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Sermon Notes

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## **The Glory of the Stone the Builders Rejected**

**Matthew 21:42**

There have been many glorious building projects in history... but few have rivaled the glories of the European Medieval Cathedrals

These awesome and soaring structures sometimes took as much as a century to build

They were constructed out of rock quarried miles away and shaped by skilled craftsmen... each rock shaped by the hammer and chisel to fit the structure at a precise place

One of the greatest of these is the Cathedral at Chartres, 50 miles south of Paris; it was built in only 54 years; the cornerstone was laid in 1206, and the work completed in 1260; it has two massive stone towers, one soars 377 feet into the heavens, the other 349 feet

It is known for its spectacular stained glass windows in a massive rose shaped arrangement depicting scenes from the final judgment

Facing west, toward the setting sun, a glorious rose-shaped arrangement of stained glass depicts Judgment Day... and at the center is Christ, seated on His throne

These cathedrals spoke in stone of the glory of Christ... and the stained glass pictures were called "a poor man's bible"... getting him ready for the Final Judgment

In Matthew 21:42, Jesus Christ uses an even more glorious architectural image... Himself as the cornerstone (or capstone) of the most glorious building project in history: the Church of Jesus Christ

***Matthew 21:42 "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes"***

Context: Jesus, the final week of His life, in direct controversy with the Jewish religious leaders

The Parable of the Tenants

- Landlord plants a vineyard
- Fully supplies it with everything needed for success
- Rents it out to some tenant farmers to produce its harvest

- Goes away on a long journey
- Sends messengers to gather his share of the crop at harvest time
- The wicked tenants seize one, beat another, kill a third
- The patient landlord sends more messengers, and they do the same thing
- Last of all, he sends his son...

***Matthew 21:38-39 "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.'<sup>39</sup> So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.***

This is a parable of the culmination of Israel's history of rebellion against God

From the time of the Exodus until the time of the Exile, God's chosen people, the Jews, had rebelled against God... they had violated His commands, and worshiped false gods; they had become corrupt, and had acted wickedly against the Laws of God

God had done everything He could to call Israel back to repentance, but they would not listen... God sent prophets, one after another; these prophets preached, and pleaded, wept and warned; they also bled and died

Finally the time had come for God to send His Son... this was the culmination of Israel's history of rebellion... the rejection of the Son

To explain this very thing, Jesus quoted Psalm 118:

***Matthew 21:42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"***

This is the focus of our time in the word today... the meaning of this amazing prophecy

## I. The Stone the Builders Rejected

### A. Architectural Image

1. Massive buildings constructed from stone
2. The temple of Jesus' day, known for its massive stones

***Mark 13:1 As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"***

3. Stones were quarried and shaped with iron tools to fit together perfectly
4. Layer by layer the building rose to impressive heights

### B. The Builders

1. In context, the builders are the leaders of the Jewish nation...
2. Here in Matthew 21, Jesus is in direct conflict with these leaders... the chief priests, teachers of the law, Pharisees

### C. The Stone the Builders Rejected

1. A long history of REJECTION of the chosen instruments of God
  - a. Jacob was rejected by Esau and made to flee, though he was chosen by God to be the avenue of blessing for the whole world
  - b. Joseph was rejected by his brothers, who wanted to murder him, but rather sold him as a slave into Egypt... yet he was the very one whom God had chosen to deliver them from famine years later
  - c. Moses was rejected by his fellow Israelites, who said ***“Who made you ruler and judge over us?”*** But he was the very one God had ordained should lead them into the Promised Land... and even after Moses had done amazing miracles, they still rejected Moses, spoke of stoning him, and chose a leader to go back to Egypt
  - d. David was rejected by his own family... when Samuel came to anoint one of Jesse’s sons, not one of David’s own family (including Jesse) thought it necessary to call David in from tending the sheep... and yet he was the one God chose to slay Goliath and deliver Israel from the Philistines; his brothers HATED him and had trouble speaking a kind word to him; King Saul rejected David and pursued him, to murder him; his own son, Absalom, wanted to kill him and take his place as king
  - e. And Israel especially rejected the PROPHETS who spoke in the name of the Lord
    - i) The parable of the Tenants speaks clearly about this

***Matthew 21:35-36 "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. <sup>36</sup> Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way.***

- ii) Stephen said very pointedly

***Acts 7:52 Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute?***

- iii) Jesus said this

***Matthew 23:29-32 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. <sup>30</sup> And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have***

*taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' <sup>31</sup> So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. <sup>32</sup> Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!*

f. Why did they REJECT the prophets?

i) wicked King Ahab perfectly characterized the rebellious attitude of Israel, the people of God to the prophets

