

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, August 29, 2010**

THE POWER OF THE NAME

Acts 4:1-22

INTRODUCTION TO SCRIPTURE READING

This week's installment in "The Life and Times of Simon Peter" is a continuation from last week. Last Sunday we looked at what happened in Acts 3, where Peter and John miraculously healed a crippled man in the name and power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When a crowd gathered to see what was going on, Peter seized the opportunity to tell the crowd about Jesus. He spoke about the death and resurrection of Jesus, and about His true identity as the long-awaited Messiah (Christ). He told the crowd that it was through the power of Jesus' name that the crippled man had been healed. And he gave an altar call. He urged his hearers to repent of their sins, to turn back to God, and to put their faith in the Lord Jesus. Which many of them did, as we see in the next chapter (4:4).

But that was not the end of the story. Our Scripture reading today from Acts 4 describes what happened next. So, let's look together at Acts 4:1-22. Let's give our full and reverent attention to the reading of God's holy Word.

A SERMON WITH THREE POINTS

Today's message is what you might call a "three-point sermon." I know the concept may be a little outside-of-the-box for some of you (just kidding!), but I hope you'll hang in there with me as I develop the three points. Without any further fanfare, here are the three points I want to zero in on from this passage of Scripture today:

1. The Story Itself: What Happened to Peter and John
2. The Central Theological Principle We Can't Afford to Miss
3. The Character Trait Exhibited by Peter and John under Duress

Here we go.

I. THE STORY

First, let's look at some of the details of the story itself, which can easily be divided into three parts:

1. The Arrest of Peter and John (verses 1-4)
2. The Hearing before the Sanhedrin (verses 5-12)
3. The Outcome of the Hearing (verses 13-22)

What happened to Peter and John is a perfect example of the axiom that no good deed goes unpunished. It is also an illustration of the truth that you can get into trouble because of your faith in Jesus.

Notice how the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem reacted when they got wind of what Peter and John were up to, and what they were teaching people about Jesus. Verse 2 says they were “greatly disturbed.” In *The Message* it says they were “indignant that these upstart apostles were instructing the people and proclaiming that the resurrection from the dead had taken place in Jesus.” Another translation (ESV) says they were “greatly annoyed” by the unauthorized activities of Peter and John.

The opposition to Peter and John and their message was spearheaded by a coalition of priests and the Sadducees, a group of wealthy Jewish leaders who, among other things, denied the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, and who viewed the Jesus movement as a threat to the power and perks they enjoyed. As John Stott says, “They [the Sadducees in particular] saw the apostles as both agitators and heretics, both disturbers of the peace and enemies of the truth.”

So, they arrested Peter and John, and threw them in jail overnight. But here is another example of the power of God and the power of the gospel. Though they could arrest the apostles, they could not arrest the gospel. Verse 4 says that “many who heard (their) message believed,” and the number of believers – the number of men who believed the gospel and became followers of Christ – grew to about five thousand. Add in the number of women and children who no doubt also responded to the gospel, and the total number of believers was probably ten thousand or more. God was on the move! You can arrest the messenger(s), but you cannot stop the message of the gospel when God is on the move.

The next day, after spending the night in jail, Peter and John were brought in before the Sanhedrin, which was the supreme court of the Jews. It was made up of 70 members, plus the high priest, who presided over it. Referring to the healing of the crippled man, they asked Peter and John this pointed question: “By what power or what name did you do this?” (4:7).

“Who gave you the power to heal this cripple? Who gave you the authority to spread this teaching about Jesus?”

Jesus had told His disciples that the time would come when they would get in trouble because of their allegiance to Him (Luke 21:12-15). He told them not to worry or be afraid when they were arrested and hauled into court, because He promised to give them the wisdom and the words they would need. That promise was fulfilled right here, as Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrin. Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (4:8), and he spoke to the court with boldness and clarity and power. He said it was by the name and power of Jesus Christ that the crippled man had been healed. It was by the name and power of Jesus that this “act of kindness [was] shown to a cripple” (4:9). Peter left no doubt about it. He made sure the Lord Jesus got the credit for it.

But that is not all. Peter didn't stop there. He went on to make this watershed statement about the significance of Jesus in 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." No other name but the name of Jesus. The name and power of Jesus had brought physical healing to this man who had been crippled his entire life. And it is the name and power of Jesus that bring salvation from sin and the gift of eternal life to all who put their trust in Him. No other name and no other power.

