a stone a tested stone a precious corner stone because a storm of judgment is coming that is the message of the sermon on the mount and it's the message of Isaiah 28 if a storm is coming how will we fare well in this chapter we see that a storm of judgment is coming and our own efforts at safeguarding ourselves are utterly inadequate verse 15 speaks of this covenant with death and verse 18 speaks of it being annulled the original hearers of this prophecy probably would have understood that this covenant of death that is spoken of is really a reference to political and military alliances that they thought would give them safety and security but

I think it probably also speaks about idolatry superstition perhaps even a witchcraft where people thought that their lives were somehow protected by charms by spells and as we know from this chapter such covenants with death are of absolutely no use to anyone but it's the same in our day isn't it many people believe that they can gain security for themselves most people believe that if they have sufficient money then they'll be able to somehow cheat death maybe they can jump the waiting list on the NHS by going private or perhaps they have money for health gurus or people who can help them cheat death in some strange way there are in fact even

I'm sure nobody here does this but there are people who will pay vast amounts of money to have their bodies frozen in hopes of some sort of resurrection in the future when technology permits well none of us I don't think are in danger of thinking that way but do we see preparing for this day of judgment as a priority or are we like those in this chapter in a kind of drunken daze not really realising the reality around us because if we try to make our own provisions for that day on that day they will be hopelessly inadequate like a bed too short to lie on like a blanket too thin to wrap around yourself there's no comfort there's no rest no warmth there's the offer of rest isn't there in verse 12 but instead a judgment a reciprocal judgment that

[24 : 13] God's word coming back against them and so those who try to make their own provision for this judgment it will be like those in the parable who built their house on the sand who didn't have this foundation their house will fall and great will be the fall of it well if a judgment is coming and those who try to make their own provision to safeguard against it will find it inadequate why is that well it's because perfection is the standard of judgment that is to be applied here verse 17 speaks of justice the line righteousness the plumb line these are the standards and in verse 19 we see to our terror that perfection is what is needed this image of a line and a plumb line it's as if something is to be absolutely flat you can only build on a foundation that's flat

I've been working the last few weeks on a wind farm site and it's intriguing to see a bulldozer making a flat platform for a substation and it's it's an amazing thing to see the blade of a dozer just comes through and anything that is not flat in front of it is pushed out of the way and there's something of that here this word of a plumb line and a line perfection is the standard that is required and it can only build on a perfect foundation so judgment's coming if we make our own safeguards they'll be inadequate perfection is the standard but what is the real meat of this passage well surely it is that this chosen and precious stone provides true security true peace whoever believes will not be in haste whoever trusts in this foundation will not be in a flap will not be panicking on that day they'll have some solid basis and they'll know that they are secure when this judgment comes there's some

New Testament light that is shone on this verse which is helpful for us one of the things I want to mention tonight is that there's something about the stages in which this foundation stone being laid there's something here for us remember that those who were waiting as the gospel writers say for the consolation of Israel in Jesus day they expected that to be one event didn't they they expected that Christ would come and immediately bring in this full and final judgment that all of the enemies of the people of God would be defeated in one event and that the new heavens and the new earth would be inaugurated at this time as the disciples would say think of John the Baptist for example I often think of him he seems to have been confused there he is languishing in prison and he sends his disciples to say is Jesus really the one why if he has come am I in prison

I thought he would come and bring in the new heavens and the new earth in one moment and last week I think you were hearing about Cleopas and his friend and they too were confused they were disappointed they said as they walked along they said we had thought he was the one Jesus of Nazareth we had thought he was the one who would bring about the redemption of Israel I'm not sure who first came up with it but I find the expression already and not yet a helpful way of looking at prophecy and we're not imposing something on the text here because see what the text says a

