



41: *The CORNERSTONE* (Mt 21:18-46)

Sometimes we need a friendly reminder that we *AREN'T* the Boss...Jesus is.
The Bible uses a symbolic term to clarify His position of authority - **CORNERSTONE**.
And here's the question YOU need to answer - Is Jesus the **CORNERSTONE** of YOUR life?

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teachingnotes

THE CORNERSTONE: often a large stone, but always an important stone - binding two walls together to strengthen them. The Bible often uses this symbol for rulers or leaders (Ps. 118:22; 144:12; Isa. 19:13; Zech. 10:4). This is what Jesus calls Himself - *the cornerstone* (Mt 21:42).

Richard Lenski Jesus is "the one who governs every angle...in the great spiritual temple of God, the new covenant."¹

Jesus is the CORNERSTONE - the KING of the KINGdom!

❓ **Is Jesus the Cornerstone of your life** - the authority of your life - the One who governs your life?

False Advertisement

Matthew 21:18-19 (NIV) Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately **the tree withered**.

Fig trees were common in Israel, sometimes growing over 20 feet high and just as wide. They not only produced sweet figs but also served as a place of rest (Jn 1:48) & fellowship with others (Zech 3:9-10), protected from the baking sun. The appearance of **leaves** on the fig tree gave the hope that it was bearing an early crop. Since there was not fruit, Jesus curses the tree and it **withered**.

D.A. Carson "Its leaves advertised that it was bearing, but the advertisement was false."²

🔍 The Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, & Luke) often give us more clarity than viewing one Gospel alone. Sometimes one follows a chronological order (what Mark's gospel does here), while another gives a condensed synopsis instead (which Matthew does here). Matthew condenses the story where the tree withered quickly and amazed the disciples. But Mark shows us that there was more time between the cursing of the tree, and it's demise.

Mark 11:13-14 (NIV) Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And **his disciples heard him say it**.

Mark then mentions Jesus going to clean house at the temple (Mk 11:15-19), as we learned about last week. The next morning, while traveling back into Jerusalem, that they see the **fig tree** from the day before.

Mark 11:20-21 (NIV) In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! **The fig tree you cursed has withered!**"

Based on the context in both Matthew & Mark, this cursing of the fig tree seems to be something more significant than just being mad at a fruitless tree. This cursing of the tree seems to symbolize what is about to occur - a cursing of *unbelieving Israel*, who **advertises being fruitful** but *proves to be fruitless*, and so is cursed by Jesus in judgement. Matthew sandwiches this story between the cleansing of the temple & the questioning of Jesus' authority by the religious leaders.

¹ R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 983-984.

² D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke, ed. Frank E. Gaebel, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 444-445.

Moving Mountains?

Matthew 21:20-22 (NIV) When the **disciples saw this**, they were **amazed**. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked. Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, **if you have faith and do not doubt**, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and **it will be done**. If you **believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer**."

Moving mountains was a well known Jewish metaphor for accomplishing a seemingly impossible task - most likely an allusion to Zech 4:6-7, where it's not by the might of man but by God's Spirit that **the mighty mountain becomes level ground**.³ While we have no record of disciples of Jesus causing fig trees to wither nor throwing mountains into the sea, WE DO have examples where disciples of Jesus **have faith and do not doubt**, asking God to make the impossible become possible.

- Peter is thrown into prison but miraculously released as the Church prays for him (Acts 12). God releases Paul & Silas from prison as they **pray** and sing to the Lord (Acts 16:25-26).
- We have multiple testimonies of people being miraculously healed as the apostles ask God and trust God to heal (Acts 3:1-11, 5:12, 9:40, 28:7-10).
- And even through persecution, the Good News of Jesus marches on while **enemies of the Gospel wither and are moved out of the way** - as God works among His people who ask Him and trust Him to move.
- As should always be understood - *WE don't have the authority that Jesus had to speak things into or out of existence*. We DO have the privilege to approach our Heavenly Father and ask HIM to do what we cannot, asking that *HIS WILL* be done (Mt 6:10, 26:42).

② **What MOUNTAIN** - what seemingly impossible barrier are **you TRUSTING & ASKING** God to move/remove?

Who Gives You the Right?

Matthew 21:23 (NIV) Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And **who gave you this authority?**"

These things are likely referring not only to Jesus teaching and healing in the temple, but *the TEMPLE TANTRUM* that we saw last week, where Jesus ran out the money changers and animals, and accused the temple leaders of making this a den of robbers rather than a house of prayer. Jesus wasn't one of the religious leaders, trained under well respected rabbis. So, *WHO* gave Him the **authority** to do **these things**?

Answering a question...with a question

Matthew 21:24-27 (NIV) Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it **from heaven**, or of human origin?" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

John's baptism - *HEAVENLY authority* or *HUMAN authority*? The brightest & best are caught in a pickle play with nowhere to run. So, they refuse to answer.

A Story of Delayed Obedience vs. Disobedience

Matthew 21:28-32 (NIV) What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, "Son, go and work today in the vineyard." "I will not," he answered, but **later he changed his mind and went**. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, "I will, sir," but he did not go. "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, **the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God** ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."

Jesus obviously recognized that John told the truth and was sent by God. Tax collectors and prostitutes who originally told God **"I will not!"** changed their minds, to **believe** and **repent**. The religious leaders were like the son who said, **"I will sir"** to his father, but did NOT. And so, *the worst of the worst sinners* - **tax collectors** and **prostitutes**, we're welcomed into the kingdom while the best of the best among the Jews- **these religious leaders** - were shut out from the kingdom. There's no doubt they understood what Jesus was saying.

