

SALVATION IS FOUND ONLY IN JESUS

Acts 4:1-31

Key Verse: 4:12

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

In the last passage, Peter and John healed a crippled beggar in the name of Jesus. Peter said to the man, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” The man, who had been crippled from birth, got up and walked. Not only did he walk, he jumped around and praised God. He was healed both physically and spiritually. The name of Jesus has power to heal and power to save. In the name of Jesus, spiritually sick men and women can be healed completely and become happy people of mission.

In today’s passage, opposition to the gospel arises. The religious leaders try to stop the apostles from preaching in the name of Jesus. But it does not work. Instead, the apostles become stronger in faith and their message becomes more clear and absolute. When opposition arose, the Holy Spirit worked even more powerfully. So in effect, as a result of opposition, the gospel spread more rapidly. Today, may God help us learn the gospel spirit and absolute message of early Christians.

First, but the number of men grew (1-4).

While Peter and John were speaking to the people about the power of Jesus’ name to heal the sick, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them. They did not saunter up casually to listen in on the message. Probably, they surrounded the apostles in an intimidating manner. The priests, with codified editions of standards for temple conduct, shook bony, disapproving fingers in the apostles’ faces. The captain of the temple guard, with a half dozen heavily armed policemen on each side, put his hands on his hips and stood there like Clint Eastwood staring at the apostles as if he would rather kill them than look at them. The Sadducees, who had money and political clout, paced about with scowling faces, muttering threats.

Why were these people so upset with the apostles? Look at verse 2. “They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.” First of all, it was because the apostles were teaching the people. The apostles were mere laymen. They had been fishermen, tax collectors and the like. They had no license, no education and no money. They were not even from Jerusalem; they were from Galilee. But they were teaching the people in the temple courts. And their words had spiritual power and authority. Peter’s message had summarized the whole Bible precisely and pointed to the Christ who suffered, died and rose again for the salvation of mankind. It challenged people to repent and believe and receive the Holy Spirit in their hearts. It was a masterpiece message from heaven above. Ordinary people were hanging on his words like thirsty deer who found the springs of water in the desert. Their souls were revived from death and brought back to life again.

However, the religious leaders were disturbed when laymen taught the Bible. They wanted to maintain a certain mystique that they were solely qualified to interpret the Bible. It gave them an exclusive privilege to teach the people. When these ordinary men, Peter and John, taught the word of God powerfully and effectively, it shattered their mystique to pieces. They could not but say again and again, “Disturbing! Disturbing! You guys are disturbing the peace!” Here we must realize that laymen who

know Christ are better Bible teachers than religious professionals who are full of unbelief. In the news these days we find that the Anglican Church appointed a practicing homosexual to be the bishop in their New Hampshire diocese. This shocked Anglican Church members in third world countries who expect moral decency from church leaders. On the other hand, at our recent summer Bible conference, young disciples of Jesus were appointed as group Bible study leaders. It is not because they have a lot of theological knowledge, but because they follow Jesus from their hearts. They are the real Bible teachers in our nation. May God use them to speak his word in our campuses this fall.

The religious leaders were also disturbed because the apostles were proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. The power of death has had a stranglehold on men's thoughts and attitudes down through the generations. Through the power of death, Satan rules men's hearts with fear and fatalism and makes them slaves of darkness (Heb 2:15). In fatalism, men become hedonistic and say, "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." Party-going people are all under the power of death. At our summer conference, we heard a song called "One Shot" by the rapper Eminem. It expressed the anger, frustration and selfishness of men under the power of death. Men under the power of death want to hold on to something. Some, like the Sadducees did, grab money and power. Others grab small pleasures. Still others grab a boyfriend or girlfriend. Before the coming of Christ, nothing could challenge the power of death. But Christ rose from the dead. Christ conquered death by the power of God Almighty. It was a knockout punch to the devil and to the power of darkness in this world. The resurrection of Christ is the best news to anybody, no matter who he may be. The resurrection of Christ brings eternal life and opens the way to the kingdom of God for those who believe. But it requires repentance, that is, turning away from this perishing world to the living God. When men don't repent their love of the world, by default they side with Satan and hate the message of resurrection. The Sadducees, who loved the world, wanted death to be the end of everything. When Peter and John proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection of the dead, they were greatly disturbed.

