

Acts 4:1-31

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[0 : 00] The book of Acts, chapter 4, starting at verse 5. It's found on page 773 in the Bibles that are in the pews.

If you want to look along in one of those. Let me begin reading. Acts chapter 4, beginning at verse 5, and we'll go down to verse 31.

The next day, the rulers, elders, and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas, the high priest, was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all the other men of the high priest's family.

They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them. By what power or what name did you do this? 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. He is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.

[1 : 21] Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. When they 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.

But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together.

What are we going to do with these men, they asked. Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle. We cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name.

Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God, for we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.

After further threats, they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them because all the people were praising God for what had happened, for the man who was miraculously healed was over 40 years old.

[2 : 42] On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.

Sovereign Lord, they said, You made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David. Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his anointed one. Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.

They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant, Jesus. After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

[3 : 52] Last week, we looked at Acts chapter 3, which begins with Peter and John going up to the temple for prayer. And they encounter a crippled beggar lying at the gate where he was put to beg for change every day.

And Peter says to him, we don't have any money for you, but what we have, we will give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk. And Peter takes him by the hand and the man gets up and starts walking and jumping and praising God.

And a crowd gathers in amazement. And so Peter proclaims to them all, Jesus is the one who healed this man. Jesus is the author of life. And so repent.

Turn back to God so that you may receive forgiveness and refreshing from his presence and the promise of a future restoration of all things.

Now that's what we looked at last week. And this week, it's a day later. The temple leaders don't like all that commotion. And so they threw them in jail.

[5 : 02] And the next morning, they bring them before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. And they ask, by what power or what name did you do this? As Pastor Matt said last week, a person's name represented their character or their identity or their authority.

And Peter says, it's by the name of Jesus Christ that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is the stone that you builders rejected, but has become the capstone.

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. And right there in verse 12 is the key idea of this entire passage.

Peter begins by talking about a very specific situation, how the beggar was healed. But in verse 12, he makes a comprehensive and universal statement. Salvation is found in no one else.

There is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved. In other words, Jesus is not one of many paths that all lead to God.

[6 : 11] But Jesus is the only way for people to be made right with God. Jesus is not just a Savior for some people, but the only Savior for all people.

Now for many people today, maybe for many of you here, this is one of the hardest Christian beliefs to accept. I wonder what would you say in response to Peter's words in verse 12.

You know, many people would say something like, Peter, that is so arrogant. How can you say that you have a handle on the, that you know the truth and everyone else is wrong? All of us perceive the truth only in part.

If you believe that you have the truth and nobody else does, you'll look down on everyone else who doesn't agree with you. You can see them as inferior. You can even justify all kinds of hateful and violent acts against them.

If you believe that you know the truth. Some people might say, Peter, that is so narrow-minded. Aren't all the religions basically aiming at the same thing?

[7 : 21] How can you say there's only one true religion? Surely you wouldn't say this if you really knew sincere people who followed other religious paths, who approach God in their own way, or even people who have no faith, but are kind to their neighbors and do good for the world.

Or maybe you might say, Peter, why don't you just, why didn't you just leave that a little more ambiguous? Why didn't you just stop at the end of verse 11?

And why do you have to make it so clear as you did in verse 12? Why don't you just let people come to that conclusion on their own if they want to come to that conclusion?

Now maybe you resonate with one or more of those responses. But even if you don't, even if you are confident that Jesus is the only Savior for all people, you need to think through how to respond to the majority of people in this society who don't agree with that belief.

Now what I want to show you today is that it is good, what Peter says in verse 12 is actually good news. It is good news that Jesus is not just a Savior for some people, but the only Savior for all people.

[8 : 45] And the second thing I want to ask, for those of us who do believe this, how should that belief shape our Christian life and witness? Now first let's begin by dealing with some objections to this belief.

First, the arrogant objection. First, it is arrogant or even dangerous to make an exclusive truth claim. About nine years ago, when I was in college, the former president, Bill Clinton, came to speak here in New Haven.

He spoke outdoors at Yale, and it was not long after the 9-11, the terrorist attacks. I think it was the following spring, a few months later. And during his speech, he said, the difference between us and them is they think that they have the absolute truth.

And so they went and flew their planes into buildings. And we know that no one has the absolute truth. And so we're willing to be peace, we're trying to promote peace in the world.

Or he said this in another speech a year later, he said this, he said, once you believe that you have the absolute truth, it's not possible for everyone to count, or for everyone to have a chance, to deserve a chance if they disagree with you, or for everyone to have a role to play in the world.

