Saved Only by the Name of Jesus

Acts 4:1-22
Key Verse: Acts 4:12
“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

Peter, John and the healed beggar were in the Temple and a large crowd gathered around them at Solomon’s Colonnade where Peter began to preach. While the book of Acts records powerful sermons, amazing miracles, and explosive church growth, it also reminds us that we are in the midst of a spiritual war. For whenever believers seek to impact their culture, whenever the gospel is preached with power, and people’s lives are changed, the enemy stirs up fierce opposition. And we’re going to see the situation get pretty nasty for the apostles.

In verses 1-4, we find that Peter is interrupted right in the middle of his sermon. Take a look. “The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. **2** They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. **3** They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. **4** But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.” The apostles couldn’t stop talking about Jesus. After all they had experienced they were overflowing with exhilaration. And as they spoke in the temple courts it caused a great stir drawing huge numbers of people. Finally the crowd caught the attention of the religious leaders who came over to see what was going on. The priests were mostly made up of a group called the Sadducees. They were a small, but powerful, Jewish religious sect that didn’t believe in a bodily resurrection, nor angels or demons. They were mostly wealthy aristocrats that were loyal to the Romans so that they could maintain their status quo. They also rejected the idea of a coming Messiah, believing that he was more of an ideal, not a person who would intervene in history. Also they didn’t want anyone making a claim to the throne of Israel because that would upset the Romans and shake their powerbase. Now along with the priests came the captain of the Temple guard. He was also a high-ranking Sadducee, second in authority only to the high priest himself, and as the leader of the guards it was his job to make sure that order was kept around the Temple. The captain was probably leading the Temple guard that arrested Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Lk 22:52) So the apostles would have been familiar with who he was and this meant that the priests weren’t fooling around. Something was going to go down.

Imagine the Sadducees, who didn’t believe in the resurrection of the dead, standing there listening to Peter claim that Jesus was raised from the dead. No wonder they were disturbed because Peter and John were refuting one of their fundamental beliefs and thus were threatening their authority as religious teachers. They thought that when they had Jesus killed, their troubles would be over, so it disturbed them to find Jesus’ followers teaching the people, they shouldn’t be teaching, and what was worse it was right here in the Temple. So they sent the temple guard into action and seized

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Peter and John like the agents in the Matrix and had them thrown into jail for the night. Even though Israel was under Roman rule, the Sadducees had almost unlimited power to do what they wanted on the Temple grounds. Thus, they were able to arrest Peter and John for no reason other than teaching something that they didn't believe in.

What's amazing to me is that even though the religious leaders were able to arrest God's servants, they still couldn't stop the spread of God's word. The miraculous healing of the crippled man in such a visible place, combined with the powerful preaching of the apostles, sent spiritual shock waves throughout Jerusalem. This brought the total number of believers up to about 5,000 men, not counting women and children. This was evidence that God was using Peter mightily, for at his first sermon, three thousand people had become believers. (2:41) I read that estimates of Jerusalem's population at this time ranged from 25-85,000. The historian, Josephus recorded that there were about 6,000 Pharisees in Palestine, so 5,000 men would have been a significant percentage of the population. There was definitely something out of the ordinary going on.

What happened next, take a look at verses 5-7. "The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. **6** Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. **7** They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?" The rulers, elders, and teachers of law made up the Jewish council. This was the exact same council that had condemned Jesus to death. (Lk 22:66) The council, which was a majority of Sadducees, consisted of seventy members plus the high priest, and they acted as the ruling government of Israel. They handled any local problems and religious questions but still had to work under Rome's supervision. For more serious crimes that carried the death penalty, they had to get Rome's approval. That's why they took Jesus to Pilate. (Lk 23:1) And now Jesus' followers stood before this council, just as he had.

Annas had been deposed as high priest by the Romans, who then had appointed Caiaphas, his son-in-law, in his place. But because the Jews considered the office of high priest a lifetime position, they still considered Annas as the one with real power. John, Alexander, and other relatives of the high priest were also there, supporting the power base of the high priest's office. They were the very men who had tried and condemned Jesus to death, and then manipulated the system to crucify an innocent man. (Jn 18:24, 28) They were not pleased that "the man whom they thought they had sacrificed for the good of the nation" (Jn 11:49-51) had followers who were just as persistent as he had been. So they brought Peter and John in before them and asked, "by what power, or in whose name, they had healed the man?" To me their question is an interesting one because it basically implies that there is more than one power that can heal someone. Was it by the power of God or with the power of evil?

