

The Stone Which Is Still Rejected

*“The stone which
the builders
rejected, the same
is become the head
of the corner.”
—Matthew 21:42*

We are approaching the time of the year when the Christian world will begin to draw its attention to those grave events which occurred in Judea nearly two thousand

years ago, culminating in the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus, the Son of God, who came into the world to be the Messiah and the King of promise.

Commentators tell us that there has never been a period in human history like the last several decades, when so many outstanding events have occurred to change the whole course of human history. Actually, however, this is not true when compared with the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. These events, although associated in the main with but one personality, have already been world-shaking, and are destined to change the course and outlook of the human race to a far greater extent in the future than they have in the past.

Jesus Rejected

It is written of Jesus that he “came unto his own, and his own received him not.” (John 1:11) This was the immediate cause of the persecution which brought about his cruel and early death. “His own” was the nation of Israel. Many of the common people of the nation rejoiced in his message and a few days before his crucifixion enthusiastically acclaimed him King. (John 12:12-15) However, it was not so with the religious leaders. They enviously hated the Master and finally succeeded in bringing about his arrest and crucifixion.—John 15:25

Jesus was fully aware that the scribes and Pharisees hated him. On an occasion near the close of his ministry he related a parable to them which fitted the circumstances so accurately that even they sensed the meaning of it. Yet their anger was increased, and they became more determined than ever to kill him. The parable was of a householder who planted a vineyard, and then left it in care of husbandmen while he went into a far country. When the time came for the gathering of the fruit, the householder sent his servants to the vineyard, but the husbandmen whom he left in charge killed some of them and maltreated the others. Finally, the householder sent his own son, thinking that the husbandmen would respect him, but they did not. They killed him also.—Matt. 21:33-46

The householder in this parable was Jehovah, and the vineyard was the Jewish nation. The husbandmen were the religious rulers of the nation, and the servants who were first sent to represent the householder were the prophets. The record is that the religious rulers killed the prophets, and

stoned them that were sent by God. (Matt. 23:37) Now they planned to kill the Son whom the Heavenly Father had sent.

After relating this parable, the application of which was so obvious, Jesus quoted the prophecy concerning the stone which the builders rejected: “Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”—Matt. 21:42-44; Ps. 118:22,23

Jesus himself was that stone whom the builders—the religious rulers of Israel—rejected. The Prophet Isaiah foretold one of the reasons, saying, “He had neither beauty nor majesty, when we beheld him, there was nothing to behold, that we should desire him.” (Isa. 53:2, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*) Actually, of course, Jesus was perfect, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Heb. 7:26) He was kind and sympathetic and went about doing good. He healed the sick and raised the dead. He encouraged the faint-hearted and extended mercy to sinners. He condemned the Pharisee who thanked God that he was not like the publican and commended the publican because he recognized his own sin and humbly asked God for forgiveness.—Acts 10:38; Matt. 11:5; Luke 18:9-14

However, these were not the qualities the scribes and Pharisees were looking for in the one whom

they would accept as their Messiah and King. They wanted a Messiah who would not expose their evil practices as Jesus did. They desired one they could control as a sort of puppet king, well qualified as a general to raise and command a conquering army, but satisfied to let them rule and exploit the people as they chose. So, from their standpoint, Jesus had no beauty that they should desire him.

To the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus did not fit their desires as to the Messiah of promise. The illustration of the stone that became the head of the corner suggests the building of a structure. The cornerstone was the starting point of the foundation, and the rest of the foundation was aligned and squared to this stone. Jesus was not only the cornerstone of the spiritual temple, but he was the “head of the corner”—that is, he was the very top stone that tied the entire structure together. Thus the builders, not understanding the kind of building God was erecting, rejected Jesus. They could find no place for him in their own plans, and God’s plan they refused to hear.