A Story of Disobedience & Judgement

Matthew 21:33-41 (NIV) Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he **sent his son** to them. "They will respect **my son**," he said. 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." So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and **killed him**. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

The **Landowner** is **God the Father**. The **tenants** working the land are the **religious leaders**. The **servants** who have been imprisoned and killed are **the prophets - men like John the Baptist**, who had spoken God's truth & warned of God's wrath. **The Son** is Jesus. And finally, **the future tenants** - we'll see who they are in just a moment.

The Cornerstone

Matthew 21:42 (NIV) Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone the builders rejected has become **the cornerstone**; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?" [* Ps.118:22-23]



There are different thoughts among archaeologists & Bible scholars on what Jesus is referring to that we translate as **cornerstone**.

- **Cornerstone** could be referring to a LARGE foundational stone like this, at the base of the Temple Mount enclosure wall. These cornerstones are estimated to weigh over 80 tons!
- This might be referring to **KEYSTONES** in middle of an arched gateways/doorways - the center and topmost stone that joins the other 2 sides and supports the arch.⁴ Remove this stone and the arch and all it supports would come tumbling down. This stone often contained the name of the city, the ruler, or the builder was carved into it.⁵



🕒 Both of these types of stones carry the idea of **foundational permanence**.

Either way, imagine the stonemasons carefully examining the raw materials in order to select only the best stones for building the Temple. One stone doesn't make the grade of what is worthy and so they throw it onto the reject pile...but THAT **Stone**, the one they **rejected** - is the most important piece - **the Cornerstone!**

One day their Temple would be obliterated with all the stones throne down (AD 70). It will become clear that the temple of God is in the heart of mankind and...

Jesus is the CORNERSTONE - the KING of the KINGdom!...which everything else is built upon.

Judgment is Coming to Those Who Reject the CORNERSTONE

Matthew 21:43-44 (NIV) Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this **Stone** will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom **It** falls will be crushed."

The New Testament writers warned the unbelieving Jews that they had been judged guilty (**Acts 4:11**), and the message was going out to the Gentiles instead. The disciples of Jesus - *Jews & Gentiles* - are the **future tenants** who will **produce fruit** by furthering the Kingdom of Jesus.

2 views between **those whom fall on this Stone** and **the one on whom this Stone falls**.

1. Some say this is just parallelism, where Jesus says the same thing 2 different ways - that those who reject Jesus will be **broken to pieces, crushed** - pulverize & turned into dust.
2. Others say those who **fall on this Stone are broken - humbled** - yet not **crushed** - yet are now able to turn to Jesus.

🌟 **Richard Lenski** "A fall on this stone never hurts the stone but only damages the one who falls" or the one on whom it falls.⁶

🌟 **John MacArthur** "For those who will not have Jesus as Deliverer, He becomes Destroyer."⁷

God's judgment falls on those who reject Jesus as the Cornerstone!

⁴ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 698.

⁵ Dennis M. Swanson, "Cornerstone," ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 285.

⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 845.

⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Matthew*, vol. 3, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 299.

Matthew 21:45-46 (NIV) When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

How many people *actually believe they can reject the Cornerstone...or at least dilute His claims....and then expect to make it into the Kingdom of God?*

Jesus is the CORNERSTONE - the KING of the KINGdom!

And one day, **He WILL judge all mankind** (Mt 25).



1. **Get in the Gospels & read the Biblical Jesus.** Don't discount any of it!
2. Answer the question: ***What IS the cornerstone of my life?*** Where is my hope & purpose found?

heretoseveyou

Have questions and need some help? ...real soon...how about now? Please **call** or **text** us soon!

* Contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Christy** (850-673-9764), **Caleb** (864-315-8015), **Gary** (850-673-2507), **Betty** (850-973-3266), or another follower of Jesus soon!

* Or call our **deacons & wives: Alan & Christy Androski** (850-464-1428), **Steve & Debbie Bass** (850-673-7952), **Noel & Patricia Barnes** (813-767-2881), **Tim & Joni Hughey** (850-464-1156), **Rob & Rebecca Leatherberry** (229-232-1087), or **Mark & Dot Mancil** (850-253-5405).

discussionquestions

Take some time to discuss these questions with your family, friends, or group.

1. **Read Matthew 21:18-19 & 21:43-46.** Have you ever considered the correlation between the fig tree that looked to be fruitful, but was not, and the religious leaders who rejected the authority of Jesus? Explain your answer and take some time to examine the connection with your group.
2. **Read Matthew 21:23-42.** While reading the stories Jesus tells, spend some time deciphering what the stories are really illustrating & talk about the parallels between those who follow Jesus and those who reject Him (e.g. tax collectors & prostitutes vs religious leaders).
3. After reading today's passage, how does the reaction of Jesus challenge you, encourage you, or cause you concern?
4. **Today's BIG TRUTH: *Jesus is the CORNERSTONE - the KING of the KINGdom!*** Take some time to discuss the importance of a cornerstone/keystone in a building and how that relates to Jesus.
5. Share any 'aha' moments in today's study - what you learned or how you were challenged. What's God want YOU to do with what we studied today?
6. In humility, take some time to share a couple of evidences that Jesus *IS* (or *IS NOT*) the Cornerstone of your life.
7. **Read Matthew 21:29-22.** What are some mountains you have seen God move? What are some 'mountains' you are asking & trusting God to move? Take some time to pray together with your group.