This was a very scary situation for them to be in. He was powerless, fearful and intimidated. Put yourself in this shoes for a moment. They were arrested by the 2nd most powerful man in their country, and now they are standing before the leader of their country, surrounded by his posse.

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That'd be like being brought in by the head of the FBI, and you had to stand before Obama and the Senate. These were the big dogs coming after them, with extreme pressure. And now it seems that they wanted to use the same strategy against the apostles that they had used to condemn Jesus. They couldn't deny the obvious miracle, so instead they wanted to discredit the power source of the apostles. Maybe even accuse them of using some kind of dark magic. The danger was real. How did they respond? Take a look at verses 8-10. "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! **9** If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, **10** 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." Luke says that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God, who has power and wisdom. The Holy Spirit drives out all fear from our hearts and fills us with courage. Romans 8:15 says, "The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." Because of the Holy Spirit Peter wasn't afraid, he even had a sense of humor to deal with the situation. The very stern looking officials were trying to bring a serious charge against the apostles. But what was it? Ha! They couldn't say. So Peter does it for them. You brought us it because we showed kindness to a crippled man. How ridiculous was that? But the point here is, that when Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, he wasn't afraid, he became courageous. He could overcome his fear and give glory to God. And as he stood before a room of condemning, scowling faces, the Holy Spirit in him began to speak through him. There are two kinds of courage: reckless courage that's unaware of the danger that it faces, and the courage that well aware the danger and yet stands strong. That's Peter and he knows exactly what stands before him because we see it in his word as he clearly and courageously proclaims the name of Jesus to the very group of men that murdered Jesus.

But Peter's message had more than humor, "Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone." Here Peter quotes a familiar Old Testament passage from Psalm 118:22, however he gives it new meaning. Most Jews regarded their nation, Israel, as the stone chosen by God but rejected by other nations. Peter realized that Jesus had in fact referred to himself as the stone that the builders rejected. Once again we see how Peter is connecting the dots from prophetic scripture to Jesus and also from history to the present day. The cornerstone was the most important stone in a building, because it was used as the standard to make sure that all the other stones were straight and level. So the builder had to make sure they got the right stone. And Israel's leadership, like the builders looking for an appropriate cornerstone, tossed Jesus aside because, to them, he didn't seem to have the right qualifications. They wanted a political king, not a spiritual one. Peter made it clear that the builders were the Jewish religious leaders. Even though the religious leaders had succeeded in their plans to kill Jesus, still God's plans would not be hindered. The rejected stone has become the cornerstone and he sits at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. And one day, Jesus will come again as King of kings and Lord of lords.

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The resurrected Jesus had already healed the crippled man physically. That same Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, will heal all people spiritually. Verse 12 says, “ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Peter goes beyond any previous statement to declare that only Jesus saves. It’s one thing to say that Jesus saves and quite another to say that ONLY Jesus saves. Peter had absolute conviction and faith that only Jesus saves. The religious leaders thought that because they were a descendant of Abraham they would be saved (Lk 3:8) (because they were from a certain line) or if they followed the law of Moses, (Jn 6:32-33) (by doing good deeds) they could be saved. But the Bible tells us that there is salvation in no one else but Jesus. In reality the whole Bible focused on Jesus Christ because he is the way God provided for man’s salvation. 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, it wasn’t just his gut feeling or a vague hope. But rather it was based on God’s promise. God recorded in the Bible all the promises he made about his son Jesus. There are more than 300 prophecies about Jesus recorded hundreds of years before he was born. I heard that if we took just eight of these prophecies, the probability of one man randomly fulfilling all eight, would be about 1 in a trillion. There hasn’t even been a trillion people born yet. And the chance of one man fulfilling 48 of them would be 10 to the 157th power. Now imagine the probability of Jesus fulfilling over 300 of them. What this shows is that practically speaking it’s impossible for these promises to be randomly fulfilled by one person and yet they were. The only reason it happened it because God said that it would happen and then he made it happen.