The temple police seized Peter and John and put them in handcuffs. Then they hauled them away like criminals and put them in jail overnight. This would give them time to organize a full meeting of the Sanhedrin the next day. Besides, the religious leaders had fancy dinner parties to attend and the temple guards had to get home and watch their favorite TV show. So they put the apostles in jail overnight. They thought they could subdue the gospel message with their establishment power. They were greatly mistaken. Look at verse 4. "But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand." Many who saw Peter and John taken away in handcuffs believed the gospel in their hearts. In fact, the number of believing men grew to about five thousand—the church nearly doubled in size. Where the gospel is working, opposition arises. But this opposition will not stop the gospel. The gospel flourishes in the midst of opposition.

Second, salvation is found only in Jesus (5-12).

Peter and John had probably never been charged with more than a parking ticket before. Now they had to spend a night in jail as "political criminals." The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem to put them on trial (5). The Pharisees had now joined the Sadducees in a united attack on the apostles. They say that politics makes strange bedfellows, and that today's enemy is tomorrow's friend. Usually the Pharisees and Sadducees were opposed to one another. But in attacking the apostles, they got together like old friends. Arrayed against the apostles were the top men of power and influence in Israel. If they had a People's magazine ranking of the 100 most influential men in Israel, 98 of them were probably there to side against the apostles, with only Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea missing. In verse 6 Luke names four of the men against the apostles, including Annas the high priest and

Caiaphas. They were the very men who had tried and condemned Jesus to death, and then manipulated the system to crucify an innocent man. These men of political influence had the apostles brought before them and began to question them, "By what power or what name did you do this?" It was a most intimidating venue for the apostles to be in. It seems that the religious leaders wanted to use the same strategy against the apostles that they had used against Jesus. They could not deny the obvious miracle that was done. So they wanted to discredit the power source of the apostles. They probably wanted to call the apostles demon-possessed. The danger was real. How did the apostles respond?

Look at verses 8-12. "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: 'Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone." Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.'"

Luke says that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and the Spirit of power and wisdom. The Holy Spirit drives out all fear from our hearts and fills us with the love of God. Romans 8:15 says, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'" When Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, he was courageous. He could overcome the situation and render glory to God. The Holy Spirit even gave him a sense of humor to deal with the situation joyfully. The very official looking religious leaders, in all seriousness, were trying to bring charges against the apostles. What was the charge? They couldn't say. So Peter began by mentioning it. It was for showing kindness to a crippled man. What a ridiculous charge!

There was more than humor there. The Holy Spirit wants to glorify Jesus. Look at verse 10 again. "...then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed." Peter knew he risked punishment, even death. But Peter boldly testified that Jesus Christ of Nazareth healed the crippled beggar. It was not by human courage that Peter did this. It was by the power of the Holy Spirit. During trials, the Risen Christ pours out his Spirit on his servants all the more. So we need not worry about facing trials. Jesus said in Mark 13:11, "Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit."

Peter did more than answer the charge. He used this opportunity to witness to them about Jesus. He quoted Psalm 118:22, which Jesus had also quoted in the parable of the tenants in all three synoptic gospels. Look at verse 11. "He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'" The religious leaders wanted to build their own kingdoms on earth with money and political power. When Jesus' pure and holy life challenged their corruption, they were overcome by self-righteous pride and put Jesus to death. They wanted to throw Jesus away. But God raised him from the dead. God made him the capstone of his redemptive history. Jesus fulfilled the words of the prophets from Samuel to Micah. Jesus fulfilled the covenant promise made to Abraham. Jesus is the descendant of David who reigns forever on David's throne. Jesus fulfilled the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. When God raised Jesus from the dead, he made him King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus Christ is the crowning glory of the work and history of God.

