

April 26, 2009
Easter 3

"Boldly Witnessing to Jesus' Saving Name"

ACTS 4:8-12

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 cripple and are 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. ¹¹ He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone." 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."

Someone once asked me why the Bible says we should call on the name of the Lord to be saved. Why does it not just say, "Call on the Lord?" Why does the Bible say, "Believe in the name of the Lord?" Why does it not just say, "Believe in the Lord?" And why does Peter tell us this morning that salvation is found only in the name of Jesus? Why does he not just say, "Salvation is found only in Jesus?"

Let me illustrate the importance of believing in Jesus' name by having you look at the doors in this church that are marked with an "Exit" sign. In case of a fire the exit signs tell you where you need to go to safely get out of the building. Even if there is a power outage, these signs are designed to glow in the dark, and you can still find your way out of the building. We are saved by the name of Jesus, because the name Jesus means "Savior." It tells us where we need to go to escape the judgment that is to come.

This morning Peter tells us, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." The Bible does not say you can take any path you want and follow any religion you want and it will take you eventually to heaven. That would be comparable to saying in case of fire or earthquake you can take any door and it will lead you out of this building. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me." Paul writes in Timothy, "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ."

Someone once sent me a video clip from an Oprah show where Oprah got into an argument with someone from the audience who made the claim that Jesus was the only way back to God. She was appalled that anyone in this day and age could ever think that Jesus was the only way back to God. She argued that people who were sincere in their religions had just as much of a chance in making it to heaven as Christians who were sincere in their beliefs. This morning we want to listen to Peter boldly witnessing to Jesus as the only hope of salvation for a world that is lost in sin.

Boldly witnessing to the many blessings in his name

We are amazed at how the Holy Spirit took hold of Peter and used him to boldly confess his faith in Jesus. "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." Peter performed an amazing miracle in Jesus' name. A forty year old man who had never walked in this life asked Peter for some money. Peter told him that he had no money, but then he commanded him to get up and walk in Jesus' name. He was able to immediately jump up and down and praise God for being able to walk and run and jump. There were no weeks and months of therapy. He did not have to learn to walk as happens with a little child. The people who saw the man sitting and begging with thin little legs that never walked now saw him jumping up and down like some star athlete with real muscles in his legs.

Peter gives all glory to Jesus for the healing that took place. He does not try to draw attention to himself. "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stand before you healed." He is able to give glory to Jesus because the Holy Spirit had filled him and given him the words he had to say. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he told his disciples that they should wait for the Holy Spirit to come on them and enable to witness boldly to their faith. Jesus told his disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." We are amazed at how the disciples were able to perform miracles of healing and even more amazed at how the Lord filled them with the Holy Spirit to boldly bear witness to their faith in Christ and not draw attention to themselves.

I am holding in my hand two gloves, a leather glove for working in the garden, and latex glove for protecting the hands when changing the oil in the car. These gloves cannot do the work for me. They can only be involved in getting work done if a hand enters into them. So it was with these disciples and with you and me today. We are able to bear witness to Jesus and his resurrection because Jesus promised that he would bless us with his Holy Spirit in these last days to boldly bear witness to our faith.

When we were children growing up on the family farm, our city cousins would come to visit us. I can remember showing them the power that existed in the electric fence that kept the cattle in the pasture. We would place green grass on the electric fence and then gradually move the grass closer and closer until we felt the power of the electricity. It was always a contest to see who could get the closest to the electric fence and feel the most power. Dear members of Star of Bethlehem, we are in the last days. The Holy Spirit is with us. He is giving us power and helping us bear witness to what we believe. Jesus told his disciples that they should not be afraid of what they needed to say because the Holy Spirit would give them the words they were to say.

A little girl was standing outside the school waiting for her dad to come and pick her up. One of the teachers asked her if she needed help. No, she said, my daddy is coming to pick me up and he is never late. If only we could have the same confidence that the Holy Spirit is never late. He will come to us and fill us and give us the words we need to say to people in these last days in which we live. Jesus promised us his Holy Spirit and Jesus always keeps his promises to his church.

Even as I am speaking there are Christians all over the world boldly bearing witness to the

many blessings they have in Jesus because the Holy Spirit is filling them just as the Holy Spirit filled Peter. Every time we gather together as we are doing here this morning we sing to each other, and encourage each other in the blessings we have in Christ. Colossians 3 says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." The joy we have together in the Lord and his resurrection is carried with us into our homes as we share that joy with each other in our marriages and families. That joy is carried with us out into the places we work and shop and go to school. We live each day of the week as the salt of earth and the light of the world, as we show forth the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Boldly witnessing to the greatest blessings

Peter pointed to the healing of the lame man as a blessing that came from Jesus through him. He wants these religious leaders to see that they have in Jesus, the greatest blessing anyone could ever have, a blessing that is found in no other religion in the world. Peter quotes from Psalm 118, a portion of the Old Testament well known to every Jewish person who worshipped in the temple of the Lord. "He is 'the stone the builders rejected which has become the capstone.'" We just sang about this in Psalm 118 when we sang, "I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation. The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

This psalm holds before us Jesus as the keystone or capstone of the arch and says, "The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes." Picture an arch very carefully planned and put together by our God. That arch is the arch of salvation, upon which we build our hope of eternal life. A stone arch is an amazing piece of construction. It needs no mortar as the weight of the stones and anything placed on top of the arch is supported by the stones weighing down on each other. The stones are held in place with the perfect fitting of the capstone. Such arches still stand after thousands of years. The arch of your salvation, that you depend on to be accepted by God on the day of judgment was carefully planned by our God. Jesus is the capstone. When the Father raised Jesus from the dead, he put his stamp of approval on what Jesus did. He sent a clear and powerful message to you and me that we can stand on that arch. We can face the final judgment knowing we are safe, resting on what Jesus has done for us.

Peter tells us that there is only one name that can save us and that is the name of Jesus. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given to men by which we can be saved." If I build my hope of being accepted by God on other religions, then I am building my hope on myself. Because all religions in the world without exception require that I must do the building based on what that religion offers me. It is like trying to build a bridge with a deck of cards. It is going to collapse in this life, and it will collapse on judgment day. Jesus comes and says, "Let me build the bridge for you. Let me be the capstone or keystone that saves you." It is marvelous in our eyes because there is nothing else in the world like it and it is solid and secure, guaranteed to be reliable because of Jesus resurrection from the dead. As we sing in our featured hymn this morning:

*In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song*

*This Cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand.*