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From Rock to Cornerstone

Over the past several weeks we have followed a trail of stones through the Old Testament. We began with God Himself as the foundation, the rock beneath all creation. Then we saw the stones of glory in Eden, reflecting the beauty of God's presence. We watched ordinary stones become markers of remembrance—places where the Israelites encountered God and built altars so they would never forget what He had done. We saw the stone tablets of the covenant, where God's law was written by His own hand. We heard how God Himself became the rock of strength for His people in times of weakness. Each stone pointed to the same truth: God is building something.

Today we arrive at the final stone of our series from the Old Testament—a stone that is not just symbolic, but prophetic. Through the prophet Isaiah, God announces that He Himself will lay a cornerstone—a foundation stone that everything else will be built upon. And while Isaiah's audience first heard this as a warning to their own generation, the New Testament will later reveal something remarkable: this cornerstone ultimately points to Jesus Christ.

Let's set up today's Scripture:

Isaiah 28 is a message about Samaria. As we hear at the beginning of this chapter, Isaiah begins by saying Isaiah 28:1–3 “Ah, the proud garland of the drunkards of Ephraim, and the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of those bloated with rich food, of those overcome with wine! See, the Lord has one who is mighty and strong; like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters; with his hand he will hurl them down to the earth. Trampled under foot will be the proud garland of the drunkards of Ephraim.”

Ephraim is the most prominent tribe of the northern kingdom and is commonly used as a synonym for the entire nation of Israel, as it is in this context. It was ruled by a long line of evil kings. When Israel split into two kingdoms after Solomon's reign, Jerusalem remained in the southern Kingdom. Leaders in this northern kingdom set up idols to keep the people from going to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem as it says in 1 Kings 12:25–33. Leaders created golden calves in Bethel and Dan and established an alternative religious system to keep political control. What began as political strategy quickly became national idolatry.

The people in the northern kingdom were led into idolatry. But I would also suggest, they were not led under their will, they were only led as they agreed! Isaiah gave the message

at the beginning of the chapter to warn Israel that destruction was certain. It was also meant to encourage Judah to repent before being punished, as the northern kingdom would be just a few years after Isaiah's message.

Unfortunately for the northern kingdom, they didn't respond well to Isaiah's message from God. Isaiah 28:9–10 "Whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from milk, those taken from the breast? For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little." Essentially they are saying that God is speaking to them like a schoolteacher speaks to small children, that they do not need to be taught, they'll make up their own minds. They complain saying they don't need to be taught little by little, here and there. They think they've got it all under control themselves. Isaiah prophesizes that the Assyrians would teach the people in a way they would like even less. And we know that the city of Samaria in the northern kingdom did fall to the Assyrians shortly after in 722 BC. God responds that he needs to use repetition and simple words to get his message through to his people. When you think of their history to date, how many times God has warned them, taught them, yet they continue to still stray from his teachings, but God is still faithful. And before we say too much about the Israelites, we need to look at ourselves. When you think of our history

to date, how many times has God warned us, taught us, yet we continue to stray from his teachings, his leadership, his warnings but God is still faithful.

Have you ever found that God has to teach you the same lessons over and over again? You see, instead of trusting God, they turned to other sources for security. God accuses them of making a deal with the grave. Do you try to save yourself during a difficult moment, only to end up selling yourself out to what you believe will save your skin. Is it worth it? Never is. If you want lasting protection, don't sell out by turning away from the only one able to deliver you —God.

This is where we are at when it comes to the Scripture read today in Isaiah 28:14-20.

I'm not an architect or a builder by any means, though I've dabbled with a bit of construction, thanks to the help of my dad over the years. And while I might not know much, what I do know is how important the foundation is for whatever you are building! As we heard at the very beginning of this series, God is to be our rock, our foundation. He has been there from the very beginning. The world is not held together by chance or chaos, but by the steady, faithful presence of God. From the beginning God was there, hovering, holding, preparing to build. As I mentioned at the beginning of this series God's faithfulness is often quiet. He doesn't always stop the chaos, but He steadies us within it.

