
WHAT MASSIVE STONES

“What massive stones and what magnificent buildings.”

- If you’ve ever been to the Holy Land, you know just how big those stones really are.
 - These pictures show the steps that Mary and Joseph climbed to bring baby JESUS for dedication and circumcision,
 - and the wall leading to the temple.
 - You can see how large the stones are.
 - This is the southern wall of the Temple of JESUS’ day.
 - You can see what large stones were there when JESUS brought HIS disciples to Jerusalem.
 - Massive. Magnificent.
 - No wonder the disciples were in awe. I certainly was.
 - And suddenly, this story made sense, and I completely understood the astonishment of the disciples who came from the little towns of Galilee.

“What massive stones.”

- We love the big and the bold, don’t we?
- The disciples are no different than we are, and we are no different than the disciples back then.
 - While we tend to trust in our two thousand years of insightfulness and advancement, or insist that the disciples just aren’t as wise or experienced as we are,
 - JESUS calls out the truth of our humanity—both for HIS past and present disciples.
 - Regardless of time, regardless of proximity to JESUS, regardless of so-called progress, disciples across the ages are attracted to splendor and grandeur.

What is the attraction of “massive stones”? What do they represent?

- Power and wealth?
- Achievement and ease of life?
- Accomplishment and attention?
 - We are drawn to the biggest and the best, the most influential, the most powerful, the most...well...anything.
- We may think we are more experienced, knowledgeable, or forward-thinking than the disciples, but when it comes to these kinds of things, we are not.
- We may know different attractions, manifestations, and incarnations of magnificence, but our reactions are no different.

Consider this building.

- Our massive stones are meant to draw the attention and wonder of onlookers.
- Our massive stones are put in place to attract potential members.
- Our massive stones are even constructed so as to entice the dedication and awe of those who worship here.
 - Yet, in the process, we turn these massive stones into the temples we worship—not temples to GOD, but temples to the things that this world says matter the most.

Consider the great temples that have come and gone—temples for worship, again, of power, wealth, accomplishment, and entertainment.

- *“Do you see all these great buildings,” replied JESUS. “Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”*

How many of our massive stone temples have been thrown down or set aside to make room for other temples?

- Travel to the Holy Land, or Italy, or Greece, or virtually any other place in the world, and you will find massive stones that were once great buildings that have now become remains or ruins:

- the Colosseum, the Parthenon, the Palace of Versailles, Stonehenge, the Pyramids, the Great Wall of China, the city of Pompeii, the Temple in Jerusalem, and so on.

- Yet, if you go to those cities named in the Bible—Corinth, Ephesus, Phillipi, and so on—you will find that not one of those congregations still exists.

- Reading JESUS’ words to His disciples, I couldn’t help but think of the World Trade Center and how it fell on September 11, 2001.

“Do you see all these great buildings,” replied JESUS. “Not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down.”

- What massive stones.

And I believe our thinking is the same regarding our congregations.

- Membership numbers, innovative programs and ministries, stewardship programs, transformative preaching, Christian education, building projects—there is no end to what massive stones we erect.

- We measure our success by the size of these massive stones.

Often, following a presentation or teaching session at another church, I am approached by one or several of those attending, and their first question is, “How big is your church?”

- I usually respond, “About a quarter of a block.”

- Yet, it seems that my credibility is based not as much on my knowledge or the content of my lessons but more on how massive the stones of the membership numbers of the church I serve.

Our faith, our religious life, and our churches are not free from the want for prestige, from the desire for greatness and grandness, for a yearning for majesty beyond comparison.

- In fact, when it comes to faith and how we do church, even congregations are susceptible to the measures of success and the gauges of greatness set by our society.

- How many people attend your church?

- How large is your budget?

- How many children participate at your church?

- Why do we look to these measurements to determine success?

- Is it insecurity?

- Is it a belief that church is just one big competition?

- Is it a sense that GOD cares more about size, wealth, and programs than faithfulness and service to others?

When the church council of Peace Lutheran in Lompoc adopted the slogan, “The Little Church with the Big Heart,” some were unhappy.

- Though they liked the Big Heart part of the slogan, they didn’t like being labeled “the Little Church.”

Yet JESUS often chose the insignificant, the lesser, the outcast, and the small as the ones to include in HIS ministry and to carry HIS message of GOD’s unconditional grace.

- Fishermen, a tax collector, doubters, prostitutes, those who would panic and run, those who swore—these are not the massive stones by the measure of our society.
 - Nevertheless, JESUS built a church on the foundation of the massive stones of the faith of these individuals—a church that has continued for 2,000 years.
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On the brink of HIS arrest and death—strange to talk about this time of year, but that’s where we are in Mark’s gospel—JESUS’ lesson to HIS disciples—to us—is significant.

- As JESUS’ ministry comes to a close in Mark and as we approach CHRIST THE KING Sunday next week, it would be all too easy to fall back into comparing JESUS’ Kingdom with those of this world.
 - It would be easy to be convinced that bigger and better are the marks of GOD’s church.
 - It would be easy to set aside the fact that GOD’s criteria for success in ministry have never been bigger and better, but rather mustard seed faith.
 - GOD cares about not the biggest, or the best, or the you-fill-in-the-blank-est, but instead the commitment of belief.
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One of the largest attended services of the church year is Easter, but one of the least attended is Good Friday.

- We like the pageantry, the joy, the flowers, and the message of Easter—the success of JESUS overcoming death.
 - But the failure of JESUS—His arrest, trial, torture, and death—we seem to want no part of such tragedy.
 - Still, the massive stone of the resurrection finds its foundation on the bedrock of the crucifixion and the humiliation of JESUS.
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“What massive stones” is something we are quick to notice, but we are not as quick to ask what stands behind the perceived greatness.

- Yet when we explore the scriptures, we find a truth that stands in contrast and contradiction to the monuments and temples of the world.
 - It is not in great cathedrals that GOD’s Kingdom is found, and the gospel of GOD’s unconditional love and grace is best proclaimed.
 - Rather, it is in the witness of both the words and actions of those who become the massive stones of the church.
 - Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, C.S. Lewis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and so many others who were not wealthy or powerful, yet their impact on the Kingdom is eternal.
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We and the disciples of JESUS’ day are not all that different.

- We look around us and stand in great awe at the monuments of human construction.
- But our commitment to JESUS calls us to focus on and live in a world where such temples are not the things that truly impress us.
- Instead, we are called to celebrate the widow and her two coins,
 - and a man who left his homeland for a distant Promised Land,
 - and the outcast woman who, after meeting JESUS at the well, brought her entire village to believe in the SAVIOR,
 - and so many others whose lives stand as examples of faith for all who call JESUS LORD.
 - It is on the faith of people like these and people like you and me who come each week to grow in our discipleship so that we might go out to be the ones through which others come to know the LORD.
 - It is through the common and the lowly and the everyday people—you and me—who seek to live out our faith every day that the church is built.
 - What massive stones!