

FOUNDATION STONES, PART 5 - EVANGELISM

Because the Arctic region of North America between Alaska and Greenland is dominated by vast, level plains of tundra there are few natural landmarks. For this reason, over many years the native peoples in these areas have used stone landmarks for navigation, as a point of reference, or as a marker for food caches. They are called Inukshuk, and many are built in the shape of a man to indicate that "someone has passed this way before."

In the book of Joshua, a similar monument was erected when the children of Israel crossed over the Jordan River into their Promised Land, because God wanted them to remember the heritage their forefathers had given them, and know that "someone has passed this way before."

Joshua 4:21-22 When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these **stones**? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land.

In the New Testament Church, we also have been given a great heritage, passed on to us by faithful men and women who left us a firm foundation. We can never forget where we have come from, or we will never be able to get where God wants us to go! Twenty-first century Christians need to know without doubt that the things we believe are not just man's idea, but are absolute foundational TRUTH from God's Word.

Ephesians 2:20 And are built upon the **foundation** of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.

TONIGHT, WE WILL LOOK AT OUR FIFTH FOUNDATION STONE – EVANGELISM.

I am thrilled that we are a church that is built on the firm foundation of the BIBLE, the ONENESS of God, the Biblical plan of SALVATION, and the lifestyle of HOLINESS. Those are the four foundation stones we have talked about in this series, and each one is critical to the success of the church. Tonight's foundation stone is no different, and in fact may be the most important of all for us to be reminded of. Why would I say that?

There was a church just like ours in the book of Acts that had all the other foundation stones firmly in place. They were well known for their purity of doctrine and the depth of their experience with God, among all the other churches of their day. In fact, they were the original church in the book of Acts! However, THAT WAS NOT ENOUGH! And when the Jerusalem church overlooked the foundation stone of "evangelism," the Lord placed His blessing and favour on a different group of people. No matter what, WE CAN'T LET THE SAME THING HAPPEN TO US!

There is absolutely nothing more important to God than a SOUL. In fact, the Bible tells us that a SOUL is worth more than the entire world ...

Matthew 16:26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

That is why the most important role of every Christian is EVANGELISM – sharing the good news of the gospel with everyone around us. WINNING SOULS is the primary purpose of every believer and it is the primary reason for the church to exist. If we are not personally involved in winning souls, we are not doing the will of God – and He is not pleased!

Proverbs 11:30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.

Daniel 12:3 And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

There is a great reward in Heaven for soul winners, because evangelism is the last and most important command Jesus gave to His disciples ...

Mark 16:15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

In fact, the entire reason you were given the Holy Ghost is not just so your life would be blessed, or just so you would be able to live above sin – the Holy Ghost was given to you to make you a powerful WITNESS.

Acts 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Look at this next verse and you will see the problem that happened in the Jerusalem church – they overlooked one of God's foundation stones!

Acts 6:7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

The church was promised POWER in Acts 1:8. But the narrative contained between Acts 1:8 and Acts 6:7 covers a period of about ten years. During this time, the Jerusalem church was blessed with divine visitation, miracles of healing and holy boldness – and they grew in spite of persecution, opposition, and even internal disputes.

Their growth rate is impressive by any standard – 3000 people in Acts 2:41, 5000 men in Acts 4:4, multitudes of men and women in Acts 5:14, and even a great company of Jewish priests in Acts 6:7. But it all happened inside Jerusalem!

Jerusalem certainly enjoyed the rich blessings of the Lord during the church's first decade, and many souls within her walls did come to salvation during that span of time. But what about the 99.9% of people in the world of their day who did not live in that one city? And what about the other cultures that God specifically told them to reach?

In many of our conferences, campmeetings, conventions and church services, the attention is centered on our "Jerusalem" – that it may grow and prosper so that it may continue to minister to us! We have "received power" (the first promise of Acts 1:8) but we have not "become witnesses" (the second promise of Acts 1:8). And the second promise is more significant than the first, because the real test of any visitation of God is whether it results in evangelism.

The Jerusalem church started out in obedience to Acts 1:8, but stopped too soon. They wanted to reach out in Jerusalem – among their own kind – but they did not really want to go to the ends of the earth, or even to Samaria for that matter! They needed a complete reversal in its thinking. They wanted God to "restore again the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6) so they could sit in Jerusalem and have the nations come to them, but Jesus wanted them to leave their comfort zone!

Luke 14:23 And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

Statistics show a nearly universal trend for Christians to disconnect from unsaved people the longer they are around the church. But that's not the way the Jesus or Paul did it! They were not isolationists; they were compelled to impact their culture with the gospel.