Now the Sanhedrin had to figure out what to do with Peter and John. They couldn't deny that the miraculous healing had taken place. The evidence was irrefutable. But they didn't like it. They were determined to stop this Jesus movement before it got out of hand. So, after conferring among themselves, they ordered Peter and John "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (4:18). If they didn't listen, Peter and John would be in big trouble. I'm sure that is what the council told them. But Peter and John stood their ground. They said: "If we have to choose between listening to you and obeying God, it is a no-brainer. We can't keep quiet about what we have seen and heard" (4:19-20). And they didn't keep quiet, regardless of the opposition they faced or the threats they received.

It is a remarkable story, isn't it?

Now let's take a closer look at the central theological principle expressed in this passage, a principle we just cannot afford to miss

II. SALVATION IS FOUND IN NO ONE ELSE BUT JESUS

The principle, of course, is found in verse 12. Listen to it again: "Salvation is found in no one else [but Jesus], for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." No other name but the name of Jesus.

That is a pretty strong statement, isn't it? It is not a popular position to hold these days. Even some professing Christians are uncomfortable with it because it seems so narrow and exclusive and absolute. It is not a politically correct thing to say in a pluralistic age.

That said, I think it is important for us to understand both what Peter is saying and what he is not saying. He is not saying: "For those of us who believe in Christ as Savior and Lord, there is no other name by which we must be saved. But for people of other religions, it is a different story. There may be another way for them to be saved." That is not what Peter is saying. He is not saying: "Jesus is the way for us (Christians) to be saved, but there are other ways for people outside the Christian faith to be saved." That is not what Peter says.

A Bible teacher and theologian named Dale Bruner tells this story about giving Bible studies each morning at a week-long pastors' conference several years ago. The speaker in the evening (a woman) was the head of the Lutheran Church in India and the executive director of the Theological Commission of the Lutheran World Federation. (It was a Lutheran pastors' conference.) Bruner was teaching on the first chapter of the Gospel of John, with its emphasis on the exclusivity of Christ as the incarnate Son of God. The speaker in the evenings also

taught that Christ is the way of salvation – for Christians. But, she added, in India a sincere Hindu could also go to God, and Buddhists could find their way to God, too. The ordinary way of salvation, she said, is sincere devotion to your own religious tradition, whatever it is. For people of other religions, coming to faith in Christ is the extraordinary way of salvation. As long as people are sincere, she taught, they can get to God or to saving truth as they understand it.

Bruner found himself faced with a dilemma. He and the evening speaker were going in different directions in their teaching. To criticize or contradict another speaker at a conference is bad form. After wrestling with the issue all week, Bruner came to this conclusion and shared it with the conference on the final morning: “In the past, when asked what my theological position was, I have described myself as a Christocentrist (Christ-centered). But now I realize that that is not an adequate answer. I am a Christoexclusivist (Christ-exclusive)! Dr. Kumari (the evening speaker) is absolutely Christ-centered. She loves the Lord Jesus Christ – no questions about it. But I have come to realize this week that, for me, Christ is not only the center, He is the *circumference*. He is the only way to saving truth. Christ is *exclusive*.

In case you’re wondering, I am a Christoexclusivist, too. So are Peter and John. And, by the way, so is Jesus.

Jesus is exclusive in the sense that salvation is found in no one else. There is no other way to be saved than through faith in Him. And there is no other name by which we can be saved but the name of Jesus. That is what Peter is saying in verse 12.

But Jesus is inclusive, too. The gospel message is inclusive. It includes anyone and everyone who comes to Him in faith. The Bible says that *everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord in faith will be saved (Romans 10:13). That word “everyone” is pretty inclusive, don’t you think?

Here is the thing: Jesus is not just *my* Savior. He is not just *our* Savior. He is *the* Savior. The *only* Savior. Salvation is not found in great men of God in the Old Testament like Abraham or Moses or David. They all needed a Savior, just as we do. Salvation is not found in great reformers like Martin Luther or John Calvin. They needed a Savior, too. Salvation is not found in great evangelists like Jonathan Edwards or George Whitefield or John Wesley or D. L. Moody or Billy Graham. They, too, needed a Savior. Every single one of them. Nor is salvation found in great leaders in our nation’s past like George Washington or Thomas Jefferson or Abraham Lincoln. Glenn Beck is not the Savior. Neither is Al Sharpton. Nor is Martin Luther King, Jr. Or Oprah. There is only *one* Savior. Salvation is found only in Jesus.

