

"BUILDING A LIFE"

A Sermon By

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106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
April 25, 1999

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INTRODUCTION

In a park out in California there's a rock hanging on a rope with a large sign next to it that reads:

"WEATHER STATION....CHECK THE ROCK...IF IT'S WET, IT'S RAINING. IF IT'S MOVING, IT'S WINDY. IF YOU CAN'T SEE IT, IT'S FOGGY. IF THE ROCK IS GONE, IT'S A TORNADO".

Today we check the ROCK...or better yet...to use the language of our text from First Peter, the **STONE** - the **CORNERSTONE** on which our lives are built or should be built. Reading from First Peter,

"As you come to Him - the Living Stone - rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to Him - you also, like 'living stones' are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says, 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.'" (First Peter 2: 6)

Jesus is the **CORNERSTONE**. It is familiar language to most of us. Some of you have seen the cornerstone of this church that dates back to 1837, here in the heart of the chancel area. Building on the Rock. On Jesus. Today we begin a series of three sermons and this one has to do with building a life.

THE FOUNDATION

Where does one begin building a life? You begin with the foundation. You begin where every builder begins. Yes, the foundation. The cornerstone. No building is any stronger or surer than the foundation on which it is built.

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Raise a hand if you have visited the Leaning Tower of Pisa in Italy. Built from 113 to 1372, this 12 story solid white marble structure began to lean even before it was completed. Did you know that the word "pisa" means "marshy land" which gives some clue as to why after the first three stories were completed, the ground beneath the tower began to sink. Also, its foundation is only 10 feet deep.

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Scientists are now working feverishly to keep this massive structure in place. They report that the tower moves about 1/20th of an inch each year and is now 17 feet out of plumb. It's been estimated that by the year 2007 this 810 year old tower will have tilted too far and will probably collapse. A famous, historical landmark will be gone as will millions of tourist dollars that flow from this unique structure. No building is any stronger or surer than its foundation.

Compare the Tower of Pisa with its ten-foot foundation with the foundations of those great European cathedrals some of which have foundations that go down as far as forty or fifty feet. In some instances, they form a mass of stone below the ground as great as that of the visible building above ground. To build a great life is like building a great cathedral. You start with a sure foundation.

A seminar leader was speaking to a group of business students. To drive home a point, he used an illustration and began by saying, "Okay, time for a quiz."

He then pulled out a one-gallon, wide-mouthed mason jar and set it on the table in front of the class. He produced a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar. When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked them, "Is this jar full?" Well, everyone in the class said, "Yes". "Really" said he? And he reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel and dumped some gravel in and shook the jar causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the fist-sized rocks. Again he asked, "Now, is the jar full?"

By this time the class was on to him. "Probably not" answered some of the students. "Good" he replied and reaching once again under the table he brought out a bucket of sand and started dumping the sand in and it went into all those little spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, "Is this jar full?" "No" came back the answer. Again he said, "Good". Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim. Then, looking up at the class of students, he asked, "Can you tell me the purpose of this illustration, this demonstration?"

One eager beaver in the class raised his hand and said,

"The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard, you can always fit more more things ~~into it!~~" "No" replied the speaker, "That's not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is this: If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all."

One might say that the expert was giving the class a lesson in time management. Put in the big rocks first. Make sure you have your priorities straight. Take care of the essentials before you get bogged down in the extraneous. This is a good lesson in managing time. It's also a good lesson in managing life. Put first things first. Make sure your life is built on a strong foundation.

And according to both Scripture and life's experiences, the best lives are always built on the foundation of Christ. Yes - Jesus is the CORNERSTONE. This is the testimony of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Even before Christ, Isaiah said:

"Behold I am laying 'in Zion' for a foundation a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone."

And Zechariah came along and wrote:

"From them will comethe cornerstone, the 'peg' on which all hope hangs, the Bow that wins the battle, the Ruler over the earth". (Zechariah 10: 4)

Build your life on Christ. Some may ask what does that mean in practical terms.

MAKE CHRIST THE MODEL FOR YOUR LIFE

First of all, it means to make Christ the model for your life. Draw your values from everything you know about Him. His love, His compassion, His acceptance, His forgiving spirit. Build your life on values and truths that are time-tested, those values and truths that have become universally recognized as the foundation for a lasting society, those values that flow from the life of Christ.

Several years ago Oprah Winfrey got rid of her entire wardrobe. One woman bought a part of Ms. Winfrey's four hundred dollar shoes for five dollars. Later on that same woman told Oprah she was having a difficult time raising her children on her own, but then she added,

"Sometimes when I feel I just can't make it, I go into the closet and I stand in your shoes!"

For this woman, Oprah Winfrey is a model and an inspiration. She could do worse, of course. Oprah is quite a lady. However, she could also do better. Millions of persons through the centuries have discovered that Christ is the only sure foundation. When we build our lives on Christ, we begin with Him as our model...but let's move on to a second thought.

