

“NO OTHER NAME.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

September 2, 2018, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Acts 4:1-12

Introduction.

Last week we noticed wherever the Gospel is being proclaimed or lived out, wherever the truth of God’s Word and Biblical morality is being held up as a standard, Satan is right there trying to hinder it. It’s what he has been doing since the Garden of Eden and is still doing.

“As they were speaking,” the wicked were watching and lying in wait to seek an opportunity. Satan never rests in his relentless drive to kill Christ and kill His Church.

We must remember we have an enemy of our souls, an enemy of this church, an enemy of every sermon preached here and of every good deed done here, an enemy of everything that is good.

But we also noticed that every effort of Satan is ruled and over ruled by God. Nothing hinders the work of God and in fact God turns every work of Satan to God’s advantage. God continues to build His kingdom and to see that the Gospel of His Son is spread.

We see this in two ways in our text. First, the number of believers grew to five thousand men in spite of the opposition. And second, the apostles are given the opportunity to preach the Gospel to the highest authorities of Israel, and they do so in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, speaks, vss. 8-12.

Remember what I said about how intimidating this scene was. The Sadducees were the richest and the most powerful political and religious leaders of Israel, and they were cozy with Rome. Peter and John were surrounded by a terrifying tribunal of about a hundred men staring down on these uneducated rednecks from Galilee in their overalls and fishing hats.

Peter and John just spent the night in prison because of what they had been preaching. They had all night to think about what could happen to them.

We all remember what happened when a little servant girl confronted Peter in a courtyard just a little ways from where they were. As the saying goes, he folded like a cheap suit or a deck of cards. He was knocked over with a feather.

And now he isn't facing a little servant girl, he is surrounded by about a hundred of the most powerful leaders and lawyers and Jewish authorities. Talk about David verses Goliath. I wonder if Peter remembered in prison the words of Jesus.

Matthew 10:16-20 "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, ... they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, 18 and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. 19 When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. 20 For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Wow, that prediction sure came true fast, Jesus has been gone but a few months and here we are.

What does Peter do? Does he flinch, does he waffle, does he backpedal, does he apologize for causing trouble, he doesn't give a safe answer? He says again the same thing that landed him in prison. What changed in Peter? He is full of the Holy Spirit.

What did Jesus say, don't leave Jerusalem until you have received power from on high. What you are called on to do will require Holy Spirit power and in that power you will be able to do all I call and send you to do. That same power is in all who confess Jesus' name.

Notice how carefully Peter walks between the ditches of cowardice or compromise on one side and arrogance and abuse on the other. He addresses the rulers honorably and respectfully, they are people in positions of authority. But he doesn't shrink back from the truth either. He speaks it plainly and clearly.

Many years later Peter will write in his first letter what we should do if called on to do this.

I Peter 3:14-15 Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.

Peter testifies Jesus did the miracle, and since dead men have no power clearly Jesus is alive. And how is that possible since they were the ones who killed Him? God raised Him from the dead.

Peter has one shot here, he is addressing the most powerful and influential leaders in Israel, the builders, the architects of culture.

They see the problems in our world and they keep trying to solve them with human means, with philosophy, education, science, technology, policies and laws, more money, more taxes.

The world-builders, the intellectual elite, the political policy makers, the captains of the communication networks are all building but without the cornerstone, without a foundation, they are building on sand rather than on the rock. They think they are building but they are tearing down and destroying.

This Jesus is the cornerstone, the foundation stone, that center piece of history, the one all humanity must face and deal with, and either stumble and trip over or stand on.

Peter is direct, unequivocal, unapologetic. This is not a suggestion, not just an opinion, not even a point in a debate. It was as politically incorrect and offensive then as it is today.

There is no other name, vs. 12.

Acts 4:12 There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

There it is. In one sentence, the essence and summary of Christianity. Jesus is the only name that has saved lost souls for two thousand years, the only name that has saved you and me.

God has made Jesus the only way to heaven, the only way to salvation, the only way to reconciliation with God, the only hope for forgiveness from sin and guilt and deliverance from death and judgment.

God has decreed from before the foundations of the earth that the supreme honor of salvation will belong to His Son and His Son alone. He will share it with no other.

The salvation they denied and rejected, the salvation they tried to erase from off the face of the earth, the salvation that today Satan is trying to erase from the face of the earth, is Jesus.

There is no other name not just in Israel, but under heaven, in all the earth, no other name given to men, not just to Jews, but to all humanity, by which we not only can be saved, but must be saved.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

This is the great central affirmation of Christianity and the great central stumbling block for those who don't believe.

We live in an increasingly secular and pluralistic culture that affirms mutual tolerance and mutual acceptance summed up in the bumper sticker creed *Coexist*. They oppose absolutes except the absolute that all religions are equally valid.