Matthew 11:19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

1 Corinthians 9:22-23 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

But so what if the church holds these faulty concepts? So what if we are not as evangelistic as we should be? So what if we tend to have "church for the church" because it is more familiar and comfortable?

The troubling answer is found by contrasting Acts 1:8 with Acts 8:1 ...

Acts 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

The ten-year "honeymoon" was shattered with the martyrdom of Stephen and the intense persecution led by Saul of Tarsus – suddenly, disciples were being scattered everywhere. But while things grew worse in Jerusalem, great things were beginning to happen in Judea and even in Samaria. In one swift act of persecution, God had forced obedience on His church and compelled them to mobilize. Stephen's death probably resulted in more obedience to the Great Commission than any other single event in the history of the early church, and was even a major factor in the conversion of Paul.

The message here is both awesome and fearful – God loves lost people so much that He will allow anything to happen in order to reach them. God is not primarily committed to successful ministries or even great churches; He is committed to the Great Commission. If we will not "GO" then God only has two alternatives to move us from our "comfort zone" –

- PERSECUTION, to drive us out, or
- SUBSTITUTION, to find someone else who will go willingly!

When the Jerusalem church continued to resist, God eventually switched from persecution to substitution. Here is the firsthand account:

Acts 11:19-21 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

Antioch was a predominantly Gentile city, and it is inconceivable that the Christians who ended up preaching there should ignore all but a miniscule minority of Jews, assuming that they were the only ones God wanted to save. But that is exactly what they did, because their vision was limited only to the religious culture they already identified with. Thank God there was a second group (from Cyprus and Cyrene, not Jerusalem) that followed the will of God and targeted their efforts to reach the Greek majority of Antioch's population – and the hand of the Lord was with them!

This was a moment of destiny, when the church at Antioch was born. It was not just a few transplants from the Jerusalem Jewish subculture, but some sinfully irreverent, biblically illiterate Gentiles who came to know God. This moment is why the Apostolics would soon be known as those who “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6) in the first century; this moment is why there is a church at all in the twenty-first century.

Jerusalem never did know how to deal with revolutionary revivalists like the Apostle Paul, who continually jumped fences, ignored protocol, and broke tradition to win the lost. That’s why they sent him back to Tarsus to “cool off” when he first appeared in Jerusalem with wild tales of a life-changing encounter with God and wild ideas about evangelizing those pagan Gentiles. And that’s why Jerusalem never got to send out history’s greatest missionary – instead, that honour fell to the church in Antioch because they had a missionary heart.

Most churches just want to touch their Jerusalem and leave it at that. The Jerusalem church was richly blessed and doctrinally sound, but God still turned His attention to Antioch because Jerusalem overlooked one of God’s foundation stones – they would not embrace His command to witness to the world!

Jerusalem held on to their resources and blessings, but Antioch accepted that God had the right to demand of them anything or anyone He wanted to use. They accepted that the Great Commission was at the very TOP of the Lord’s priority list. Today, Great Commission churches continue to defy the status quo. No matter what they achieve they never feel like they have arrived, because there is always one more soul just beyond their borders that needs to hear about Jesus Christ.

Acts 11:25-26 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

There are really only two New Testament church models, the Jerusalem Church and the Antioch Church. We have to be one or the other – and the choice is ours. The Antioch church was full of risk-takers, change-agents, and radical revivalists. They reached for everyone and anyone.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

EVERY PERSON IS EITHER A MISSIONARY OR A MISSION FIELD!

Matthew 4:19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

IF YOU ARE NOT FISHING, THEN YOU ARE NOT FOLLOWING!

WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT EVANGELISM:

1. Evangelism should be PERSONALITY-ORIENTED.

Christians are to BE good news before they SHARE the good news.

There are many different styles of evangelism:

- Confrontational Style – Peter in Acts 2
- Intellectual Style – Paul in Acts 17
- Testimonial Style – Blind Man in John 9
- Interpersonal Style – Matthew in Luke 5
- Invitational Style – Woman at the Well in John 4
- Serving Style – Dorcas in Acts 9

2. Evangelism should be PEOPLE-ORIENTED.

An evangelistic “event” tends to rush people, but an evangelistic “process” is patient with people.

3. Evangelism should be TEAM-ORIENTED.

A person’s coming to God is like a chain with many links; we don’t have to be every link, just one link!

4. Evangelism should be ETERNITY-ORIENTED.

If one soul is worth more than the entire world, then any person we meet is incredibly valuable to God.

Colossians 4:5-6 Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

1 Peter 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

Matthew 9:37-38 Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

Do you know what Jesus did immediately after He asked His disciples to “pray for labourers”? He sent THEM out to be labourers! (Matthew 10:5)

Isaiah 6:8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.