[10 : 06] All that we have to say is that there is a truth, life is a search for it, religion can be a pathway to it, but we're all imperfect and nobody has it. The only thing the world has to give up to achieve the core values necessary to an integrated community is the idea that you have the absolute truth.

Now certainly, I think all of us can agree that none of us has exhaustive knowledge of everything that is true in the world. And in that sense, we all have more to learn, and we can learn a lot from people whether or not we agree with them.

But the irony in his statement, the irony in Bill Clinton's statement is that even as he says that none of us should claim to know absolute truth or ultimate reality, he's at the same time making a very specific claim about what ultimate reality or absolute truth is like.

In particular, he's saying truth exists, it's out there somewhere, but we can never know what it is. And that's a very specific claim about absolute truth or ultimate reality just as much as any other.

It's an assumption that God or maybe some higher power exists, but that God is unknowable. or maybe that God is an impersonal force rather than a person who has revealed himself in a definite way.

[11 : 30] The reality is, see, all of us make truth claims or assumptions about what is true, what ultimate reality is like.

Every religion or every philosophy makes some claims about what is true or what is real, and every truth claim by its very nature excludes some others. They can't all be true at the same time.

And so the question to ask should not be, is it arrogant or dangerous to make any kind of exclusive truth claim, but rather, how does your particular belief, your particular truth claim, shape your attitude toward other people who might disagree with you?

Now, the most fundamental truth at the heart of Christianity is what Peter proclaims in verse 10 when he says, Jesus died on a cross and God raised him from the dead.

Jesus died on the cross for the very people who opposed him, the people who were his enemies, who executed him. And God accepted Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf so that we might have peace with God.

[12 : 49] That's the most fundamental truth at the heart of the Christian faith. Jesus died for sinners like you and me. And if you know that, if that's the thing that you believe more confidently than anything else, if you know that Jesus died for you not because you were better than other people, not because you were smarter than others, not because you were stronger than others, but simply because he loved us while we were yet sinners.

And if you let that belief sink deeply into your heart, you will not become arrogant or prone to violence, but rather humble and peaceable.

see, the Bible says that if you've been forgiven by Jesus and you understand what that means, that you will begin to forgive others who have hurt you, that you will be patient with others because you know how much God has been patient with you, that you will pursue peace because you know what it cost Jesus to purchase your peace with God.

A friend of mine once put it this way, he said, to someone who's not a Christian, the statement, Jesus is the only way to be saved, sounds like the most arrogant claim that a Christian could make.

But for a Christian to say, Jesus is the only way that I or anyone else could ever be saved is a statement of humility because you are saying I am no different than any other human being.

[14 : 33] I am more sinful and wicked than I ever dared to believe. There is nothing that I could do to make myself worthy of God's favor only by the mercy of Jesus Christ.

I've been accepted by God. So believing in Jesus as the only Savior should make us humble and not arrogant. Second objection, is it narrow-minded to say that Christianity is superior to all other world religions?

Aren't they all aiming at the same thing anyway? Now we need to make an important distinction. Christians believe that Jesus as the sinless Son of God is superior to all other prophets, philosophers, and religious teachers.

Christians should not believe that they themselves are superior to others. inherently. See, according to the Bible, all human beings bear God's image.

And so Christians should praise God whenever we see reflections of the image of God in the lives of people who may or may not believe in Him.

[15 : 50] Whenever we see reflections of God's wisdom, truth, and love displayed in the lives of non-believers, we can recognize that people of other faiths or people of no religious faith may have some true insights into the nature of God.

For example, that there is a God or that He created the world or that God is righteous and pure or that God is the judge of all things. We can agree with people because that's a piece of truth that God has revealed generally.

and we can recognize that other religious communities may provide some good moral advice. They may provide social services to their community. They may express a spiritual longing in the human heart.

We can recognize all those things as part of bearing the image of God that is common to all people. And according to the Bible, Jesus gives us all those things perfectly.

He reveals to us the true nature of God. He gives us a perfect moral standard and a perfect example. He pours out God's love into our hearts to bind us together and He fulfills the spiritual longings of the human heart.

[17 : 03] But what is unique about Jesus above all else is that He offers salvation. Salvation by grace.

That's what Peter says in verse 12. He says, salvation is found in no one else. There is no other name by which we must be saved.

See, in some way or other, every religion is trying to bridge the gap between the human and the divine. And every religion gives us some way that we can follow to achieve salvation or to be accepted by God.

In Buddhism, it's the eightfold path. In Hinduism, it may be the ritual offerings. Or in Islam, the five pillars.

