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**When Stones Fall**

馬可福音Mark 13: 1-8 11/17/2024

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Prayer: Lord, though heaven and earth may pass away, Your Word will never fade. Once again, we humbly come before Your Word, asking the Holy Spirit to work within us. Open our ears and eyes so that we may hear and see the wonders of Your Word. Grant us the grace to understand clearly and give us the freedom to choose Your wisdom.

Today's scripture recounts Jesus leaving the temple and prophesying that it would be completely destroyed in the future. Why did He predict that this magnificent, solidly built temple, constructed with great stones, would one day be torn down and ruined? The answer can be found in the preceding passage. Jesus (Chapter 12) "rebuked the leaders for their hypocritical piety" and told the story of the widow who gave "all she had to live on"—two small coins. These two events are directly related.

The temple had become a place of hollow appearances and formalized religion, led by hypocritical leaders. The widow gave the last of her livelihood to support the temple, highlighting a system that prioritized organizational structure over people. Such a system was destined to be torn down and destroyed.

As Jesus and His disciples left the temple, they marveled at its massive construction. The disciples said, "Teacher, look! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" Jesus replied, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." Imagine how shocking Jesus’ words must have been at the time—provocative and offensive to those who supported the temple. It would have made many angry.

Humans have an insatiable desire to build ever-larger mansions and structures, often aiming higher and higher, longing to soar above. Grand buildings often symbolize power, authority, and fame. "What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" Large temples or cathedrals represent religious and cultural stability, as well as the pride of religious organizations and systems. Yet Jesus said, "Do you see these great buildings?". Remember the Tower of Babel in Genesis, built with bricks by people who said, "Come, let us build a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves..."

Many of us have seen magnificent buildings with towering spires that seem to reach the heavens. Yet, God’s calling may not always be about building upward but rather downward—about letting go, embracing spiritual surrender, and walking humbly with our feet grounded. Jesus said, *“Not one stone will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”* Bricks, cement, and marble may be strong, but nothing lasts forever. No matter how much effort we put into preserving and supporting them, the stones will eventually fall.

When the stones fall, they break the routines and norms, even causing disruption and a loss of security.

When the stones fall, people must change how they have been doing things. As the space changes, so must the people.

When the stones fall, it shakes those within. People begin to see what truly matters and what does not.

If our organizations and buildings collapse, there will inevitably be losses. What we once knew and had will no longer be the same.

When external changes occur, internal transformations also take place. This inner work is often the hardest to undertake. *“Everything will fall; everything will be disrupted.”*

Yet, when the stones fall, though everything may seem lost, there is good to be found. Through the collapse of external structures, we can often understand truths about the internal state of things—things we may have never realized before.

When the stones fall, you are forced to step outside, to deal with the external world, and to connect with others. You are called to face the outside world that God loves so deeply.

Jesus leaving one of the most significant buildings of His time symbolized His departure from the power of institutions, letting go of the central hub of influence. He freed Himself from bureaucratic constraints, moving toward the margins and the periphery. Sometimes, to fulfill a mission, one must step outside the bounds of organizations, even leaving the temple or church. We can learn from Jesus’ example of going out. He stood on the Mount of Olives, facing the temple, and challenged the oppressive power of religious systems that harmed people.

We live in a post-denominational era where mainstream churches are in decline. However, it is important to understand that Jesus did not oppose denominations as such. What He opposed were systems of oppression and any religious structures that dehumanized people. This is why He left the temple.

We must also let go of ideologies that prioritize systems over people. Throughout the Gospel of Mark, the powerful Jewish leaders kept a close eye on Jesus, rejecting Him. Yet, they failed to recognize that He was *"the stone the builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone."*

Jesus asked, *“Do you see these great buildings? Do you admire these grand structures and organizations? They will all fall.”* Why? Mark 12:38-40 gives the answer: *"Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, 39 and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. 40 They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."*

At the same time, they exploited widows, taking everything they had to live on, failing to care for them, and even robbing them of their dignity as widows.

They made long prayers for show, dressing in extravagant robes to display their status. Yet, these are not the marks of true discipleship. Following Jesus does not require outward pomp or pretentious rituals.