There are **not** many different ways to be saved. All roads do not lead to heaven. There is **not** one way for Christians, another for Jews, another for Muslims, another for Buddhists, another for Hindus, another for New Agers, and another for Wiccans. There is not one way for Americans, another way for Afghans or Iranians, another way for the French or Germans. There is only one way to be saved. Salvation is found in no one else and in no other name but

Jesus. I know a lot of people in the world today take offense at this. But it is at the heart of our faith as followers of Christ.

We should never be mean or angry or arrogant in talking about what we believe. Meanness and anger and arrogance do not bring glory to God or demonstrate the beauty of His grace. I think winsomeness in our witness to the Savior is much more pleasing to God. And more effective, too. If we are winsome in our life and witness, God may just use us to “win some” to join us as followers of Christ.

Winsome, yes. Wobbly in our beliefs, no. We can be both loving and uncompromising in holding fast to the essentials of our faith. We may wish there were other ways or other roads to heaven for people who do not believe in Jesus as the only Son of God and Savior of sinners. But God’s Word is clear: Salvation is found in no one else and in no other name but Jesus.

We’ve looked at some details of the story here in Acts 4. We’ve looked at the central theological principle expressed by Peter in verse 12. Now let’s look at the character trait exhibited by Peter and John that just leaps off the page in this passage.

III. COURAGE ON DISPLAY

That character trait, of course, is courage. Look at verse 13: “When they [the members of the Sanhedrin] saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”

Courage is a trait not always in evidence in Peter’s life. Think back to the night Jesus was arrested, the night before the crucifixion. Peter had boasted that he would never abandon Jesus or deny Him (Matthew 26:33-35). But three times in one night his courage failed him. Three times that night, he denied knowing Jesus or being one of His disciples (Matthew 26:69-75). Not exactly a profile in courage. Earlier there had been the night when Jesus came to the disciples out on the lake, walking on the water. Peter boldly asked and received permission from Jesus to get out of the boat and walk on the water toward Him. It started out well, and as long as Peter kept his eyes on Jesus, he was okay. But then, when he saw the wind and the waves, his nerves failed him, and he began to sink (Matthew 14:25-33).

So, Peter had not always been a poster boy for courage. But something had happened to him. Something was different now. To stand before the supreme court of the Jews, the most respected and most powerful leaders of the Jewish people, and to speak to them about Jesus the way he did, took unusual courage. And to stand up to them when they gave Peter and John orders to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, was also a remarkable act of courage.

The Jewish leaders attributed the courage of the apostles to the fact that they had been with Jesus. They had been friends, companions, and disciples of Jesus for three years. Being with Jesus had changed them. There is no doubt about it. When you spend time with Jesus, it changes you. *He* changes you. You become more like Him in your character and conduct, in both the way you think and the way you act. And that is one of God’s primary purposes for

your life and mine. He wants us to become more and more like Jesus. The more like Jesus we become, the more we glorify God.

Yes, Peter and John had been with Jesus. But there is another factor, I think, that also contributed to their courage. Not only had they been with Jesus for those three years. Not only were they witnesses to the facts of His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. On Pentecost, they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is not just that they had been with Jesus. Now God was not only *with* them but dwelling *in* them in the person of the Holy Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit was being unleashed in their lives. Which gave them courage to speak and act in the name of Jesus.

Someone has said that courage is like a muscle. The more you exercise it, the stronger it gets. I think that is true. The same thing could be said of faith. The more you use your faith, the more you exercise it, the more you put your faith in God into action, the stronger it becomes.

This world needs men and women of courage. This world needs courageous Christians to stand against evil and oppression and injustice. To stand against lies and falsehoods. And to stand up for what is true. To stand up for what is right. But always to do it in love and respect. To speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. And to stand up for the gospel itself. To stand up for Jesus and the power of His name.

How is your courage muscle today? Need to give it some exercise? Remember, you are not alone as you face whatever it is that life throws at you. If you have received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of your life, not only is He with you, but His Spirit resides in you.

Dear friends, do not ever stop believing in the power of the name of Jesus. With courage and confidence in Him, let us share with others the power of His name.

Lord, let it be so. Amen.