



SYMBOLS OF THE GOSPEL

the veil, the cross, the cornerstone

The Cornerstone **The Firm Foundation of the Gospel** **Acts 4:1-12**

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THE CORNERSTONE
THE FIRM FOUNDATION OF THE GOSPEL
Acts 4:1-12

Today is Easter, and we celebrate the greatest event in human history. Today, we celebrate Jesus. We express our gratitude. We affirm our faith and renew our commitment to live for Him.

When it comes to the Gospel, the Bible gives three symbols that help us understand what Jesus did for us – the veil, the cross, and the cornerstone.

The veil is the Jewish symbol of our faith. The temple veil reminded people that God was holy, and they were not. It was a physical barrier separating sinful man from the holy presence of God. Yet, the moment Jesus died on the cross, the veil was torn from top to bottom, symbolizing that we now have access to God.

The cross, of course, is the sacred symbol of our faith. Yes, it's odd that a Roman tool for execution became the symbol of our faith, yet we proudly identify with the cross. We display it, we wear it, and we decorate with it, because it is through the cross that we find salvation and eternal life. As Paul said, we "boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹

The cornerstone symbolizes the foundation of our faith. Because of His victorious resurrection, Jesus is that cornerstone.² There is salvation in no other name. And He is the only reliable foundation upon which to build our lives.

The veil, the cross, and the cornerstone are all symbols of the Gospel. So this Easter season, we've been looking at what these symbols teach about what Jesus did for us.

Two months after the resurrection, Peter was arrested and interrogated by the religious leaders for preaching about the resurrection in the streets of Jerusalem. Before this court, Peter declared, "Let me state clearly to all of you ... that Jesus Christ, the man whom you crucified, God raised from the dead! For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says, 'The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.' There is salvation in no one else!" (Acts 4:10-12, NLT). Because of His supernatural and victorious resurrection, Jesus is that cornerstone. The resurrection proves that Jesus is the Son of God and that everything He said is true. The resurrection proves that He is the true cornerstone of our faith and the only reliable foundation upon which to build our lives.

Today, we celebrate Jesus. We express our gratitude. We affirm our faith and renew our commitment to live like we believe it.

PETER WAS CONVINCED

Reading Acts 4 is like having Peter as our guest speaker this morning. We get to hear why Peter was convinced.

Peter was a fisherman. He met Jesus at the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus invited Peter to follow Him. And there was something so compelling about Jesus that Peter left everything to follow Him. He followed Jesus for three years. He heard every word and witnessed every miracle. Peter was an eyewitness of the crucifixion. He watched Jesus suffer and bleed and die. And ... he was an eyewitness of the resurrection. Peter saw Jesus alive again! That's why he was convinced. And he couldn't stop talking about it.³ Even when he was arrested and flogged with a whip, he kept talking about Jesus.⁴

Acts 4 records what happened just two months after the resurrection. "While Peter and John were speaking to the people, they were confronted by the priests, the captain of the Temple guard, and some of the Sadducees. These leaders were very disturbed that Peter and John were teaching the people that through Jesus there is a resurrection of the dead. So, they arrested them ... But many who heard the message believed it, about five thousand" (Acts 4:1-4, NLT). Some "believed" and some were "disturbed."

Jerusalem was a divided city. We know what that feels like. We live in a divided nation. We're divided over politics, race, and religion as well, especially belief in Jesus Christ. Some believe, and some don't. Denzel Washington does, but George Clooney does not. Tyler Perry does, but Bill Maher does not. Carrie Underwood does, but Emma Watson does not. Bono does, but Bill Gates does not. Some believe, and some don't.

Peter believed because he was an eyewitness. He saw Jesus bleed and die on the cross, and he saw Jesus alive again. And he could not stop talking about it. And that's why he was arrested.

