

"The Stones of Unbelief" —John 10:31-33

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, "The Stones of Unbelief", is John 10:31-33 → *The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone Me?" The Jews answered Him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone You but for blasphemy, because You, being a man, make Yourself God.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

I have been told by those who have traveled the Holy Land that in Jerusalem and it's surrounding vicinity stones are abundant. During our Lenten journey we have been considering the Scripture's use of stones in connection to the life and public earthly ministry of Jesus. From the description of Him as *a tested and precious cornerstone* sent from Yahweh to the descriptions of stones being used to condemn to death, stones played an important part in the faith life of God's people.

In our text stones also take a prominent place during Jesus' interaction with the Jewish religious leaders in the temple at Jerusalem. However, more

important than the stones held in their hands was their stony hearts of unbelief. Yes, Scripture also uses stones as a picture of a person being hard-hearted, that is, refusing to trust in the LORD.

Verse 31 of our text says that some Jews listening to Jesus' teaching about His Person and Work *picked up stones* of condemnation to put Him to death. Why? Why such a harsh, quick reaction to Jesus' words? In obedience to God's command in the Old Testament Scriptures. They believed it the only way to be faithful to Yahweh upon hearing such teaching!

However, while stoning a person for various sins was prescribed in the Old Testament Law, there was more to their reaction to Jesus' words and "meets the eye" . . . or shall I say "meets the ear?" The words that "triggered" these peoples' "knee jerk" reaction was Jesus' teaching about Himself.

This was certainly not the first time the Jewish leaders revealed their desire to kill Jesus. Another incident was when Jesus healed a paralytic. Why would they want to kill Him for healing a paralytic? That is hard-hearted! They accused Him of disobeying the Law by healing—thus working—on the Sabbath Day. Jesus answered them in John 5:17-18 → *"My Father is working until now, and I am working."* This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. The words

in the present context which pushed these Jewish leaders to “take up arms” with stones against Jesus spoke about **His being God** → *I and the Father are one.* (cf. John 10:30)

Thus, they simply strove to be faithful to the LORD’s Word stated in Leviticus 24:16 → *Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death.* Blaspheming *the name of* Yahweh included claiming for oneself characteristics or attributes which belong to Him alone, and especially **claiming to be equal with God!** When Jesus asked them the reason for their stoning Him the *Jews answered Him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone You but for blasphemy, because You, being a man, make Yourself God.* (cf. verse 33)

While it may appear that the stones in these peoples’ hands were stones of faithfulness to the command of Yahweh given in the Old Testament Scriptures they were actually stones of unbelief. In their effort to “figure out” Who this Jesus character was, many dynamics attributed to their assessment, most of which were filtered through self-centered, self-serving desires and perceptions. Such perceptions could have included Jesus not meeting up to their expectations of who they wanted the Messiah to be—a political King to restore the fortunes of Israel. Included may have been His being a threat to their powerful positions and popularity amongst the people. Nobody likes to

lose control of their positions and influence in life, especially if it serves “the good life” you desire! Simply put, Jesus just doesn’t do for me what I think He should do for me!

People are constantly defining God, Jesus, a relationship with God, spirituality and so forth on the basis of their life experiences. Too often they assess their negative experiences in light of how **they think** God should act on their behalf or what **they think** God should not allow to happen in their life or what **they think** God should be doing for them. Unfortunately, defining a “relationship to God” in this way leads to very self-centered, self-serving conclusions which ignore the revelation of God’s written Word.

The revelation of that Word defines God not by how He should act for you but rather how He has acted for you **in the Person & Work of Jesus!** Romans 1:16-17 says *the gospel . . . is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes . . . For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”* The written Word of God is the means through which the Holy Spirit will create faith in Christ, not proof for you. Faith brings salvation while proof bring self-righteousness.

Defining God according to your own life experiences also leads to creating a god in your own image. Commitment to this “god” is revealed by upholding

those Scriptures which reinforce your creation and ignoring those which do not. This is evident in the reactions of these unbelieving Jews in our text. While the Jewish religious leaders upheld the Law by picking up stones in obedience to it they rejected the revelation of God's Word by refusing to see Jesus' Person and Work in light of the Prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. You choose to obey only those parts of Scripture which serve you imagination of God.

Jesus' works were a very important part of that revelation. In Jesus' question in verse 32 of our text He reveals the source of His works: *I have shown you many good works **from the Father**; for which of them are you going to stone Me?* Those good works were evidence of His Person and Work. They connected Him to the Old Testament promises about the coming Savior. In Matthew 11:4-6 John the Baptizer's disciples asked Jesus if He was the promised Savior. *Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by Me."* He pointed them to His works which pointed them to the written promises. Faith is always based upon the written Word of God!

When we encounter these written Scriptures the Holy Spirit creates a

“solid” faith in Jesus as true God and true Man. Even more than simply that knowledge of Who He is, it reveals the purpose of His Person & Work as **completely** serving your redemption from sin! It reveals Him existing and functioning for a bunch of hard-hearted sinners who figure they have no use for Him! The stones of unbelief are released from the hand when you realize that the issue is not Who you think Jesus is but rather what Jesus has done to deal with your sin once and for all. He lived obediently to those written Scriptures on your behalf. He sacrificed Himself as the perfect satisfaction for the judgment which your sin deserved. He rose from the dead so you can continue new life experiences on the Last Day in the new heavens and new earth! It was all **for you!**

Jesus came to deal with our stony hearts, lost in sin and rebellion. He came to create a new heart in a new relationship with the LORD on the basis of His Person and Work **as revealed in the Scriptures**. A “solid” faith can only be evidenced by trusting in the Person and Work of the Christ, **revealed as true God and true Man in the Scriptures**. At this point of submission in repentance and trust faith grasps the Stone, Jesus Christ, which gives identity, meaning and the Cornerstone direction to your life now and eternally. Amen.

This is what the Sovereign Lord says:

*“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation;
the one who trusts will never be dismayed. (Isaiah 28:16 NIV)*