

NO OTHER NAME SAVES

Acts 4:8-12 | Third Sunday in Easter | April 16/19, 2015

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Jesus

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

One Sunday a pastor noticed that something just wasn't right with one of the members of his flock. During worship the man didn't sing the hymns or confess the creed. He didn't join in the prayers. While the pastor preached he openly napped. Later, the pastor approached the man with his concerns. “I noticed that you're not very engaged during the service. Is everything OK? Is there anything I can do to help?” This is how the man responded: “Pastor, I don't believe what this church teaches. I believe that, if there is a god, there are many different paths to him.”

I wish I could tell you that such false beliefs are rare. I can't. They're not. In a 2008 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center it was discovered that 52% of American Christians believe that other non-Christian religions can lead to eternal life. More than half of Christians in this country believe that there are many paths to God. I would guess that the percentages have not improved in the last seven years. We live in a world that increasingly rejects the concept of absolute truth and, therefore, rejects the Bible as truth and, therefore, rejects Jesus Christ as the world's only Savior.

The Word of God before us today is a

beacon of clarity in this dark world. You cannot miss the message: There is only one way to eternal life. There is only one Savior, Jesus Christ. NO OTHER NAME SAVES. Maybe this sounds like Christianity 101 to you. In a sense it is. That Jesus is the only Savior is basic to our faith. But as the survey I mentioned before shows, it's a truth that can be lost, even by us. Let's dig into the truth that NO OTHER NAME SAVES. Let's do so with two prayers in our hearts: (1) Lord, give us grace to believe this truth. (2) Lord, give us courage to proclaim it.

I. Give Us Grace to Believe It

One day Peter and John were headed up to the temple to pray when they encountered a man who had been crippled from birth. He begged them for a handout. He got much more than a few coins. In Jesus' name and by his power alone, Peter healed him. This caused a lot of excitement. The healed man jumped for joy and sang God's praises. A crowd gathered. Peter preached a stirring sermon calling all of them to repent of their sins and trust in Jesus who died for them and rose again. Many did.

But all this commotion also drew the attention of Jesus' enemies: the priests, the captain of the temple guard, the Sadducees. They didn't like all this talk

about Jesus, especially the part about his resurrection from the dead. So they dragged Peter and John before Caiaphas, the high priest, and asked, **“By what power or what name did you do this?”** (4:7). Our text is Peter’s answer.

Let’s take a brief walk through Peter’s Spirit-inspired sermon. He begins: **“Rulers and elders of the people!”** Note his respectful tone. I am reminded of something he wrote later on: **Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect** (1 Peter 3:15).

Peter continues: **“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.”** Peter didn’t enable this man to walk and run and jump. He was just the instrument, the mouthpiece. The real power belongs to Jesus. Peter gives him all the glory.

Also note that Peter preaches some stinging law to those leaders. “You crucified him.” These men were guilty of murdering the Lord of life himself. But the Lord of life couldn’t stay dead. So God raised him.

Peter backs up what he is saying with Scripture. He quotes Psalm 118: **“He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which**

has become the capstone.” A capstone could be either the keystone at the top of an arch or the cornerstone laid as part of the foundation. Take away either the keystone or cornerstone and the result is the same: a poorly constructed building, a building that won’t last long. Peter’s point is clear. To reject Jesus is to reject the fulfillment of all God’s promises. To reject Jesus is to reject the Church’s one foundation. To reject Jesus is to reject the only way to eternal life.

Peter makes this same point in his glorious conclusion: **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”**

We believe this. Jesus is the only Savior. No problem. We’ll always believe that, right? Not so fast. We will do well to remember Paul’s warning: **If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall** (1 Corinthians 10:12). The devil, whom Peter calls a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8), is constantly on the prowl. His goal is to cut us off from the truth and so destroy our faith in Jesus. He tries to convince us that there is another way. *After all*, he reasons, *it’s not just Jesus that gets you to heaven. You’ve got to be obedient too.* God’s Word counters: **No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law** (Romans 3:20). Good works don’t get us to heaven. As the old hymn puts it, “Good works cannot avert our doom; they help and save us never” (CW 390:1).