If all roads lead to heaven, then it doesn't matter what road you are on and it doesn't even matter if you know or understand the road you are on. Just keep walking and you will get there.

But if only one road leads to heaven, then is it absolutely essential that you know what road you are on and understand everything you can about it to make sure it leads you where you want to be.

They totally miss that all religions make truth claims, Christianity is not the only religion to have absolutes. They miss that each of the religions make claims that are in complete contradiction with the others. They cannot all be true.

But we live in a culture that resists certainties and rejects truth, especially absolute truth, so to tell the truth today is tough business. When the important people hate what you say, it will get you in trouble.

We don't proclaim this truth with some sort of puffed up pride, like look at us aren't we great, we have the truth and no one else does. We don't say this in a way to say we are better than everyone else.

To say “Jesus is the only way to salvation” is arrogant and intolerant only if it's not true.

People shouldn't object to there being only one solution if they understand the problem is sin and the solution is a sinless God-man Savior who can sacrifice His blood in a way that satisfies the just and righteous wrath of God and brings salvation to those who believe. It takes a God-man and Jesus is the only one.

We say He is the only way because He has done the impossible, what no one else could do, and He is willing and able to save the most unworthy people. We come holding out a gift that isn't our own doing.

How is it arrogance to say Jesus is the only way of salvation, when actually it is an admission of our hopelessness and helplessness apart from Christ? The Gospel kills arrogance and pride. We aren't better than anyone else because we know we didn't deserve any of this.

To say something is true is not arrogance if it's true. G.K. Chesterton spoke about this over a hundred years ago and it is more true now than ever.

“What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert – himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt – the Divine Reason. ... We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table ... [or] ... the law of gravity.” (G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*).

We are to be humble about ourselves, but not about the truth. We should doubt ourselves and have conviction about the truth.

I am reminded of the cartoon of the pastor who ended all of his sermons with, “But then again what do I know?” Wrongly placed humility, sinful lack of conviction in the truth of God's Word. Humility does not exclude conviction. Yes, be humble, but never timid and apologetic.

We are afraid of being called intolerant, but tolerance does not mean accepting everything as equally true or valid.

We want legal tolerance which means protecting all human rights.
We want social tolerance which means treating each other with respect, honoring one another, living peaceably in a diverse world.

But we cannot have an intellectual tolerance that says we have to accept and approve and believe everything.

This is the spirit of our age, it's the air we breathe and if we aren't watchful it will make its way into our own hearts and into our church and we will lose all confidence and conviction.

Jesus is inescapable unique, there is no other name, no one like him, no one did what he did, said what he said, had such power, who fulfilled prophecies, healed, forgave sin, no one died way he did, no one who rose, no one ascended. There is no other cross, no other resurrection, no other salvation, no other name by which we can be saved.

The scandal is there is only one way. The good news is there is a way.

Parents and grandparents, give your children and grandchildren absolute confidence and conviction, so they will have the courage of Peter in the face of the opposition that will come. I was talking with one of our members this week about their college granddaughter who got a bad grade on a paper that defended Biblical truth.

If Christians and churches get tongue tied and lack conviction of the truth of the gospel; if we lose confidence in truth and relevance of Jesus, we lose having anything to offer to a dying world. Who else forgives sin, who else defeats Satan and delivers from death? Who else satisfies our thirsty souls in a dry and weary land where there is no water?

In *The Silver Chair*, book four in the Chronicles of Narnia series, there is a scene in which a young girl stands before the most serene and seemingly thirst-quenching streams she's ever laid eyes on. She is terrified, however, because although the sight of water made her feel ten times thirstier than before, she didn't rush forward and drink because just on this side of the stream lay the lion...

"If you're thirsty, you may drink." . . .

For a second she stared here and there, wondering who had spoken. Then the voice said again,

"If you are thirsty, come and drink." . . .

It was deeper, wilder, and stronger; a sort of heavy, golden voice. . . .

"Are you not thirsty?" said the Lion.

"I am dying of thirst," said Jill.

"Then drink," said the Lion.

"May I — could I — would you mind going away while I do?" said Jill. The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience. The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic. "Will you promise not to — do anything to me, if I do come?" said Jill. "I make no promise," said the Lion. Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer. "Do you eat girls?" she said. "I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it. "I daren't come and drink," said Jill. "Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion. "Oh dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then." "There is no other stream," said the Lion." There is no other stream. (C.S. Lewis, The Silver Chair, chapter two).

Drink deeply of this stream, and call all who are thirsty to do the same. There is no other stream.

Holy Father, you have exalted Jesus to the highest place in heaven seated at your right hand, and you have given Him the name that is above every name, that at His name every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father.

May the greatness of Jesus Christ's uniqueness fill our minds and hearts. May we bear witness to it faithfully all the days of our lives, may we be ambassadors of the only Savior in whom we have salvation from all our sins.