Exalted by God

All the tragic experiences surrounding Jesus’ life were due to the fact that the builders rejected him. However, his exaltation to heavenly glory following his suffering and death was in fulfillment of the prophecy that the rejected stone would become the head of the corner. He would not be the head over the old Jewish house, which the scribes and the Pharisees had so miserably warped and twisted by their selfish construction methods, but a new house, a spiritual house. This being true, it was

both appropriate and essential that the head of the corner be provided first for the new house so that the entire structure could be conformed to God's plan and purpose.

Speaking of the faithful and resurrected Jesus, the Apostle Peter says this: "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe, he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."—I Pet. 2:4-10

The New Nation

When Jesus let it be known to the scribes and Pharisees that the stone they were rejecting was to become the head of the corner, he added, "Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing

forth the fruits thereof.” (Matt. 21:43) In the lesson we have quoted from Peter, in which he refers to the stone and the new building which began to be erected with Jesus as the head of the corner, he also tells us about the nation to which Jesus said the kingdom would be given. He said, “Ye [the church] are ... an holy nation.”—I Pet. 2:9

The nation of Israel could have been God’s royal or kingdom nation. In Exodus 19:5,6, we read of God’s promise to Israel if they would be obedient to his laws. “Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” The promises were originally made to this nation. However, because they rejected the prophets, and finally killed God’s Son, the kingdom was taken from them, and, starting with Jesus as the head of the corner, God began to bring a new nation into being. Many are the promises, particularly in the New Testament, which refer to those who become a part of this new spiritual nation. “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him,” is one of them.—II Tim. 2:12

The work of God since Pentecost has been the calling and selecting of those who are to reign with Christ in that thousand-year kingdom. (Rev. 20:6) It is to be an actual kingdom, although this fact has long been lost sight of in much of the Christian world, but the apostles and the Early Church understood it. Indeed, they believed that this glorious kingdom of the Messiah was very near. They knew that Jesus would return to set up that kingdom in the earth, making an end of earth’s long

night of weeping and death. Paul wrote, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand."—Rom. 13:11,12

This will be the day that will result from the reign of Christ, who has been exalted to the head of the corner in the Messianic kingdom structure. Indeed, this is the day which the Heavenly Father will bring about. It is his doing, and "it is marvelous in our eyes." (Matt. 21:42) The kingdom day of blessing will not be a humanly conceived Utopia, but a day of brightness and joy which will result from the rising of the "Sun of righteousness," who will arise "with healing in his wings."—Mal. 4:2

The Vision Lost

It was not long after the apostles fell asleep in death that the vision of the hope of the kingdom began to fade. Two erroneous viewpoints gradually developed to take its place in the hearts of Christians. The first was that the kingdom of God would be established by the church uniting with civil powers. The professed Christian world now knows how miserably that has failed. Later there developed the erroneous theory that the kingdom referred to in the Bible is merely a righteous influence exerted in the hearts and lives of believers. It is claimed that when the whole world is converted to righteous living, the kingdom shall have fully come.

Great and widespread missionary efforts to convert the world have been made, especially within the last century and a half, with the hope of realizing the fulfillment of the kingdom promise. Now it is slowly beginning to be recognized that this viewpoint is just as disappointing as was the church-state theory. Because of this, many are now admitting that

they do not really know the meaning of Christianity, or whether it has succeeded or failed. This is evident from the following, written several decades ago by the late Dr. Charles W. Ranson, General Secretary of the International Missionary Council, and published in the *Christian Century* magazine.

“It is increasingly recognized that we shall not find answers to some of the most perplexing questions of contemporary missionary practice until we achieve a new clarity as to the Christian meaning of history. What do we expect to happen as a result of the missionary preaching of the church? What is the meaning of Christian hope—within history and beyond history? And what is the relation of this hope to our missionary vocation? There is a sense in which the contemporary crisis of missions derives from a recognition that we do not really know the answers to these questions, or at least that the answers we conventionally offer are totally inadequate.”