***1 Kings 22:8 The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, "There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the LORD, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah."***

ii) Here is the rub!!!! A godly prophet, a man of God will TELL THE TRUTH! And often, the truth is "Repent or perish"

iii) Israel consistently strayed from God's laws; God consistently sent messengers to call them to repentance and obedience; Israel consistently HATED these men of God and sought to kill them

iv) The attitude is perfectly summed up in the astonishing words of Isaiah

***Isaiah 30:9-11 These are rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the LORD's instruction. <sup>10</sup> They say to the seers, "See no more visions!" and to the prophets, "Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions. <sup>11</sup> Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!"***

But, though this pattern of REJECTING the messengers of God is well-established, it comes to its fullest fruition in this, the rejection of the SON of GOD

***"The stone the builders rejected..." is NOT Jacob, nor Joseph, nor Moses, nor David, nor the prophets***

2. This is Christ... the Son of God

3. His rejection is astonishing when you consider the quality of Christ Himself

a. He is the only sinless man that ever lived

i) God searches hearts of every man...

***Psalm 7:9 O righteous God, who searches minds and hearts***

ii) His testimony of man's heart before the flood of Noah was clear

***Genesis 6:5 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.***

iii) So also in the time of Jeremiah

***Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?***

iv) But yet, here is one man whose heart was pure, perfect, filled with the light of God, filled with love for God and for others... here is Jesus, the only pure-hearted man who ever lived... and they HATED HIM

b. His life was lived only out of love for God and others

i) All of His words were filled with truth and life

ii) His healing miracles brought a river of blessing to a suffering nation

(i) The lame walked, the blind saw, those with leprosy were cleansed, the deaf heard, the dead came alive, the hungry were fed

iii) His demeanor was gentle and tender-hearted... He brought hope to sinners, even of the worst kind: tax collectors and prostitutes found in His teachings hope for them, that God might actually accept them back

***Mark 7:37 People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well,"***

c. SO WHY DID THEY REJECT HIM??? Why did they hate Him so much?

4. And they DID reject Him!!

a. The "builders" were the leaders of the Jews

b. They assessed Christ, and turned away from Him

i) They were offended at His freedom from their traditions... He didn't follow the man-made traditions of the elders

ii) They were offended at His healings on the Sabbath, and His complete lack of concern to submit to their authority

iii) They were disdainful of the fact that He came from Nazareth in Galilee:

***John 7:52 Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee."***

iv) They were secretly jealous of Him, that He could do these healings, and know so much about the Scriptures, and be so independent of them, and have a HUGE CROWD love and adore Him

v) BUT ESPECIALLY: they HATED the fact that He condemned them with His words... that He called them out, and exposed them as

hypocrites and sinners... this made Him their bitter enemy, for they were utterly convinced of their own righteousness

So, they rejected Him!!!

5. In the Parable, the Tenants saw the Son and seized him; they put him outside the vineyard and killed him

6. Jesus then quotes Psalm 118:22,23 to describe this

***Psalm 118:22-23 The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; <sup>23</sup> the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.***

7. This one OT prophecy is quoted FIVE TIMES in the NT, one of the most significant prophecies of the Bible

#### D. Christ's Rejection Predicted

***Isaiah 53:1-6 Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? <sup>2</sup> He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. <sup>4</sup> Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.***

#### E. Christ's Rejection Complete

1. In the parable of the Vineyard, it says that the tenant farmers put the son OUTSIDE of the Vineyard

***Matthew 21:39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.***

2. This is a graphic picture of His rejection by the Jewish nation

3. AND a picture of the CURSE that was on Him

***Hebrews 13:11-12 The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. <sup>12</sup> And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.***

a. The rejected parts of the sin offering were carried outside the camp

- b. So also outside the camp, the Israelites were to have a place to relieve themselves, so their refuse would not pollute the people
  - c. Jesus being crucified OUTSIDE the city gate meant that He was completely rejected by the Jewish leaders, and through them, by the Jewish nation
  - d. This is really a picture of Christ as ACCURSED, completely REJECTED by the Jews
4. For Christ was not only rejected by the Jews, as our sin-bearer, He was also rejected by God Himself

***Matthew 27:46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"-- which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"***

God took our sins and laid them on Christ, then in some way turned His back on Christ... forsook Him as our sin bearer... Jesus was rejected by God as He bore our sins, Jesus became a CURSE and was OUTCAST

***Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."***

This is the STONE the builders rejected

The most acceptable man in history became the most rejected

## II. Has Become the Capstone

***"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone..."***

### A. The Exaltation of Christ

- 1. Who can measure the infinite journey Christ has travelled? From the lowest point of cursing and rejection to the loftiest place of exaltation and honor
- 2. Christ drank hell on the cross... ultimate rejection by God and man alike
- 3. Christ was dead and buried... it appeared His enemies had triumphed completely

***Ephesians 1:20-22 [God] raised [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church***

- 4. Christ has been given infinite glory and majesty; He is in a position of infinite glory

## B. Cornerstone or Capstone? Either Way...

1. The Hebrew in Psalm 118:22 is ambiguous

*<sup>KJV</sup> Psalm 118:22 The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.*

Literally “the head of the corner”

2. This means either the cornerstone or capstone... the foundational stone that sets the direction for everything that follows, or the vital final stone that holds it all together
3. EITHER WAY... it is true of Christ

*Revelation 22:13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.*

## C. Cornerstone: Indispensible and Uniting

1. The first stone... the reference stone for every other stone that will follow
2. If that cornerstone is off, not perfectly square, the whole wall will be off line as well
3. The perfect righteousness of Christ is the foundation for the entire church; we are all built on Him as our solid foundation, and follow in His footsteps as our perfect example
4. Christ is the cornerstone for the church

*Ephesians 2:20-21 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.*

## D. Capstone: Infinitely Lofty and Majestic

1. This stone COMPLETES and HOLDS TOGETHER the entire structure; it is usually made beautiful, ornamentally decorated
2. Another word is sometimes “keystone”

A keystone is the architectural piece at the crown of a vault or arch which marks its apex, locking the other pieces into position. This makes a keystone very important structurally

Medieval structures made use of soaring VAULTED ceilings, and the keystone held everything together



3. Christ is the keystone for the church in that He completes its perfection and holds everything together
4. The image in Ephesians 2 is of the church made up of Jews AND Gentiles, people from every tribe all over the earth; only Christ can hold together such a structure

#### E. The Soaring Majesty of Christ

1. See, then, the contrast
2. The builders REJECTED Christ as worthless... equivalent of dung to be cast out of the city gate like rotten refuse
3. Instead, Christ HAS BECOME something infinitely glorious... the most vital stone in the entire structure, the most decorated, the most honored, the most esteemed and praised
4. He was glorified in His resurrection
5. He was glorified in His ascension to the heavenly realms before the eyes of His apostles
6. He was glorified in His being seated at the right hand of God in a position of ultimate authority
7. He was glorified in the sending of the Holy Spirit, who has now for twenty centuries magnified the name of Christ all over this globe

### III. The Lord Has Done This

#### ***“The Lord has done this...”***

##### A. The Direct Work of Almighty God

##### B. The Sovereign Plan of God: Both Sides

1. “The Lord has done this...” Done what??
  - a. Simple answer: made Christ the capstone
  - b. Yes, He has done this; BUT the fuller Scriptures reveal the Lord planned also Christ’s rejection as well
2. God’s is the plan, man’s is the responsibility
3. Peter makes this very plain as he cites Psalm 118 as well, and says openly that the Jewish leaders’ rejection of Christ is what they were destined to do by the sovereign plan of God

***1 Peter 2:7-8 But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,"<sup>8</sup> and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message-- which is also what they were destined for.***

God's incredible sovereign plan made Jewish unbelief central... their long-standing tendency to resist the Holy Spirit, to oppose every true messenger of God, to kill the prophets and stone those sent to it... God built His salvation plan around this... they WOULD MOST CERTAINLY reject this stone

It is what they were DESTINED for...

And this extends now to individuals around the world... salvation comes from the Lord, and He gives it as He chooses

4. They said the same thing in Acts 4

***Acts 4:27-28 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.<sup>28</sup> They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.***

The Lord's sovereign plan orchestrated the REJECTION of Christ as much as it achieved the EXALTATION of Christ

All of this comes from God and God alone!!

C. Only God Can Exalt Christ

***"The Lord has done this..."***

1. God willed that the church of Jesus Christ be built only by His sovereign power
2. Not by the plans and schemes of the religious leaders... they were against Christ and persecuted and killed both Him and the apostles after Him
3. Not by the plans and schemes of the political and military leaders, like the Romans: Pontius Pilate condemned Jesus and it was Roman soldiers who nailed Him to the cross; and in the centuries that followed, the Roman emperors bitterly opposed the advance of the Kingdom of Christ
4. Not by the philosophies of men, for the Greek philosophers and poets, writers and thinkers of Athens MOCKED Paul as he brought this gospel of Christ
5. Not by ANY human power or might, but only by the power of the Lord has Christ been exalted!!!