foundation in Zion a stone a precious cornerstone of a sure foundation here we speak about laying a foundation and we speak about the kind of capstone the finishing of the building process in one breath as it were and yet obviously it happens in stages and so this is describing a process of building a building and you'll remember last time when we were thinking about the stone the builders rejected that this imagery of this building points us towards the building of a temple and what's in view here is that this process is the fulfillment of all of these Old Testament references to the temple the tabernacle all of these things are fulfilled in the finished work of Christ and so this temple building is to be a place of shelter a place of refuge a place of rest and it's a place as we see in verse 17 that's built square and true it's a place built with perfection well let's turn now to these New Testament references that help us get more light on what this passage is saying firstly we can look at Romans and chapter 9 let me just read from verse 30 in Romans chapter 9 it says there what shall we say then that Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it that is a righteousness that is by faith but that [30 : 54] Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law why because they did not pursue it by faith but as if it were based on works they've stumbled over the stumbling stone as it is written behold I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame and again just further down chapter 10 we'll pick up at verse 9 there because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved for with the heart one believes and is justified and with the mouth one confesses and is saved for scripture says everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame for there's no distinction between Jew and Greek the same Lord is Lord of all bestowing his riches on all who call on him for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved so we see in Romans where this verse is picked up in a couple of places here that there is one stone that will unite both Jew and Gentile and of course all our own sad internal divisions as it were and so in Isaiah in this original context we see that there's only one source of security in this overwhelming flood of judgment that's coming our passage speaks of everything being carried away in a flood driven away by this overwhelming force of judgment that those who believe in the stone will not be put to shame there's more New Testament light friends in 1st Peter let's turn to these references as well if we can 1st Peter chapter 2 I want to read quite an extended section from here from verse 4 down to verse 10 Peter says as you come to him a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ for it stands in scripture behold I'm laying in Zion a stone a corner stone chosen and precious and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame so the honor is for you who believe but for those who do not believe that stone that the builders rejected has become the corner stone and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence they stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do but you are a chosen race a royal priesthood a holy nation a people for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light once you were not a people but now you are God's people once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy see how this reference to the stone laid in Zion is this reference to our chapter here the references in Peter in a number of places tie back and so it's absolutely clear that this is speaking of Christ in our chapters in Isaiah 28 here and those who trust in Christ as we just read they will not be put to shame but instead they themselves become living stones and this is part of one of the most wonderful doctrines in the New Testament the doctrine of our union with Christ as we spoke earlier it's a very great mystery when we as individuals put our hope in Christ corporately we become this fulfillment of all that the tabernacle all that the temple was pointing towards and we share in a mystical way the glory of being a dwelling place for the Lord verse 21 speaks of his strange work there's a reference here to Mount Perizim and the valley of Gibeon these are not immediately obvious perhaps but in 2 Samuel 5 19 we read there about David going out to fight and instead God fights for him and so it is friends with the church the gospel is preached and people are urged to put their faith in this chosen and precious cornerstone that is [36 : 27] Christ in the gospel and we do this week in week out and it doesn't appear as if it will achieve anything meaningful it looks like folly and yet just as God went before David in Mount Perizim and in the valley of Gibeon so we assemble here and we proclaim the gospel and more

more than we could ever imagine is achieved by it though it doesn't seem like it at the time no one who hears and responds to the gospel is merely saved no one survives this overwhelming flood of judgment that is spoken of by the skin of their teeth and arrives in glory as it were a bit red faced having just scraped in and made the grade no a truly saved person is given immense glory and honour because of this promise meaningfully becoming a dwelling place for the triune

God part of that temple part of that bride of Christ part of his vineyard given all the dignity and honour of a full member of the royal family of heaven with Christ not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters and so when this judgment does come Christ is the only sure foundation and his body the church it remains after this judgment and emerges as it were washed and pure and solid and perfect a building that as we read in verse 29 is wonderful in counsel excellent in wisdom glorious and so these are the good things that we put our hope in and look to to this is what we have to look forward to this is our hope and yet the immediate context as I've been saying is one of judgment so let's recap in closing we've seen that this judgment is coming we've seen that our own safeguards against it will never prove adequate we've seen that the standard of the judgment is one of perfection and we've seen that this chosen and precious cornerstone provides true security and peace and brings amazing blessing to those who will trust in him they will not be put to shame instead they will be given glory and honour but in closing we see lastly then that this judgment is purposeful from verse 23 onwards to the end of the chapter the imagery switches and we are now on an agricultural image which speaks of what this judgment is accomplishing ploughing and harrowing these are violent operations that rip open and level the soil but once they're complete they're not repeated over and over and over again the process continues to the next stage and crops are sown and ultimately a harvest is obtained perhaps you know something of that in your own experience perhaps your heart has been prepared initially by some experiences that might bear some analogy to harrowing or ploughing!

and certainly as a church I believe that we may experience seasons of being broken up of being harrowed of being brought to an end of any sense of our own resources brought out of any sense of self-reliance but instead prepared for a harvest of righteousness God's wisdom in this is perfect though it seems as the chapter says strange at times to us maybe we worry that ploughing is all that's happening as I quoted this morning from John Owen Jesus is always near and he puts in when the need is greatest and when our resources are at an end there is a limit to this judgment he does not thresh forever it is a purposeful judgment and his wonderful counsel and excellent wisdom will be on full display bringing glory and worship from the nations on that glorious day and here in this congregation even this morning we have glimpses don't we have seen the nations coming to put their faith in this chosen and precious cornerstone well may that day in its full glory come soon and let us commit to pray that soon we would see the glory of that final and wonderful day amen
voy