

AM Acts 4 "The Stone that was Rejected"

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[0 : 00] also happened to be here in September last year. You might remember that last time I was here we were in Acts chapter 3 and this morning we're continuing on into Acts 4. But just to give some background to that, you'll remember the man who from birth had been disabled, unable to walk and Peter and John spoke to him in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and he was able to walk and jump and praise God and that drew a crowd and Peter was able to preach the gospel to this crowd that was gathered and he told them of their need to repent and turn again in verse 19 of chapter 3 that their sins would be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus and so on. So Peter has been preaching this sermon and we'll pick up what's happening as Peter preaches at the beginning of chapter 4.

As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed and a number of men came came to about 5,000. On the next day, the rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander and all who were of the high priestly family.

And when they'd set them in their midst, they inquired, by what power or by what name did you do this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them rulers and people and elders if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man by what means this man has been healed let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead by this man, by him this man is standing before you well this Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you the builders which has become the cornerstone and there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated common men they were astonished and recognised that they had been with Jesus but seeing the man who was healed standing beside them they had nothing to say in opposition but when they had commanded them to leave the council they conferred with one another saying what shall we do with these men for that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and we cannot deny it but in order that it may spread no further among the people let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name so they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus but Peter and John answered them whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God you must judge for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard and when they had further threatened them they let them go finding no way to punish them because of the people for all were praising God for what had happened for the man on whom the sign of healing was performed was more than 40 years old when they were released they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them and when they heard it they lifted their voices together to God and said sovereign Lord who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them who through the mouth of our father David your servant said by the Holy Spirit why did the Gentiles rage and the people's plot in vain the kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and his anointed for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place and now

Lord look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness while you stretch out your hand to heal and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus and when they had prayed the place in which they were gathered together was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness Amen we'll leave the reading there well if you have your Bible with you please turn back to Acts chapter 4 as I said before we read this last time I was here we were looking at Acts chapter 3 and here we continue in Acts chapter 4

I appreciate it's quite a few months since I was here last but let's try and bear in mind what is happening in this section of God's word Peter and John have been proclaiming the gospel they've been interrupted thrown into prison and are brought back to give an account of themselves before these rulers and the verse that I want us to focus our attention on this morning is verse 11 in verse 11 we read these words this Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you the builders which has become the cornerstone just in passing it's an interesting exercise to go through this section of Acts and look for the number of times the words this Jesus occurs it's clear that

[7 : 48] Peter wants to draw attention to the person of Jesus but those of you who are familiar with the Psalms will recognise that this reference to Jesus being the stone that was rejected which has become the cornerstone that's a reference to Psalm 118 118 and God willing we'll sing these words at the close of our service but actually that particular verse from Psalm 118 is referred to six times at least six times in the New Testament and whenever something is repeated it's clear that there's something significant about it something that we're to have our attention drawn to about it and probably there's not that many other Old

Testament prophecies that are quoted six times in the New Testament and so by way of introduction before we come to look in more detail as to what Peter really means when he is saying about the stone being rejected and then becoming the cornerstone let's just go through those six occasions where it's mentioned in the New Testament and that will help us in our thinking and help us be clearer about what is happening here the first place in the New Testament where Psalm 118 is quoted in this way is Matthew chapter 21 and at verse 42 that there Jesus himself states unambiguously that this prophecy about the stone the builders rejected becoming the cornerstone is about him and in the context there in

Matthew chapter 21 verse 42 it's clear that some of the people whom Jesus is addressing are these exact same people who Peter is addressing in Acts chapter 4 we'll come back to that but what we see in the Matthew account in Matthew 21 42 is Jesus introducing a solemn warning about the consequences of rejecting this stone the next place in the New Testament that we meet this is Mark 12 in verse 10 and in Mark's gospel Mark is recounting exactly the same event and what's interesting about Mark is that often if a person is new to the Christian faith we might say to them read Mark's gospel first because it's the shortest of all the gospels