This is important for us in our day. We have to accept the absoluteness of the gospel message because we live in a multi-cultural society with many religions. Most people think that to make democracy work we have to tolerate anyone and everyone as though their ideas are all equal. But the Bible says that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation for men. What I’m about to say is highly controversial. This means that Buddha cannot save us. Mohammed cannot save us. Confucius, Socrates, Freud–none of them can save us. Science cannot save us, nor can technology or money. You might say, “But I know someone who is very sincere in their Muslim faith. And we believe in the same God. They must be saved right?” It’s not a question of the sincerity of someone’s faith, but the object of one’s faith. Think of it this way, say you are swimming in Lake Michigan and suddenly you get a massive cramp and you can’t swim anymore. What are you going to do? Call for help right. So you call to someone on the boat and you say, “Throw me the anvil. Hurry throw me the anvil.” And so they heave it overboard and you grab on to it and hold on with all their strength. Tell me what’s going to happen? You’re going to end up as fish food. It doesn’t matter how sincerely you believed in that anvil, the problem isn’t the sincerity of the faith, but rather the object of your faith. If you sincerely believe in something that is wrong, you will fail. 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

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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 want to force us to accept every religion as truth. We need Peter's conviction that only Jesus saves. Let's read verse 12 again. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

When the religious leaders heard Peter's clear message about Jesus, they were stunned. They saw powerful courage, wisdom and spiritual insight in Peter and John. It was then that they realized that the apostles had never received formal theological or rhetorical training from any rabbinical schools; rather they were ordinary guys; fishermen by trade. Yet they were bold, composed, confident, and undaunted in their defense. The religious leaders became desperate to stamp out this movement. They probably wanted to kill the apostles right there on the spot. But the problem was they could see the man who had been healed by Jesus standing right there. They couldn't deny the truth that a miracle had been done. They cleared the council chambers so that they could figure out what to do. How Luke knew what went on in this closed door discussion has been debated. Maybe an "Edward Snowden" type person in the council "leaked" the information. Or maybe Gamaliel, a member of the council, told his student Paul, who later told Luke. (5:34; 22:3) We're not sure but I love the detail we have in the Bible.

The council was in a quandary. The apostles had performed an undeniable, widely publicized miraculous sign. The people were gravitating toward Jesus. How could the religious leaders save face, discourage further teaching and healing in the name of Jesus, and preserve their status quo? Their solution was to order the apostles not to speak to anyone in Jesus' name again. It seems as though they thought that their power and position could convince these men to be silent. The Jewish council's best attempt at damage control was to call in the apostles and try to scare them into silence with vague warnings. They were told never again to speak or teach about Jesus. Jewish law specified that at the first instance of wrong or illegal action, the guilty were to be warned and released. The second time they did wrong, they were to be beaten with rods. (5:28, 40) With this official order, the council would now have legal grounds to impose more punishment on the apostles in the future if they choose to disobey.

"But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (v19-20) Commanded by Christ to be witnesses (1:8) and completely convinced of the truth of the gospel, Peter and John announced their rejection of any such ban on speaking in the name of Jesus. In effect, the apostles' response accused the council of being at odds with the will of God. The apostles already knew their answer, so they asked the council members to judge for themselves whether they should obey the council's orders or God's. These men had indeed "been with Jesus," and Jesus had completely transformed their lives. They had lived with him, had witnessed his resurrection, and had experienced the filling of the Holy Spirit. And so they said, "We cannot stop telling about the wonderful things we have seen and heard." To have obeyed the council's command would have been to disobey God. Stunned by the courage of Peter and John and fearful

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of their popularity with the people, the religious leaders could only yell at them with empty threats and let them go. You would think that these leaders would be thrilled that the people were praising God, but that wasn't the case.

So what can we learn from all this? There is a time when as a true Christian we will be confronted because of our faith. If we really believe and live by our faith, Satan, who rules this world, will challenge us. And just like Peter and John we're going to have to make a decision to either stand by our conviction and have faith in God, or give it to the pressure of the world. Maybe some of you have already experienced this and for others maybe it's coming. But when the pressure gets intense, what are you going to do? Don't worry. You can trust in Jesus. During trials, the Jesus pours out the Holy Spirit on his servants all the more. So we have to be afraid to face 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." Jesus tells us this now, so that when it happens we will be prepared. May God bless you to grow in your faith.

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