Peter concluded with verse 12. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Here, Peter goes beyond any previous statement to declare that only Jesus saves. It is one thing to say that Jesus saves. It is another thing to say that only Jesus saves. Yet this is exactly what Peter said. Only Jesus saves. Peter had an absolute conviction of faith that only Jesus saves. No doubt, this came from Peter's spiritual understanding of the Bible. The whole Bible focused on Jesus Christ. He is the way God provided for man's salvation. There is no other. Jesus himself said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me." When Peter said that only Jesus saves, he was challenging the religious leaders and all Israel that without Jesus they would perish in their sins and go to eternal condemnation. When Peter said that only Jesus saves, he was sharing his personal assurance that he had the kingdom of God and eternal life as the gift of God through Jesus Christ.

We must realize the absoluteness of the gospel message. We live in a multi-cultural society of many religions. Most people think that to make democracy work in this environment we must tolerate anybody and everybody as though everyone's idea is of equal value. But the Bible says that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation for men. This means that Buddha cannot save men. Mohammed cannot save men. Confucius, Socrates, Freud—none of them can save men. Technology cannot save men, nor can education or money. Only Jesus Christ can save men from their sins and give eternal life. Only Jesus came to this world as God in the flesh. Only Jesus defeated the devil in direct combat. Only Jesus shed his blood on the cross for sinners and only the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God is sufficient by God's standard to atone for the sin of the world. Only Jesus rose from the dead. Only Jesus saves. This is God's truth. Many Americans say they are Christians and yet become squeamish when asked if Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. Many want to be so tolerant that they accept witches, wizards and devil worshippers as children of God. We need Peter's conviction that only Jesus saves. Let's read verse 12. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Third, we must obey the living God (13-22).

When the religious leaders heard Peter's clear message that only Jesus saves, they were shocked. They saw real courage in Peter and John. They saw divine wisdom in Peter and John. They saw true spiritual insight in Peter and John. It was not a result of formal education, but of being with Jesus. They began to see that Jesus' disciple raising ministry had produced many changed men who had the image of Jesus. They killed Jesus. But now many little Jesuses were rising up to take his place. The religious leaders became desperate to stamp out this movement. They probably wanted to kill the apostles on the spot. However, they could see the man who had been healed by Jesus standing right there. Maybe he was doing jumping jacks, running in place and dancing an Argentine tango with John. They could not suppress the truth that a miracle had been done. So they tried to command Peter and John not to speak or teach in Jesus' name any more.

Look at verses 19-20. "But Peter and John replied, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.'" Peter and John saw beyond the corrupted religious leaders in front of them. They saw the living God. They knew their mission came from the living God. It was to be Jesus' witnesses in Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth. When they saw the living God, they could decide to obey God with life commitment. When they saw the living God, they did not feel it was they who were on trial; it was the religious leaders. The apostles have the image of Moses and of Jesus (Heb 11:27; Lk 22:69). During the summer Bible conference, many high school students met the living God in Jesus for the first time. Soon they must go

back to their schools where peer pressure awaits. They do not go alone. The living God goes with them. May the living God enable them to serve God like the apostles.

Fourth, enable us to speak your word boldly (23-31).

The religious leaders had no choice but to let Peter and John go. Peter and John went back and told their fellow believers everything that had happened. The believers were not fearful. Nor did they make light of the threat. They said, "Let's pray about it." Look at verse 24. "When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. 'Sovereign Lord,' they said, 'you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.'" They remembered Psalm 2, "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One." They were sure that God is the Sovereign Ruler of the world and history. The work of rebels would be in vain. God's will for world salvation would be accomplished. God's kingdom would come. Their gospel faith was rooted in the sovereignty of God.

Then they prayed, "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus" (29,30). They prayed to speak the word of God with great boldness and for the healing of many to the glory of Christ. The believer's prayer pleased God. God shook the place where they were meeting. He filled them all with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak the word of God boldly. We must pray like them.

In this passage we learn that only Jesus saves. We must have this conviction of faith in our hearts. With this conviction and the power of the Holy Spirit through prayer, God can use us to speak the word of God boldly on Chicago area campuses in this fall semester.