The religious court threatened Peter and demanded that he stop preaching about the resurrection. When the court interrogated him, they also asked him questions about the healing of a lame man the day before in front of the temple, which is recorded in Acts 3. Imagine the excitement of those who witnessed the miracle. But the religious leaders were outraged because it drew attention away from what they were doing inside the temple. It would be like a popular food truck parked in front of a restaurant. The restaurant owner is going to get mad. The religious leaders had the corner on the God market, and Peter was infringing on their business. So they demanded, "By what power, or in whose name, have you done this?" (Acts 4:7, NLT). On the one hand they were demanding, "Who said you could set up shop here?" and on the other hand they were asking, "How did you do that?"

This is what Peter said. "Are we being questioned today because we've done a good deed for a crippled man? Do you want to know how he was healed? Let me clearly state to all of you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, *the man whom you crucified God raised from the dead*" (Acts 4:9-10, NLT).

Peter was the most outspoken of the disciples. He was the bold one. But when Jesus was arrested and crucified, Peter hid in the shadows. He even denied knowing Jesus three times. Where was Peter when Jesus was crucified? The Bible says he ran away and "wept bitterly." So, what changed? What moved Peter from crying in the corner to preaching in the streets? The resurrection!

In response to their questions, Peter said, “The man whom you crucified God raised from the dead” (Acts 4:10, NLT). Peter was saying, ***“I stand here today declaring that the resurrection proves that Jesus is the Son of God and that everything He said is true.”***

What proof? How can we believe the impossible? Because the Bible says, “He appeared.”⁵ The Bible records eyewitnesses who saw Jesus die and eyewitnesses who saw Him alive again. The New Testament records ten different resurrection appearances of Jesus. The appearances were spread over a forty-day period. He appeared in different places and to different people. He appeared to one person, then to two, then to a dozen, and then to more than 500 people at one time.⁶ These eyewitness accounts sparked a movement. The emergence of the church, people willing to die for their faith, and millions of changed lives throughout history are evidence that something phenomenal happened.

Now we admit, if there was no resurrection, there is no Christianity.⁷ If there was no resurrection, then Jesus is still dead and there’s nothing to believe. If the resurrection of Jesus never happened, it would be foolish to believe it. But if it did happen, it would be foolish ***not to*** believe it! And it would be foolish ***not to*** base your entire life on Jesus.

Peter continued and rebuked the religious leaders, “The stone you rejected has now become the cornerstone” (Acts 4:11, NLT). Peter was an uneducated man quoting the Hebrew Scriptures to Hebrew scholars. Peter was saying, ***“I stand here today declaring that the resurrection proves that Jesus is the true cornerstone and the only reliable foundation upon which to build our lives.”***

A cornerstone is the stone at the corner of a building that joins two adjacent walls. It’s the first stone and must be perfectly set in place. A cornerstone is the point of reference to which the rest of the building is measured and the stone upon which the entire building rests. This is a picture of the laying of the cornerstone of the Empire State Building. It was laid in 1930, and 102 stories rest on that stone.

The Jewish establishment rejected Jesus and crucified Him as a heretic. But the resurrection proves otherwise. The resurrection proves that Jesus is the cornerstone promised by God. Centuries earlier the Lord promised, “I lay a stone in Zion (a leader from Jerusalem), a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be disappointed. To those who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe ... they stumble because they do not believe the message” (1 Peter 2:6-8, NIV).⁸ God promised to raise up a king and a savior in Jerusalem. God promised a cornerstone, a foundation upon which the faith of every person in the world could rest. Jesus is that cornerstone.⁹ Everything we believe, everything we trust, everything we hope, rests on Jesus.

Edward Mote grew up in a tough part of London in the mid-1800s. His parents ran a pub at night and slept during the day. Edward was often alone and played in the mean streets of London. He had no religious background and later in life admitted, “I didn’t even know there was a God.” But at age 18, someone told him about Jesus. It was so different from anything he had ever heard, and so refreshing, that he believed it. But there was so much he didn’t understand. In his early twenties, Edward was walking to his job as a cabinetmaker, pondering what he was learning about

Jesus and struggling to put it in his own words. And even though he was not a musician or a songwriter, the words that went through his mind that day became a famous hymn.