Jesus did not come to save organizations; He came to save people. He did not elevate religion itself or grand buildings. He never said, “Follow me, and we’ll build a magnificent structure or a great organization.” Instead, He said, *“Not one stone will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down.”*

Jesus calls us to follow Him. When we follow Him, we leave the centers of power and go outward. In stepping outside the organization, we find ourselves—and we find Jesus—because Jesus is on the outside. There, we encounter the marginalized in society, those oppressed by religious systems, and the rejected among us. We walk alongside them and with the rejected cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

Jesus wants to lead us away from lifeless organizations that resemble tombs or museums, or from hollow structures that have lost the love that once built them. Stones will fall, and sometimes they must, because when large organizations lose love and oppress people, they need to be broken and shattered.

This reminds us not to over-identify with or attach ourselves too tightly to any building or organization. We must regularly reflect and remain vigilant because when the system you’ve tied your life to collapses, you may fall with it. We are not called to give ourselves to any organization, for no organization has shed its blood for us. Sometimes organizations cause others to bleed. Instead, we dedicate ourselves to the One who shed His blood for us. Buildings do not breathe; they do not give life.

There is only one source of resurrection and life. Jesus said, *“Do you see these great buildings?”* They have no heartbeat. But the people inside—the runners, the servants, the caretakers, the cleaners, those taking out the trash, organizing chairs, or running errands—they have a heartbeat.

Sometimes, beautiful churches, large organizations, mega-churches, a hundred-person choir, or prestigious Christian universities abandon the true cornerstone. Yet the real work of sustaining these communities is often done by those who labor quietly in gratitude, those who endure misunderstandings, criticism, and blame—the weak, the marginalized, and the overlooked. They are the true stewards.

What if we recognized the person who is often-overlooked and rejected as our cornerstone? They don't look like a leader, a man who wears long robes or says long, nice prayers. Instead, they are the ones who give their bodies, strength, and lives in service to the greater community, often from positions of vulnerability. What would a community look like if it were built on the silent, marginalized individuals as its cornerstone? Would our actions and words change? What transformations would we need to make? What ideologies and service mindsets must be reexamined? Jesus asked, *"Do you see these great buildings?...Every one of them will be thrown down."* What remains when everything else is gone? What remains is the living stones, the people. As 1 Peter 2:4-6 says: *“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house”*. When the great structures and organizations of stone crumble, the cornerstone, the people, stand firm, and living stones will rise from the ruins.

The church is not a building or an organization. The church is a group of people who recognize their own shortcomings, feel their need for God, and understand what it means to be marginalized like Jesus—the rejected cornerstone. No grand or beautiful structure compares to the broken body and self-giving sacrifice of Christ.

He broke his body to become the living temple of the Holy Spirit. Jesus dismantled the inhumane system in order to build a church of God’s love and vitality. In the film *Romero*, which tells the story of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, we see a vivid example of this truth. Romero was assassinated while celebrating the Eucharist because he served the poor and gave them a voice. He once said, *“A bishop will die, but the Church of God, which is the people, will never perish.”* Christ is alive. The visible and invisible Church is His body, and He lives forever.

When the stones fall, when the great buildings and structures no longer exist—*“not one stone will be left on another…”*—we must ask ourselves: “Do we see the greatness of God’s true Church?” What we consider important and grand may need to be broken. Institutionalized systems must die for Jesus to truly live among us. May we take the rejected Savior as our cornerstone. Let us seek what truly matters in our faith: recognizing our own limitations and weaknesses, yet offering everything we have, like the vulnerable and self-giving among us, to build a living, loving Church.

The falling of stones does not matter, for it allows Jesus to become our cornerstone. It is only when the stones fall, for the sake of Christ, that we can truly know who the great cornerstone of our lives is.

No building or organization is eternal, no matter how magnificent or powerful it may seem. Let us hear the lesson Jesus taught as He approached the cross. Unable to awaken the leaders of the temple, Jesus must have felt profound sorrow and frustration. He sang a prophetic lament, foretelling the destruction of the temple, declaring that the stones must fall. If Jesus Himself was broken, it was not for His own sake alone; He came to break every oppressive power and system.

As Jesus neared the cross and prepared to leave this world, He taught His disciples—and us—to see that the temple, having lost God’s presence and failed to fulfill its mission of connecting people with God, must fall. Let us rediscover the cornerstone and turn our focus to what Jesus truly cares about: the widow who gave all she had, the orphan, the oppressed, the marginalized, and the weak. In the brokenness of humanity, among the rubble of fallen stones, the cornerstone rises and lives forever.

The Lamb who was slain is the living stone that remains. What is built upon Him is a temple filled with the Holy Spirit. The grass withers, the flowers fade, the stones fall—but the Word of God, Jesus Christ, stands forever. Amen.