Mark's gospel is like a news report about the gospel he's as short and as fast moving as he can be but he doesn't leave out this detail that Jesus speaks of the stone that the builders rejected as being a prophecy that's about him and in both accounts it's the same event that's being described in both accounts this happens just after Jesus has told the parable of the wicked tenants and when we see this exact same account being mentioned in Luke's gospel which if you're turning these up that's at Luke chapter 20 verse 17 here Luke gives us more information about the context around that the parable of the tenants you might remember is the parable where

Jesus speaks of the owner of a vineyard who has rented his vineyard to some tenants and then he sends the servants to collect the rent and the wicked tenants they beat some they kill some and Jesus then says that the owner of the vineyard sends his son and at the point in the parable where Jesus says he sends his son the wicked tenants say this is the heir let's kill him and when they say this is the heir let's kill him Jesus as he's telling this parable is almost interrupted by the crowd who are listening they say surely not surely not in fact the word is just one negative word but it's such a strong word in the

[13 : 12] Greek that in the old King James translation they say God forbid it's something shocking so remember that now the next place we meet it is in Acts in the account that we've read here and this is after the fulfillment of these events and as I said when we looked at this in Matthew the high priest Caiaphas and others of his family they are the people who heard Jesus quote this prophecy against them and when we look at Matthew Mark and Luke we see that they knew that Jesus was quoting this prophecy against them and yet between hearing the words of Psalm 118 the first time and hearing them again from Peter they have of course met Jesus again at least one other occasion in between and on that occasion they sentenced him to death and handed him over to be crucified and now

Peter has come in chapter 4 here and he brings this prophecy before them and it has been fulfilled there's two other places where the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone is mentioned and applied clearly to Christ Ephesians chapter 2 verse 20 and in Ephesians chapter 2 Paul is concerned with the spiritual significance the real meaning the real meaning of what that means when it's been fulfilled and words don't fail Paul because he's inspired by the Holy Spirit but they would fail me to try to condense these early part of the letter to the Ephesians into something condensed enough to remind you but really in Ephesians

Paul is saying that everything in all of creation the whole of the cosmos every event even our suffering is all meaningful and it is all pointing towards a great glorification of Jesus at some future point on that last day the Lord Jesus Christ will be revealed to be the glorious the most glorious object of all of history and everything is pointing towards him and it's in that context that Paul speaks of the stone that builders rejected has become the cornerstone the most glorious part of all all that creation is orientated towards showing forth the glory of the last place where the stone that was rejected is mentioned is in 1 Peter chapter 2 so we can see that this was important to Peter

Peter would have heard Jesus quoting this and it's lodged in his mind as it were he uses it as he defends himself in Acts chapter 4 and then when he comes to write his own epistle again he comes back to this theme it's an important theme and in 1 Peter chapter 2 Peter is urging us to live holy lives to be what we are as redeemed Christians and he says that we the church are living stones and we are being built together to form this temple this center piece of history which glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ and so he urges us to be what we are to put away malice deceit hypocrisy and slander and to abstain from the sinful desires that war against our souls so I hope that's given an overview just before you know it's been a long introduction but I wanted to make sure we understand that this verse is threaded through the

New Testament in that way so slightly more briefly we'll now look at the stone rejected and then we'll look at the stone glorified what does Peter mean when he says this Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you the builders well there's no doubt about what he means because we have a high view of scripture but even within the scriptures it records the Holy Spirit is recorded here it's recorded that Peter at the time he said this is full of the Holy Spirit and so when he identifies these Jewish rulers as being the builders who rejected the stone that is an authoritative interpretation of what Psalm 118 is telling us about in fact if you look carefully at what Peter actually says he kind of changes the words of Psalm 118

[19:15] Psalm 118 says the stone the builders rejected and Peter says Jesus is the stone that is rejected by you the builders so there's no question the builders who rejected the stone are these Jewish leaders in one sense at least and by doing this by drawing our attention to this by Jesus drawing our attention to it in his ministry and now by Peter highlighting that as well we see something of the meaning of the events around the crucifixion and resurrection the rejection that Jesus experienced is not an accident it's something that has been foretold long ago and it is part of a wonderful divine plan to bring about the greatest of all reversals the greatest turning around ever and just in passing it seems a kind of minor point of application for us but let's note that every prophecy in scripture is fulfilled this one is a core one a one that is full of glory but no word from the Lord falls unfulfilled!