#### IV. It Is Marvelous in our Eyes

There are four key figures in this quote: the stone (Christ); the builders (the unbelieving Jewish leaders); the Lord (God the Father); and “us”...

The verse ends with a focus on “us”... the observers who are celebrating the exaltation

***Matthew 21:42 "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes"?***

##### A. Wonder and Be Amazed!!

1. The point of all this is WORSHIP
2. In the parable of the tenant farmers, the vineyard is taken away from those wicked men and given to a people who will produce its fruit
3. The ultimate fruit of the gospel is WORSHIP... it is WONDER and AMAZEMENT at Christ, and at the sovereign plan of God for our salvation

##### B. Spending Eternity Gazing at this Marvel

1. Now we see through a glass darkly, then we will see face to face
2. The marvels of Christ, the wonders of His person and His achievement we are only beginning to see, and that only by FAITH
3. When we are in His presence, we will need faith no longer, but we will gaze upon the glories of God in the glory of His Son

#### V. Warnings, Exhortations, and Encouragements

1. Marvel in the glory and attractiveness of Christ

***The Lord has done this and it is MARVELOUS in our eyes***

Is Christ marvelous to you?

Do you see His appeal, His attractiveness?

We sang

***“Jesus I am resting, resting, in the joy of what thou art... I am finding out the greatness of thy loving heart***

***Thou hast bid me gaze upon thee, and thy beauty fills my soul***

***For by thy transforming power thou hast made me whole***

**Simply trusting Thee, Lord Jesus,  
I behold Thee as Thou art,  
And Thy love, so pure, so changeless,  
Satisfies my heart;  
Satisfies its deepest longings,  
Meets, supplies its every need,  
Compasseth me round with blessings:  
Thine is love indeed!**

The essence of the exaltation of Jesus is the worship He receives from grateful sinners all around the world

Jesus is infinitely fascinating, infinitely satisfying

Come to Him... look to Him... trust in Him!!!

## 2. Warning to the unbeliever

- a. God is determined to make Christ, who was rejected by men, the most glorious of all

***Psalm 110:1 "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."***

Therefore, this passage speaks a strong warning to Christ's enemies

- b. Christ spoke it Himself

***Matthew 21:44 He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.***

- c. Neither one is desirable
- d. To "fall upon Christ" means actively oppose Him, to seek to destroy Him and to resist His work
- e. In Christ's day, this was done by the chief priests, the elders, the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin that condemned Christ
- f. The passage ends with these words

***Matthew 21:46 They looked for a way to arrest him***

- g. They would "fall upon" Christ to destroy Him... but in the end, they are "broken to pieces"

- h. Today, this would be done by government officials, policy makers, presidents and kings, dictators and their lackeys who seek to seize Christians and to stop the church

***“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”***

- i. Then Christ says “He on whom it falls will be crushed”... literally “ground to powder”
- j. I believe this refers to the lot of all unbelievers at the Second Coming of Christ
- k. The Book of Daniel speaks of a huge statue with a gold head, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, feet partly iron, partly clay... these represented all human empires and kingdoms...
- l. Then a “stone cut out, but not by human hands” struck the statue on its feet of clay

***Daniel 2:34-35 a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. <sup>35</sup> Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.***

- m. This refers to the Second Coming of Christ, when Jesus will destroy everyone who has not believed in Him, and they will be swept away like chaff

SO... be warned!!! Opposing Jesus Christ is deadly dangerous... Christ yearns to be your Savior, to be your glory, your righteousness

But if you oppose Him, if you fight against Him, He will crush you forever... ultimately in hell

**B. Encouragement to the Oppressed**

1. Christ Himself was despised and rejected, but He is now exalted
2. All over the world, Christ’s people suffer rejection, opposition, persecution, torture, suffering, and death
3. They are, like Christ, despised and rejected... and someday they will be exalted with Him

***Romans 8:17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.***

C. Delighting in God's Sovereign Plan

1. Meditate on the statement "The Lord has done this..."
2. Understand that the Scripture proclaims a mystery... that in the sovereignty of God, the Jews were destined to reject their own Messiah
3. Stand in awe of the inscrutable ways of God
4. Do not reject what Peter says when he proclaims that they were destined for this...
5. Instead, be amazed that YOU were among those chosen to believe in Christ, to see in this despised and rejected man your personal Savior

D. Bringing Forth the Fruit of the Kingdom

1. Rely on the power of God to exalt Christ in your life

***"The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes..."***

2. Daily pray that Christ would be MARVELOUS in your eyes, marvelous in your heart...
3. Let Christ be exalted in your daily lives... by how you live, how you think, how you spend your time and your money

E. Live that Christ be exalted in the hearts of those who have never heard of Him