Isaiah 43:16–21

**Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, 17who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: 18“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. 19Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. 20The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, 21the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.**

Philippians 3: 8–14

**Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.**

**12Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**

Luke 20:9–20

**And he began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. 10When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. 12And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. 13Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’ 14But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.’ 15And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When they heard this, they said, “Surely not!” 17But he looked directly at them and said, “What then is this that is written: “‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’? 18Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”**

**19The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people. 20So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.**

Wisdom

Wisdom is an interesting thing in that true wisdom is not restricted to particular cultures or languages.  True wisdom is cross-cultural in every sense of the word.  Sure, it may need to be translated into a different language; it may need to be brought in context in order for it to make sense to someone else, but the core meaning is still there.  The meaning remains the same no matter what language or culture or era it is spoken in.  For instance, the golden rule isn't just restricted to contemporary English-speaking Westerners.  We could go anywhere in the world and find that the golden rule, do unto others as you would want them to do unto you, is known by people of every race, creed, social standing, and culture.  They may say it differently from us, but in the end they're saying the same exact thing, and they've been saying it for a very long time.  As you know, I have lived in many different cultures so another good example of wisdom is; If mama isn't happy, no one is happy!  This may be said a million different ways from one culture to the next, but there has never been a husband at any time in history who doesn't understand this wisdom!

As I was going through the Gospel lesson for today, I was continually reminded of the universal reality of wisdom.  You may not know this, but many cultures have taken Christ's words here in verse 18 about falling on a stone or being crushed by the stone and adapted them to their own folk wisdom and proverbs.  For instance, the Jews give credit to a rabbi living in Jerusalem around the mid to late 100's for his proverb concerning the same Old Testament scripture that Christ had quoted in today's lesson about the rejected and exalted cornerstone: the rabbi said; "If a stone falls on a pot, woe to the pot.  If a pot falls onto the stone, woe to the pot.  Either way, woe to the pot."  This same saying is recounted in African and Islamic culture as well, only the Muslims substitute an egg for the pot.  "…Either way, woe to the egg."

So what’s Jesus really saying here? You may think it’s wisdom like; “Hey, whether you fall on a stone or the stone falls on you, the results are going to be bad.  So whatever the stones are in your life, don't mess with them.  You will lose.  The stone will win."  Unfortunately, that's not what Jesus is saying here.  What Jesus says quite clearly that "everyone who falls on the stone will be dashed to pieces, but everyone on whom the stone falls will be crushed."  Notice the all-inclusive language of "everyone." You might think that doesn’t include us Christians because we build our houses on Christ, the solid rock.  We're neither dashed to pieces nor crushed because of sinful pride and hard-headed unbelief.  So obviously 'everyone' in this instance obviously doesn't mean 'everyone;' it means 'everyone else' who are not faithful Christians.  Because remember, Paul said that the message of Christ crucified is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.  That's obviously not us.  We're believers.  We're good faithful Christians!"

Well, Paul did say that the message of Christ crucified was a stumbling block, but that's not the word used here in this text.  I’ve talked about the word for stumbling block before, in Greek it’s skandalizo, scandal.  That makes sense, doesn't it?  Salvation through Jesus Christ crucified would be scandalous and blasphemous to a group of people who wrongly believed that the Messiah would be a great political and military leader who would make life here on earth a veritable paradise for them.  But as I said, that's not the word Jesus uses in today's lesson.  In this Gospel text Jesus specifically uses the word pipto, which means "to fall upon," and He uses it in both scenarios, i.e., the person falls upon the rock and is broken or the rock falls upon the person and crushes them.  So what Jesus says here is that everyone, in one way or another, will encounter Christ, the Rock of our salvation, and the result will be brokenness.

Is it really God's will that everyone is to be broken and crushed?  There’s two parts to this question. First, God does not desire that everyone be crushed.  You see, that word for crushed is used by Christ elsewhere to speak of the winnowed sinful chaff that is separated from the good wheat.  The sinful chaff, the crushed dusty remnant separated from the good wheat on the threshing floor, is winnowed right into the fire.  But always remember: God desires that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, His truth.  It is not His will that some be saved while some go to hell. However, it is precisely God's Will that everyone fall upon Him and be broken into a million pieces.  There is a difference between being crushed and being broken, a huge difference.  It is precisely God's will that neither you nor anyone else can put you back together again after His Word breaks you; that is, anyone but Him alone.

You see, that's exactly what God's Word of Law and Gospel does, and it does it in that exact order, all the time.  This is His good and gracious will.  The Law comes into our lives, and like Humpty Dumpty, that Word of Law pushes us off our proud, arrogant, sinful perches and breaks us.  God's Law exposes our sin for what it is.  We often attempt to justify ourselves passing these sins off as something "less than sin," but God's Word cuts through all that foolishness.  His Word of the Law confronts and breaks us into irreparable pieces.

Now notice also the future aspect in Christ's words?  Not everyone is immediately broken into pieces when they encounter Christ and His Word and His Will, are they?  Some people flat out reject Him.  Some people refuse to ever let God's Word break them down, preferring instead to arrogantly and proudly form and fit God to meet their wants, their desires, and their opinions on how things should be.

They hear what Christ is saying.  They know what He says, but unlike Humpty Dumpty, they encounter God's Word and they hold on tight to their foolish, sinful little perch.  They refuse to be broken down.  However, just because God's Word hasn't broken them yet or crushed them yet doesn't mean that it won't at sometime in the future.  Everyone, at one time or another, will encounter the truth of Christ, the Rock of our salvation.

But here's the thing: God doesn't leave us on this side of eternity irreparably broken, dead and miserable.  Through His life-giving Gospel, God resurrects us; that is, He puts us back together anew, not again, but anew, exactly the way He wants.

This is a new and sanctified life. We don’t just climb right back up on our sinful wall, acting like the sinful, self-righteous Humpty Dumptys who justly deserve temporal and eternal punishment.  That's why I said that God doesn't put us back together again.  He doesn't want the old self restored.  He wants the new resurrected self.

The new life that is lived in the joy of our justification, the new sanctified life in Christ, is a life that now desires to do God's will, not to be saved, but because we are saved, by Christ alone.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, as we return to our Lenten theme of repentance, we all realize how broken we are. We've all been dashed upon the Rock of Righteousness.  There is nothing outside of Christ that can repair the shattered pieces of our fallen sinful life.  However, in true, faithful repentance, we, as baptized children of promise, call out to God from our brokenness, asking Him to be merciful to us because of Christ Jesus.  That’s what God does, and more.  Not only does He show us mercy and forgiveness in our broken sinfulness, but He truly does put us back together anew, in Christ, making us truly alive and declaring us to be His precious treasure, so precious that He was willing to ransom His own Son's life in exchange.

This Gospel reality is yours and mine and all who've been broken and put back together anew in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

AMEN