every part of scripture is reliable and true but when we look at Psalm 118 being quoted here and when we go back to read the Psalm 118 in the Old Testament you'll see that the very next clause in that Psalm says that the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone it says this is the doing of the Lord and it is wondrous in our eyes and whether or not you are a Christian this morning is it wondrous in your eyes?

do you see the wonder the amazing the thing that's amazing about it the way that Jesus has been rejected in this way and it seemed like a plan that had failed it seemed as though his ministry had come to an end that his message had been rejected his teaching was not accepted and yet that was always the plan and it's the plan and the way in which we are brought in to the gospel opportunity that it gives us Jesus didn't merely come as a good teacher to influence our behaviour and make us better people or to give us an example or to open our eyes to teach us give us insight he did all of these things but he primarily came as a sacrifice he primarily came as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world he came willing to be rejected and when we see the awesomeness of what that means for us that he would willingly come and be rejected on our behalf that should give us a holy fear and our reverence and it should influence how we behave with one another it should influence the whole of our lives but there's something else it should do it should hopefully bring us to a point to see what a fearful thing it is to reject that offer of salvation brought at such a high price so

Jesus is rejected by the builders but there's a sense in which that rejection is ongoing see how Peter and John now experience rejection as well they are told do not preach anymore in that name in the name of Jesus and this is something shocking as well isn't it the high priest and those around him should have known that when a wonderful sign of that kind which was undeniable to everybody that would accompany the word of a prophet who was faithful and so they should have given greater weight to what Peter and John were saying they should have paid all the more careful attention to the message that Peter and John brought but instead they reject that they continue in their rejection and this continued rejection is something that will carry on we too in our day will in a sense experience an ongoing element of that rejection

Jesus himself says in John 15 18 if the world hates you know that it hated me before it hated you those who follow Jesus are to expect to some degree to experience rejection and this has implications for us in our day to day lives we need to be realistic in our expectations of what it will be like to live as Christians there's a balance of course we won't be rejected all the time if you use the Psalms as a guide book for how our Christian experience should be we will experience times of rejection and suffering and times of rejoicing and great joy but we need to be on our guard if we feel overly comfortable and accepted by the world the truth is that the exclusive claims of Christ create a tension which can never fully go away in our relationships with others and if there is no tension at all we need to begin asking ourselves why not another application of that rejection is that we should expect when we come together on a

[26 : 47] Sunday like this to feel a closeness and a unity as a Christian fellowship together Sunday should be this one day in the week when we can gather together with our Christian brothers and sisters and share in a sense in the struggle share in the sense of what it means to experience to some extent a greater or lesser extent something of that rejection we should be like Christian soldiers in a sense coming back from the front line once a week at least to be encouraging and comforting one another and sharing our experiences as a group together and lastly as a point of application on that we need to be realistic when we are sharing the gospel with others we cannot promise when we tell other people about our faith we cannot promise them an easy life we cannot promise anyone that it will be mean acceptance and wealth and prosperity

I'm sure we don't anyway but let's always be careful to be realistic when we are telling others about what it means to be a Christian and so we've seen there the stone that was rejected but the stone that was rejected has become the cornerstone this is something as the psalm says is wondrous in our eyes it's glorious what Peter is saying here is that what's happened with the death and resurrection of Christ is a fulfilment of that prophecy and because it's a fulfilment of that prophecy he's saying that what happened on the cross can be pictured in a way that's like putting together a building these stones that are forming a building and what is being built what does it mean the stone that was rejected has become the cornerstone what is being built is a temple a place where God can be truly worshipped there's a sense in which all of God's work in creation has been leading up to this point

God has created a wonderful world full of things that cause us to be amazed to be astonished the more we discover the more places we see we see beauty we see power and wonder in all that God has made and in all that God has made he's also at the same time building this temple of living stones Christian people will have will be something of lasting significance something of permanent value when all these other amazing things and the wealth of this world and the glory of the scenery and the wonders of nature these are in a sense temporary compared to the permanence of the church being built a group of people who together glorify the sun and everything in the