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand
All other ground is sinking sand*

Jesus Christ is the cornerstone and foundation of our faith. Everything we believe, everything we trust, everything we hope, rests on Jesus. And as Peter said, "To those who believe, this stone is precious" (1 Peter 2:7, NIV).¹⁰ To those who believe, Jesus is precious.¹¹

The last thing Peter declared before the court was that "there is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we can be saved" (Acts 4:12, NLT). Peter was saying, ***"I stand here today declaring that the resurrection proves that Jesus is the only way of salvation and the only way to God."*** "There is salvation in no one else."

Jesus' name means "God saves."¹² His name means salvation. An angel appeared to Joseph and Mary and announced that "she would give birth to a son, and give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21, NIV). Paul said, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13, NLT).¹³ John said, "To those who believe in his name, he gives the right to become children of God" (John 1:12, NIV). And Peter said, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name ... by which we can be saved."

The password into heaven is the name of Jesus! Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, NIV). There is only one way to God and that's through His Son Jesus. And He offers grace and forgiveness, peace and heaven, to anyone who believes in Him.

SO WHAT ABOUT YOU?

This morning, we've heard why Peter was convinced. ***So what about you? What is the foundation of your life?*** What are your beliefs based on? What are your values based on? When life is tough, where do you run? To whom do you turn?

Without Jesus, every other foundation is unreliable. It's great to have a lot of money, but it really is true, money cannot buy happiness. It's great to be healthy, but you can do crossfit every day and still get cancer. It's great to have a career, but a career won't fix your problems or relieve your worries. If the foundation of your life is anything other than Jesus, it can and will fail.

So the real question is this – what are you going to do with Jesus? Will you accept Him or not? What are you going to do with the resurrection? Will you believe it or not? You may have a lot of questions about God, and that's fine, we all do. But as you process your questions, consider what Jesus is offering.

I want to show you a video of one woman who was filled with regret and who was changed by Jesus. Here is Kristin's story. **[VIDEO]**

Again, you may have a lot of questions about God and about faith, but what Jesus did for Kristin, he can do for you. And here's how.

There is a God and He wants you to know how much He loves you. He really does. But you, like me and every other person in the world, have made choices and done things that have broken His laws, offended His holiness, and left you separated from Him. And it breaks His heart.

It breaks His heart so much that He sent His Son into this world to show you how much He loves you. And Jesus loves you so much that He gave His life for you. He died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sin. He died in your place to make things right between you and God. But that's not all.

Amazingly and miraculously, Jesus rose from the dead proving to be the Son of God and proving that everything He said is true. And what did He say? "That whoever believes in Me shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). And all you have to do is believe and receive His gift. The Bible says, "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" (Romans 10:9, ESV). All you have to do is believe it and receive it.¹⁴

I urge you to consider His words and consider His offer. Because the moment you believe in Jesus, you will be forgiven of everything you have ever done wrong, you will experience peace within and peace with God, you will become a child of God and He will become your Father, and you will have the hope and assurance of one day seeing Jesus face to face and living with Him forever in heaven. All you have to do is believe it and receive it.

If you are a Christian, I ask the same question. What is the foundation of your life? What are you doing with Jesus? How does the resurrection affect your life? If you believe Jesus came from heaven to earth, if you believe He died on the cross for you, if you believe He actually rose from the dead, ***then don't just believe! Live like you believe it!!***

When the disciples saw the empty tomb, the Bible says they were "gripped" with awe and "marveled" at what they saw.¹⁵ When they saw Jesus alive with their own eyes, the Bible says they were filled with "joy."¹⁶ They were devastated at the cross, but were ecstatic at the resurrection. The resurrection sparked a movement that continues today. The resurrection changed their lives and changed history.¹⁷

What about you? If you say you believe, what does the resurrection do in you?