MAKE HIM YOUR MENTOR

We also begin with Him as our mentor. Christ is not only a dead, historical figure whom we admire, He is also, through the power of the Holy Spirit, alive in our lives in the here and the now. Think of it this way. The foundation of our lives is not only a model that we copy, but a mentor who dwells within us, guiding us and encouraging us daily.

In the Grip of Grace, Max Lucado writes of his boyhood days when he and his friends would gather on the street each afternoon to play football. One dad in the neighborhood, a die-hard football buff, would sometimes join them in their play. This dad always played for whichever team was losing that day. Max Lucado writes in his book,

"His appearance in the huddle changed the whole game. He was confident, strong and most of all, he had a plan..."

The kids fired up by his leadership and emboldened by his plan, played with new determination and usually won the game!

Lucado, of course, makes the point that Jesus did the same thing for us. He came to join the losing team and His appearance in the game changed everything. He was a leader who inspired hope and confidence and courage and love in His followers. And He had a plan, too, a plan so outrageous and amazing that no one - not even His disciples - truly understood it at first. But they trusted Him as their leader and so they followed and won. And now all of His followers can be sure that they, too, are going to win this game in the final inning.

It's a wonderful analogy. We are playing the game of life. And a bigger, stronger and more confident player steps into the huddle as our ally, as our coach, our friend, our partner and makes a difference. Jesus is not only our model, but He is our Mentor, as well. One may wonder...could not other people fill that void just as well? Perhaps...up to a point, but there are areas of our lives in which no other friend is adequate.

A woman fought a long battle with cancer. Her brother, a Dr. Earl Wolf, made the trip from Missouri to Pennsylvania to attend her funeral. While there, he spent time looking through his sister's Bible and there he found this hand-written poem tucked into its pages:

"Often on the Rock I tremble, faint of heart and weak of knee,
But the steadfast Rock of Ages never trembles under me."

When you are doing battle with some of life's fiercest foes, you want more than a dead hero or even a live but inadequate friend. In so many words, you want the Rock of Ages. You want the precious Cornerstone of life on your side. A model. A Mentor who is present and powerful and can make a difference.

HE IS THE MORTAR, TOO

He is also the mortar that joins our lives with our Christian family and friends.

When you are building a life, you build it on the sure foundation of your faith, but you give added strength to that life when you form lasting relationships with people who care about you - strong relationships within families, with close friends and lasting friendships within the body of Christ, which is the Church. Notice in verse four of today's text...these words:

"As you come to Him, the 'living stone'...rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to Him...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

You and I are "living stones" of the House of God. A stack of stones lying in a field may have little or no value, but take those stones, put them on a strong foundation and join them with mortar and you can fashion them into a skyscraper or cathedral. And when we build our lives on Christ, we become a part of a very special family...the family of Christ. Thus we find help in building strong lives through our relationships with others in His family!

A closing story. In the fall of the year, a young woman by the name of Linda, was traveling alone up the rutted and rugged highway from Alberta, Canada to the Yukon. Linda didn't know that one doesn't travel to Whitehorse alone in a run-down Honda Civic and so she set off where only four-wheel drives normally venture. The first evening she found a room in the mountains near a summit and asked for a 5 A. M. "wake-up" call so she could get an early start. She couldn't understand why the clerk looked a bit surprised at her request, but as she awoke to early morning fog shrouding the mountain tops, she began to understand. Not wanting to look foolish, she got up and went down to breakfast where two truckers invited Linda to join them and since the place was so small, she felt obliged and accepted their invitation.

One of the rough truckers asked her, "Where are you headed, lady?" And she replied, "Whitehorse". The same trucker responded, "In that little Civic you're driving!" "No way, lady...this pass is dangerous in weather like this." "Well, I'm determined to try" was Linda's rather gutsy if not informed response. "Then I guess we're just going to have to HUG you" said the other trucker. With that Linda drew back and said,

"There's no way I'm going to let you touch me" she said rather angrily. "Oh, not like that" the trucker chortled. "What we mean is that we'll put one truck in front of you and one in the rear and in that way, we'll get you through the mountains."

And all that foggy morning Linda in her little Honda Civic followed the two red dots in front and had the reassurance of a big escort behind as they made their way safely through those treacherous mountain passes. She arrived safely.

CLOSING

Caught in the fog of uncertainty in our dangerous passage through life, we need on occasion to be "hugged". With some fellow Christians who know the way and can lead safely ahead of us and with a few others behind, gently encouraging us along, we, too, can pass through some of life's treacherous passages.

How do you build a successful life? You build on the rock. You build it beginning with a sure cornerstone. You build it on Christ - our model, our mentor and the mortar that joins us as believers together in a family that loves and cares....as "living stones in His holy temple".

PRAYER

Make us sensitive to Your nearness in these moments, O God, sensitive to your peace and power...your hope and healing. Wrestle with us in the hidden corners of our lives...in those areas just below the surface of our lives. And help us to build strong foundations that will stand firm in those moments of testing and temptation. In the name and spirit of Christ - the cornerstone...our model, mentor and mortar. Amen.

PARISH CONCERNS

F.

G.

OFFERING

A. Jesus said:

"It is more blessed to give than...."

In this spirit...