When our thoughts spiral and control feels like it is slipping away, God does not disappear. He becomes the solid place we can press against when everything else feels unstable. Sometimes that steadiness looks like peace in the middle of fear or chaos. Sometimes it looks like provision that arrives before we even know to ask. God is not moved by the chaos that shakes us. He remains the Rock beneath us.

Unfortunately for the Israelites, they often forgot this, they didn't always obey God. They wandered, and when they did, things only get worse. Isaiah told them in Isaiah 8:11–15 “For the Lord spoke thus to me while his hand was strong upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what it fears, or be in dread. But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. He will become a sanctuary, a stone one strikes against; for both houses of Israel he will become a rock one stumbles over—a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.” Isaiah was telling them, do not fear what everyone else is fearing, because God is more powerful than any human enemy, and what God wishes will prevail. Those who take refuge in God will be protected; those opposing God will stumble, yet here they are worshipping idols.

So, now Isaiah is addressing the political leaders of Jerusalem, who are seeking security in foreign alliances, believing their alliances would afford them protection from calamity. But as we know, judgment came on the nation as predicted. Faith is a key element in Isaiah's preaching. Israel and Judah are guilty of leading their people away from the covenantal protection of YHWH and into alliances with human protectors that will not prevail. But we can't just look to them and say what fools, for we have wandered as well, and failed been led away from the protection of God.

As the Lord says, Isaiah 28:16 "See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: "One who trusts will not panic." A building stands or falls based on the solidness of its foundation, and the cornerstone is what aligns and founds it. As the first stone laid, everything else needs to square to it. This reminded me of when I put our trampoline together in our backyard, around the time that Mackenzie was probably 5. It was a spring free trampoline, and so used these white fibreglass rods to hold the mat to the base. You put one in, then another, going around the entire trampoline, which I would say there were probably around 50 rods. By this point, I was at about day 3 trying to put it together, I had all the rods in, except the very last one. No matter how hard I pulled, the last one wouldn't go into

place. I called the company, of which we went through a variety of different reasons as to why it wasn't working...and I couldn't take it all apart and put it back into its box, this thing was heavy and massive. Then, somehow by accident, I discovered the very first rod had to move by a couple of millimetres to snap into its "pocket" for it to be aligned, which then meant all of the rods were off....I had to go back through every single one, starting back at the beginning, to make sure they were snapped in, and sure enough the last one finally went in its place and it has been standing in the backyard ever since.

A building stands or falls based on the solidness of its foundation, and the cornerstone is what aligns and founds it. Laying the foundation also has important symbolism, and kings took part in a special ceremony. In Mesopotamia, foundation inscriptions often were inscribed on either bricks or tablets buried in the foundation, dedicating the building to a deity or lauding the building king. Here, Zion—the dwelling place of God and the center of His expectations for Israel—is called to shape its national life around His cornerstone, a foundation on which the people can firmly rely.

In 2007 the I-35W Mississippi River Bridge in Minneapolis suddenly collapsed during evening traffic. Cars plunged into the river. Thirteen people died and over a hundred were injured. What shocked investigators was that the

bridge had been considered safe for decades. Thousands of people trusted it every day. But hidden within the structure were undersized steel gusset plates—a flaw deep in the design that weakened the entire structure. From the outside it looked strong. But the foundation of the structure had a flaw no one could see. Many things in life look strong from the outside—success, influence, security. But Isaiah reminds us that God alone provides the tested foundation that will never collapse.

Or in 2009 in San Francisco, a luxury skyscraper called the Millennium Tower opened. It cost hundreds of millions of dollars and housed wealthy residents and celebrities. But within a few years, engineers discovered something alarming: the building was sinking and tilting. Why? Its foundation had been built in soft soil instead of bedrock. The building itself was impressive. The problem wasn't the design or the apartments. The problem was what it was built on. Similar to the famous Leaning Tower of Pisa. It began leaning almost immediately after construction began in the 1100s. Why? For the same reason. The foundation was built on soft, unstable soil. Engineers have spent centuries trying to stabilize it. The problem wasn't the height, the design, or the stones—it was the foundation underneath it. Because even the most impressive structures fail if they're built on the wrong ground. Isaiah says God has laid a tested stone—a sure foundation. God

promises a tested cornerstone, a sure foundation. Many people try to build life on money, reputation, or success—but when life begins to tilt, they discover the ground underneath isn't stable. A life built on Christ doesn't mean storms won't come—but it means the foundation will hold.

