

Easter 3
April 19, 2015

"Speaking Boldly about Jesus' Resurrection"

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."

Look at Peter standing before the high priests and leaders of the Jewish people. He is boldly confessing that Jesus rose from the dead. Only a few months before this he stood in the very same place cursing and swearing to a servant girl that he never knew Jesus. Here he is before the people who condemned Jesus to death boldly witnessing to Jesus' death and resurrection.

We know the reason for the change. It says here that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised he would send the Holy Spirit to help his disciples boldly witness to their faith. It is the Holy Spirit who gives them the power to witness to Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

We want the Holy Spirit to help us witness more boldly to Jesus' resurrection. I once visited my dad's cousin whose name was Carl, also may dad's name. He was an elder in his congregation, active in his congregation and loved to read the Bible. He said something to me that I will never forget. He said, "Steve, we just don't talk enough about Jesus' resurrection from the dead." Those words hit home with me and still do. With whatever years the Lord gives me to serve him here on this earth, I want to speak more boldly about Jesus' resurrection from the dead. I am sure that is also your desire as well.

Speaking boldly about Jesus' resurrection

We are amazed at how the Holy Spirit took hold of Peter and led him to powerfully speak about Jesus. He says, "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account 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 caused quite a commotion in the temple when he healed a man who had never walked in his life. Perhaps you remember the account. Peter and John are going to the temple about three in the afternoon. As they are about to enter the temple court, a lame man reaches out his hand for some much needed money. Peter looks at him and says, "Look at us!" He thought he was going to get some money. Instead Peter says, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk."

Peter took hold of the man to help him up and immediately his ankles became strong, he jumps up and starts walking, and even jumping up and down for joy in the temple courts. He doesn't just stumble around and shuffle to get going. He jumps and walks and keeps jumping around.

Needless to say, that caused quite a stir among the people who had come to the temple to worship the Lord. Crowds of people came to see this man. Peter used this large gathering to talk about Jesus' death and resurrection.

It didn't take long for the word to get to the religious leaders. They threw Peter and John into jail. Then they called a meeting of the Sanhedrin just as they did with Jesus. Caiphas and Annas were there just as they were with Jesus. They wanted to condemn to death as they had done with Jesus

Yes, Peter you were there once before when Jesus was falsely condemned by the high priests and spit on and smacked in the face. You watched from a distance, trying to hide in the dark shadows. As I was going through this I wondered whether Peter was thinking back to that night when he had been such a coward and so unfaithful to Jesus. Today he is a different man because the Holy Spirit is giving him the power to speak boldly about Jesus.

Peter sure is bold, would you not agree? He says, "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but God raised from the dead, that his man stands before you healed." Peter is not afraid to let these people know they had crucified Jesus. If you genuinely love people you will let them know the truth about sin. You want your friends and family members and anyone you meet to come to repentance and share that same forgiveness and hope that you have. Peter once cursed and swore he never knew Jesus. He wept bitterly. But then he saw firsthand the nail marks in Jesus' hands. He saw these nail marks as the evidence his sin had been forgiven. He yearned and longed for these religious leaders who hated him to come to grips with their sin and turn to Jesus as their Savior.

If you were given the power to heal people as Peter did, I am sure that a large crowd of people would also gather around you. That would give you an opportunity to speak boldly about Jesus and his resurrection just as Peter did. Even though we do not have this power to perform miracles we do have the strength given by the Lord to live unique lives that draw attention to Jesus. If you do not use bad language where you work, or if you do not tell dirty jokes, and if you are honest in what you do, and faithful in your tasks, people will notice you are different. Large crowds will not gather around you, but individual people will take notice that you are different. Jesus tells us that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. He said that we live good lives in thanksgiving for our blessings so others may come to glorify our Father in heaven.

What should we say when the opportunity comes to speak about what we believe? Let's take a lesson from Peter and the other Apostles in the Book of Acts. They talked a lot about Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Whether it was Peter speaking to these Jewish leaders, or Paul speaking to the philosophers in Athens. They talked about Jesus and his resurrection from the dead. I have never been able to forget those words once spoken to

me with such firm conviction, "Steve, we just don't speak enough about Jesus' resurrection from the dead." When I talk to people about what I believe and what is important to me, I want the Holy Spirit to fill me so I can speak boldly about Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Speaking boldly about Jesus as the only way to be saved

If you believe that Jesus rose from the dead, then you will also believe he is the only way for people to be saved. Peter is so bold and outspoken as he uses words from Psalm 118 to point to Jesus as the only way to salvation. "He is, 'the stone the builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'"

Picture in your mind an arch that is built with a keystone or capstone in the middle. The stones are carefully cut and put into place over some wooden frame work. The most important stone in the arch is the keystone or capstone. When the wooden framing is removed, the arch does not collapse because the weight of the stones presses down on the columns of each side. Perhaps you have seen the arches of ancient Roman aqueducts that still stand today two thousand years after they were built.

What an amazing illustration this is for how our God carefully planned every aspect of our salvation. Everything was carefully chosen and put into place. Then there is the final stone, the keystone or capstone, Jesus' resurrection from the dead. When God the Father saw the salvation he had provided for us in Jesus, he saw a perfect construction project that needed no improvement. When Jesus finished the job of saving us, he said, "It is finished." The Father acknowledged the perfect plan of salvation was completed by raising Jesus from the dead. We live each day under this completed work of Christ. That is why we say in Psalm 118, "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad."

Peter told these important religious leaders of the Jewish people that they had rejected Jesus as the keystone of their salvation. It is part of my sinful nature and yours to think we need to contribute something to the construction project. Can't I just add a little bit of the good life to what Christ has done? Can't I shape one of the building blocks of salvation with my efforts? What a blessing it is to believe Christ has done it all. That is why in the Revelation it tells us we will someday sing this amazing song, "Salvation belongs to God and to the Lamb." It is not about me. It is all about Christ. "In Christ alone, my hope is found.."

Peter is so bold, so very bold as he powerfully witnesses to the name of Jesus as the only way to be saved. He says, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Is this really true? Do you believe with Peter that people can only be saved through the name of Jesus? What about all the millions of people in the world who believe in the name of Allah? What about those who believe in the name of Bhudda? What about those who put their trust in themselves and their good works? Is salvation found only in the name of Jesus? I once heard a popular theologian say that Peter was using hyperbole and exaggeration when he spoke these words. It is extremely unpopular to take this bold stand that salvation is found only in the name of Jesus.

How do you know where to go for salvation? Look for the name of Jesus. If you ever go to Costco you notice that some of the products have the name of Kirkland on them. Costco uses puts that name on products they acquire and then sells them under the brand name. It is their way of saying you trust this product because it has our name on it. There is no name like the name of Jesus. These Jewish leaders to whom Peter is speaking were there at the cross of Jesus ridiculing his name Jesus. They mocked him for saying he could save people when he could not even save himself and come down from the cross. There is no prophet or religious leader who can compare to Jesus. He is God's Son who came down to this earth to save us. The name of Jesus points to what he did to save us.

So we enter another week of life here on this earth. As we go about our daily tasks we live our lives for Jesus. We also believe that the Holy Spirit will help us speak boldly about Jesus' resurrection and what he has done to save us. Jesus kept his promise to Peter. Jesus will keep his promise to us. "O Holy Spirit help us speak more about Jesus' resurrection." Amen.