Bible leading up to this point has been a kind of a foretelling of it when the Israelites left Egypt as slaves they were slaves they were set free and they travelled around in the desert and when they camped in the desert their camp had a layout a structure and at the middle in the heart of this camp was a building a temporary building but a building that was a place where God would dwell in a special way with his people and a place where God could be worshipped and that was important for them but it was just a picture of what it's like for us to be part of this building when King David had it in his heart to move from having this temporary structure it was a tent they call it a tabernacle to make a permanent temple where God could be worshipped in the right way the Lord came to him through

Nathan the prophet and says would you build me a house to dwell in God doesn't need a house to dwell in and yet he graciously allows David's son to build a temple in order to be a kind of a picture for us to help us see what the church would be like something amazing something something glorious that temple was a way of picturing what the amazing reality of God dwelling with his people the amazing reality that Christ would fully fulfill when he became Emmanuel God with us God dwelling with his people and so that's what this temple is pointing towards and that's what is meant here the stone that was rejected by you the builders has become the corner stone

[32 : 54] Jesus completes this temple this living temple made of living stones and he he is the capstone he is the crowning glory he is the the rest of the building is orientated in order to show the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ so the stone is glorified the stone has become the corner stone and yet just in the same way as we experience rejection in a way because we are connected in that way it is so we too can be glorified on that last day part of what it really means for the Lord Jesus Christ to become the corner stone is still not yet part of that prophecy we are being built into this temple and we will share in that glory if you're a Christian this morning you'll be clear that on a good day all that you do is is orientated towards glorifying Christ your saviour and your Lord but if you're like me you'll know that you have good days and bad days and some days we fail miserably but we look forward to that final glorification that day when we'll be set free from sin and from the effects of sin in our hearts and in our lives and we'll be able to worship and glorify Jesus in an uninhibited way and when that happens we too will be glorified and yet all around us there's a spectrum isn't there from a sinful indifference about who Christ is to those who actively and aggressively seek to despise and mock

Jesus and that's the reason we pray in the Lord's prayer your kingdom come so we mustn't lose sight of this reality that we are headed towards this glory and we should pray earnestly that Christ would return again soon and to do that is not sinful indifference about our non-Christian friends I'm convinced that if we commit ourselves to pray that Christ would soon return will be of far greater spiritual and practical help to all of our non-Christian friends and family and as evidence of that actually look at what Peter says in verse 11 and then verse 12 this Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you the builders which has become the cornerstone and there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved do you see how how it leads to a clear and uncompromising presentation of the gospel of

Jesus Christ this is what it means for us to have a union with Christ I want to read some verses from 1 Peter just as we as we close 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 6 and 7 beg your pardon yeah for it stands in scripture behold I am laying in Zion a stone a cornerstone chosen and precious and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame so the honour is for you who believe but for those who do not believe the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone and then look at verse 9 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 marvellous light do you see what's happening here there's there's just no middle ground there's no other name given by which we must be saved there is rejection or there is glory and those are the only two options many people think that on the last day on the day of judgment there will be some hard cases where the Lord

Jesus maybe says has to weigh up to say oh this person just scrapes in by some act of kindness or some something that tips the balance but there's nothing that tips the balance there is only rejection or glorification it will not be like that there will not be any kind of difficult cases on that last day it will be clear that God's judgment is just think back to the parable of the wicked tenants I said that on when Jesus spoke of the parable of the wicked tenants and the wicked tenants said this is the air let's kill them those who heard it said surely not God forbid what a horrific thing to do and on that last day it will be the same nobody will say but this guy was good he gave so much money to charity and he was so kind they will say he rejected the son and yet today is the day of salvation it is not too late for any one of us we live in the gospel age that's why I'm here he's promised never to turn anyone away and this is the great mystery of the gospel nobody scrapes in some horrifically reject the son and others are made part of the most glorious and permanently valuable thing there's ever been a living temple to glorify the son our time's gone so let's close our service singing thing thing