Historian Michael Green describes the early Christians. "They were passionately convinced of the truth of the Gospel ... which had such a profound effect upon them ... It affected everything they did and everyone they met ... In the early days, the quality of their lives was ***blazingly distinct***."¹⁸ I love that. "Blazingly distinct."

If you believe it, then live like you believe it!

What does that look like? It means abiding in Him, it means a personal, intimate, day-by-day, and moment-by-moment relationship with Jesus. It means loving Him more than anyone or anything. It means going to His word for guidance and living according to His word. It means trusting His help when you need it most. It means submitting to His Lordship, following Him and obeying Him. It means enduring life and being filled with joy because we know one day we will see Him face to face and live with Him forever.

What does it mean to live like you believe it? It means loving Him, trusting Him, following Him, and obeying Him. If you believe it, then live like you believe it!

CONCLUSION

The resurrection is challenging. If you're not a Christian, it challenges what you believe. If you are a Christian, it challenges how you live.

According to Jesus, you are either a wise man who builds his house on the rock or a foolish man who builds his house on the sand.¹⁹ Which one are you? The wise man who believes in Jesus, or will the foolish man who does not? If you're not a Christian at this point in your life, understand that Jesus is the only firm foundation. And I pray that you will consider His words and His offer.

As Christians, we gather today to celebrate Jesus, to express our gratitude, and to affirm our faith. Because, like Peter, we are convinced that the resurrection proves ...

- That Jesus is the Son of God and everything He said is true.
- That Jesus is the only reliable foundation upon which to base our lives.
- That Jesus is the only way of salvation and the only way to God.

This is why we believe, so go and live like you believe it.

NOTES

¹ See Galatians 6:14. Also 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2:2.

² See Acts 4:11, Ephesians 2:20, 1 Peter 2:4-8.

³ See Acts 4:20.

⁴ See Acts 5:40.

⁵ See 1 Corinthians 15:5.

⁶ Paul said of those 500, who witnessed the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:9-11), that “most of them remain until now,” that most of them are still alive and could be interviewed. See also Paul Little’s *Know Why You Believe*, pages 55-56, where he refutes the claim that the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus were nothing more than hallucinations.

⁷ The Apostle Paul admitted that in 1 Corinthians 15:13-14.

⁸ Translated NIV “shame” with “disappointed” and NIV “disobeyed” with “believe.”

⁹ Ephesians 2:20 calls Jesus the “cornerstone” of “God’s household,” a household consisting of two peoples. Those two peoples are Jews and Gentiles. Ephesians 2 says Jesus has “made both groups into one” (Ephesians 2:14). He has made the “two into one new body” (Ephesians 2:15). He has “reconciled both into one body through the cross” (Ephesians 2:16).

¹⁰ “Precious” refers to something valuable, like a diamond ring. But this word means more than valuable. The Greek word for “precious” is *entimos*, from which we get our English word intimate. A diamond ring may be valuable, but one of our children is infinitely more precious than a diamond ring. To those who believe, Jesus is precious, dear, cherished, treasured, and intimately valuable to us.

¹¹ But for others, Peter said, Jesus is “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense ... they stumble because they do not believe the message” (1 Peter 2:7-8, NIV).

¹² The Hebrew name is Joshua, also pronounced Yeshua, also means “God saves.”

¹³ After explaining the gospel in one of his letters, the Apostle John said, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13, NIV).

¹⁴ To Martha, Jesus said, Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; the one who believes in Me will live, even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26, NAS).

¹⁵ See Mark 16:8 and Luke 24:12.

¹⁶ See Luke 24:41.

¹⁷ Acts 11 is a story of persecution and fear, but also a story of conviction and courage. It’s a story of real people, people just like us, walking the ancient streets of Antioch unashamed to talk about their Savior. Acts 11:26 says, “The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch” (NAS). What was meant as an insult became a name of pride.

¹⁸ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970, 2003), pages 17, 20.

¹⁹ See Matthew 7:24-27.