The devil has other more subtle ways of

trying to convince us that Jesus isn't the only way. He hammers away at us so hard with the worldly opinion that all paths lead to God that after a while it can start to make sense to us. We look at the people in our lives - the nice Jewish family next door who are such good neighbors, the Hindu guy at work who is always friendly and helpful, the Muslim lady who volunteers at the hospital, the atheist who shovels his elderly neighbors' driveway – and we begin to think, *How could God send such nice, sincere people to hell?*

Jesus' words provide the answer:

“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (John 3:16). **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”** (John 14:6). Peter was just repeating the truth he learned from the Teacher. There is no other name that saves. Jesus is the only way.

In a world that largely rejects the Bible and Jesus, do you realize what a miracle of grace it is that we don't? We believe in Jesus not because we are smarter than everyone else. We trust in him as our Savior not because we're such good people, less sinful than others? Why do we believe? Grace! Undeserved love! **It is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast** (Ephesians 2:8-9). God gives us the free gifts of forgiveness and life through faith in his one and only Son who lived and died and rose for us. And so daily we pray: Keep us from listening to

the devil and the world. Keep us from falling away from faith. Keep giving us your grace to trust in Jesus.

II. Give Us Courage to Proclaim It

And keep giving us courage to proclaim his good news to the world. I want you to remember who the preacher of our text was. It was Peter – Peter, the uneducated ordinary man (4:13); Peter the fisherman who walked on water until he took his eyes off Jesus; Peter, who swore oaths and called down curses to convince a slave girl that he didn't even know Jesus; Peter, who on that first Easter hid behind locked doors with his fellow disciples in fear of Jesus' Jewish enemies. Now he stands before those same enemies and boldly preaches with great courage and conviction.

What changed Peter? A better question: Who changed Peter? Our text gives us the answer: **Peter [was] filled with the Holy Spirit**. You may remember a promise Jesus made to his disciples: **“Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you”** (Matthew 10:20-21).

The same Spirit is at work in you. With the power and strength he gives through Word and Sacrament you can proclaim the good news of the only Savior, **“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29). You don't need to be a preacher or teacher. You don't need to be a church councilman. You don't even need to be on the Outreach Board.

You just need faith in Jesus and the willingness to share his name with the world. The Spirit gives both.

By the way, when I talk about proclaiming Jesus' saving name I don't mean banging on your neighbor's door and screaming at them, "Believe in Jesus, or you're going to hell!" Yes, without faith in Jesus they will go to hell. Yes, Jesus is the only way. On those points God's Word couldn't be clearer. But we don't have to be obnoxious or confrontational. Rather, with **gentleness and respect**, we can tell them about a God who loves them so much that he sent his one and only Son.

Among all the world's religions, Biblical Christianity is unique. It's the only religion in which salvation is not earned but given as a gift, no strings attached. We can tell others about the Giver. We can tell others about a God who loves us so much that he took on flesh to live in our place. We can tell others about a God who demands perfect obedience but who also sent his Son to live under his law to provide that perfect obedience for us. We can tell others about a God who did not spare his own Son but gave him up to a gruesome death on a cross, a death that paid for the sins of all people. We can tell others about a God who raised his Son on the third day and promises life eternal to all who believe in him.

We can do this with confidence – confidence not in our speaking ability or our winsome arguments – but confidence that in spite of our stammering tongues God's Word will not return to him empty

(Isaiah 55:11) because the gospel is **the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes** (Romans 1:16).

Let's go back to the story I told at the beginning of the sermon. It wasn't just a story. I didn't make it up. I'm the pastor. A member of my former congregation is the man who rejected his Savior. I'll never forget that night. It still breaks my heart to this day. May we never take the gift of saving faith lightly. May we never forget the message of our text: **NO OTHER NAME SAVES**. By God's grace we know that name, and in him we are saved.

Let us close with prayer: Father, give us grace to trust in Jesus as our only Savior, and give us courage to proclaim his forgiving love to all. We ask this in his saving name, the only saving name. Amen.

S.D.G.