Or in modern Judaism, the 613 commandments of the law. And the message is, if you do these things, if you follow this way, you will achieve salvation or you will experience nirvana.

[18 : 11] You will obtain paradise. But Christianity is not about the good things that we must or can do to achieve salvation.

Christianity says there is no way that human beings, by our own efforts, following any of these ways, can merit or achieve salvation.

There is no way that we can bridge the gap between us and God. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And so God has to bridge the gap to us.

God has to make the way by which we can be reconciled to Him. See, being a Christian means recognizing that you are spiritually lost, but Jesus, the good shepherd, has come to find you.

Being a Christian means recognizing that our souls are desperately sick, but Jesus, the great physician, has come to heal and forgive us.

[19 : 21] Being a Christian means recognizing that we're trapped in sin and self-centeredness, but Jesus, our Redeemer, has come to set us free. Being a Christian means recognizing that we're guilty before the judgment seat of God, but that Jesus, our substitute, was condemned in our place.

You know, if you go to the doctor and the doctor says, we found that you have an extremely serious disease, you will certainly die within the next month.

death. But the doctor says, but there is one medicine that can cure this disease. And it doesn't just alleviate the symptoms, it actually attacks and kills the root cause of your disease.

And if you take this medicine, you may experience some short-term pain, but you will certainly recover. You know, you wouldn't say, that's so unfair that there's only one medicine that can cure this deadly disease.

You would say, thank heavens, there's a cure. There's a way to be healed. There's a way to be rescued.

[20 : 39] It is good news that Jesus is not only a Savior for some people, but the only Savior for all people, because in Jesus, we have all that we need for salvation.

The New Testament describes Jesus as our prophet, our priest, and our king. Our prophet who reveals to us the true nature of God.

Our great high priest who offered himself as a sacrifice to God so that we might be cleansed and forgiven. And our king who guards us and leads us and protects us.

Jesus is all that we need for salvation and our security. We don't need to look anywhere else to be secure with God now and forever.

And salvation in Jesus is not only for some kinds of people, it is for all kinds of people. You know, if Jesus is only a Savior for some people, then Christianity becomes a tribal religion.

[21 : 50] It's good for some kinds of people but not for others. Maybe it works for you. Maybe it'll be nice for your friends and people who are like you.

But you would have no confidence to go to someone who's very different than you and say, Jesus can meet your need just as he has met mine. If Jesus is only a Savior for some people, then the church becomes merely a social club of people who already have other things in common anyway.

Because he's only a Savior and he's only for some people. But if Jesus is the only Savior for all people, he has the power to break down all kinds of social and racial and economic and all kinds of other things that divide people to make a bridge across all those differences to unite his followers into one new family.

This morning, I have the privilege of baptizing Kevin Cunningham later in the service. And Kevin and I come from very different backgrounds and life experiences. Kevin grew up on the south side of Chicago.

I grew up on the north shore of Boston. And I'll let him tell you some of his story later on. But you know, the way New Haven normally works, we would never have met each other or let alone become friends. Except for Jesus.

[23 : 22] But through Jesus, Kevin and I have become friends and brothers in Christ. You see, if Jesus is the only Savior for all people, we should be concerned not just for people who are like us, but also for people who aren't like us.

in the book of Acts, which we're looking at this fall, we see the story of the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem all the way to Rome.

And throughout Acts, Christianity spreads through the confident proclamation that Jesus is the only Savior for all people. And throughout church history, the Christian world mission has been fueled by that same conviction.

in the first century, the Apostle Paul preached the gospel throughout the Roman Empire because he knew that Jesus was not just for the Jews. He was for Gentiles, too.

In the fifth century, St. Patrick left his home in Britain to proclaim Jesus in Ireland because he knew that Jesus came not only for people within the bounds of the Roman Empire, he came for those barbarians, too.

[24 : 37] In the seventh century, a band of Persian Christians traveled the Silk Road all the way to Sion because they knew that Jesus came not just for Persians but for the Chinese people, too.

Almost 200 years ago, Adoniram Judson and his wife Anne left New England to travel halfway around the world because they believed that Jesus came not only for Americans but for the people of Burma, too.

And this is why missions is so important and must be a priority here at Trinity because salvation is found in no one else. Jesus is the only Savior for all people everywhere in the world.

So let's be praying regularly for missionaries that you know or missionaries that this church supports. Let's support missions generously and encourage our missionaries diligently.

You know, you can choose one of the missionaries that we support as a church and write them a letter or an email a couple times a year just to say that you're praying for them. I think many of them would be very encouraged by that.