As one author writes, “Isaiah's message, put simply, is this. Jerusalem's security is dependent on Yahweh's presence in the city. However, that presence depends on the righteous and just behavior of the human inhabitants of Jerusalem, particularly that of the king and his officials, who are largely responsible for the quality of life in a monarch society. Because the present rulers of the city had not fostered righteousness and justice, Yahweh was about to institute an urban renewal project for Jerusalem. His demolition work, however, was simply a necessary step in his restoring righteousness and justice as the foundation for Jerusalem's life. But this required faith. The one who trusted God to provide Jerusalem's security could afford to promote righteousness and justice. If one did not trust God, if one looked to human means for security, justice and righteousness would eventually be sacrificed to that higher goal of security, but, paradoxically, the hoped-for security would remain elusive. It could only come in God's way; it could not be achieved by human shortcuts.”

Those trusting in the covenantal promises of God over the security of worldly power find salvation in Zion and witness

God's restorative building program in action.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Enron was one of the largest energy companies in the world. Its leaders were obsessed with appearing secure, successful, and profitable. Instead of building the company on honest business practices, executives began hiding losses through complex accounting tricks. Their goal was security: to protect stock prices, maintain the company's reputation, and keep investors confident. But to maintain that appearance, they slowly sacrificed integrity and justice: Financial statements were manipulated, executives misled investors, and employees were encouraged to keep investing their retirement savings in the company. In 2001, the truth came out. The company collapsed almost overnight. Thousands of employees lost jobs and retirement savings, investors lost billions, and executives faced prison sentences. The very security they tried to protect through shortcuts disappeared. This mirrors Isaiah's warning in Isaiah 28:16. When leaders trust human strategies for security, righteousness gets sacrificed. But the security they hoped to gain never lasts. Just as Isaiah warned Jerusalem's leaders, when a society trades righteousness for security, it eventually loses both. The leaders of Enron tried to secure their future through clever human strategies instead of integrity. They sacrificed righteousness for security—and in the end, they lost both.

Isaiah says that when we build life that way, the foundation eventually collapses.

So here we are. Isaiah's audience thought they were secure. They had alliances, strategies, confidence. But God said, *"You've built on the wrong thing."* And then He made a promise: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be shaken." The question was never whether a storm would come. The storm always comes. The question is always: **What are you standing on when it does?**

Because here is the truth — Every single one of us is building something. Careers, families, reputations, identities, futures. The issue is not whether we are building. The issue is what we are building on. If the first rod is off by a millimeter, the last one won't fit. If the foundation rests on soft soil, the tower will tilt. If righteousness is sacrificed for security, both will eventually collapse. But God says: "I have already placed the stone." The foundation is not your strength. It is not your performance. It is not your political preference. It is not your financial stability. It is something — Someone — God Himself has provided. Faith begins not with striving, but with trusting. Trusting when panic feels easier. Trusting when alliances look safer. Trusting when obedience feels costly. Isaiah says, *"The one who trusts will not panic."*

What would it look like to live without panic? Not because life is easy — but because your foundation is sure. So today, the invitation is simple: Examine the ground beneath your life. Where have you been leaning on something that cannot hold? Where have you traded righteousness for a sense of control? Where have you built on appearance instead of alignment?

And then — return. Return to the Rock. Return to the foundation already laid. Return to the God who builds, restores, and steadies. Because when the cornerstone is right, everything else can finally align. And as we prepare to step into the New Testament next week, we will see that this stone Isaiah spoke of is not merely about national renewal — it is about personal transformation. God has laid the cornerstone. And with the cornerstone laid, the next question we will look at next week becomes: what kind of life are we building on it?”