“To interpret this revived interest in eschatology [the destiny of humanity] merely as a form of escape from practical problems that have grown too difficult for solution is totally to misinterpret it. These questions are, rather, the result of a new realism which recognizes the catastrophic nature of history and seeks an answer to it in the light of the fullness of the Christian revelation and the Christian hope. They are an attempt to submit the whole historic enterprise of Christian missions to the judgment of the Word of God.”

“It is here indeed that the present judgment of God is upon us. It may well be that what the Lord our God most requires of us at this time is a penitent reexamination of those things in which we have

failed in simple obedience—the insights we have ignored, the convictions we have not had the strength or the courage to apply. This will undoubtedly be a hard road. But it may well be the road that leads to resurrection and renewal, not only for the missionary movement but for the whole church.”

“It is thus my deepest conviction that what God requires of us is not some stupendous missionary strategy, not some pretentious piece of central planning, but a humble return to the Word of God wherein we meet once more our Judge and our Savior, and receive afresh our mandate and our marching orders.”

Here is a frank confession of frustration. It is a humble acknowledgment of the lack of knowledge of God’s purposes and of what work is to be done through the church. This did not come from some obscure layman, but from a Doctor of Divinity, graduate of Oxford University, the General Secretary of the International Missionary Council, and a widely read author of books and articles on the subject of Christian missionary work. Facing the stark fact that the missionary efforts of churchianity were failing, he earnestly recommended that all should return to the Word of God to find out what he really wants them to do. If Dr. Ranson’s observations were true several decades ago, how much more today do they describe the church’s need to return to the Word of God—the Bible.

Jesus told the Pharisees that they had made void the Word of God by their own traditions—the traditions of men. (Mark 7:6-9) Now history has repeated itself. Traditions and ideas of fallen humanity, rather than the Word of God, more and

more are guiding the church systems and their teachings.

Increasingly throughout the centuries, various traditions of men have attempted to make void the Word of God. The church-state tradition certainly did this, and while that idea is now generally frowned upon, it has left its mark upon religious thinking. Even in the United States many prominent religious leaders urge the influencing of the civil government in the passing of laws which it is thought will support their respective ideas.

One of the most misleading traditions of men is the idea that the promised kingdom of God is something that must be established by human efforts. Knowingly or unknowingly, this erroneous concept rejects Jesus as the head of the corner just as definitely as the Pharisees rejected him. They wanted their own kingdom. The religious leaders of today have lost sight of God's plan to set up a kingdom. They have little or no faith in the idea that divine power will be exerted to take over the rulership of the earth. They praise Jesus as a man, but give little attention to the teachings of the Word of God that he is to be the King of Earth, and will rule with "power over all the nations."—Rev. 2:26,27; Ps. 2:6-10; I Cor. 15:22-25

Jesus, the Headstone

Judgment came upon the nation of Israel, and judgment is coming upon the world in God's due time and own way. All Christendom will mourn because of its failure to achieve humanly-conceived purposes. As their house crumbles, Jesus, the promised King of earth, the headstone over his

new spiritual house which he has been in the process of building, will soon begin his righteous rulership. Truly it is God's doing and is marvelous in our eyes. The footstep followers of the Master, as they view the signs of the approaching kingdom, can truly say, "This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."—Ps. 118:24

Let us rejoice, not because the churches are failing, but because we know that God has a better plan for the conversion of the world. His is a plan that will be gloriously successful, resulting in the promised blessing of all the nations of the earth. (Gen. 22:18; Acts 3:25) Let us rejoice in the knowledge and conviction that the day which the Lord has promised will be one of increasing brightness and joy. It will end in a glory to him that will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea—not because of human efforts, but because it will be his doing.—Hab. 2:14

This is truly marvelous in the eyes of all those who rejoice in the God of our salvation and humbly accept Christ, the head of the corner, as their Exemplar, Savior, and King. ■