[25 : 50] You can read their newsletters, start praying for them regularly and write to encourage them. And then when they come and visit, you'll get to know them and you can say, I've been praying for you.

We're part of this together. You know, some of you can use your skills. You can use your skills in medicine or engineering or construction or teaching on a short-term trip.

And some of you should give up your career plans and go into full-time ministry or cross-cultural missions work. I know that's not for everyone, but it is for some.

You know, most missionaries throughout history didn't become missionaries because they had nothing better to do because they were just unemployed. They left.

They sacrificed to go and proclaim the gospel throughout the world for the sake of Jesus.

[26 : 48] Christian mission is fueled by the conviction of Jesus' absolute uniqueness. But whenever Christian churches or mission agencies have wavered or compromised that belief, the Christian world mission has suffered.

The student volunteer movement began in 1886 to recruit Christian university students to go to the un-evangelized portions of the world, parts of the world where people had never heard of Jesus, to proclaim his saving grace.

And in its heyday, thousands of college students attended their summer conference. Each year, hundreds went abroad with various missionary societies. But around the 1920s and 30s, the SVM gradually shifted in their views and missions became simply cooperating with other people to improve society rather than proclaiming the unique saving work of Jesus.

And around that time, it began to decline and by the 1960s, it completely dissolved. Now, let me be clear. Christian social service is valuable and important.

God made us with body and soul. He cares for people's physical needs as well as their spiritual needs. But social service is not a substitute for proclaiming the gospel of Jesus.

[28 : 14] the distinctive message of the Christian church is salvation through Jesus Christ alone. And the church must always keep this message front and center.

Otherwise, it will begin to die. You see, it is good news that Jesus is not only a Savior for some people, but the only Savior for all people.

Now, for those of us here who do believe this, how should this belief shape us? We've talked about this already a little bit. But I want to point to one more thing.

And the answer, this is found in a word that appears three times in this passage. If you look down at verse 13, it says, they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men.

Verse 29, the believers gathered to pray and they pray, now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

[29 : 17] And in verse 31, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. It's actually the same word translated a little differently in the NIV, but it's actually the exact same word that appears in all three verses.

Boldness. Now, boldness does not mean being rude or reckless or hot-headed. Boldness, as one lexicon puts it, is an attitude of openness that stems from freedom and lack of fear.

being courageous because of a joyful confidence in God. Speaking straightforwardly and plainly, not trying to hide or manipulate.

For those of us who believe in Jesus as the only Savior and Lord, we must not hide or deny that belief. We can't always leave it ambiguous, no matter how unpopular or misunderstood it may be.

Peter did not hide his belief in the uniqueness of Jesus, and Peter was persecuted much more than any of us are here in the United States. Yes, we can start by sharing our personal experience of Jesus.

[30 : 40] Yes, we can affirm common concerns that we share with people who do not believe in the Christian faith. But we must not stop there. Like Peter, we must proclaim who Jesus is, the one and only Son of God, what he has done through his death and resurrection, and his call to repent and believe in him alone.

You know, you don't have to be well-educated or eloquent to speak about Jesus with boldness, with freedom and openness. Verse 13 says, Peter and John were unschooled, common, ordinary men.

You know, God can use a well-educated scholar like the Apostle Paul, and he can use a simple, down-to-earth fisherman like Peter. Peter and John hadn't gone to seminary.

Peter and John hadn't been trained in public speaking, but they had been with Jesus. They had listened to his word.

They had seen his example, and they were filled with his spirit, and that made all the difference. They spoke about Jesus with boldness to people who were probably smarter and certainly older and more powerful than they were.

[32 : 07] You know, the guys in the Sanhedrin were a powerful, smart group of religious leaders, but Peter and John could speak to them with freedom and confidence and openness and straightforwardness.

Now, most of us are intimidated by people who we think are smarter or maybe older or maybe younger or more powerful than we are.

but if you have, what this, what this verse is saying is if we have been with Jesus, if we have listened to his word, if his spirit lives in us, you can speak with boldness to anyone that God brings to you in your workplace, in your family, in your dorm, on the street, because Jesus is in you.

And notice, it's not just Peter and John, not just the apostles. It's not just pastors or preachers who spoke the word with boldness. Verse 31, all the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

And you might ask, how do you, how do I get? How do we as a church have that kind of freedom and confidence and straightforwardness, that boldness to speak openly about Jesus?

[33 : 31] And the answer is, pray. Just like these early believers did. When Peter and John were released, they didn't come together and say, we need to have a big strategy meeting and make a grand plan.

They didn't come together and start complaining about all the sufferings they were going through and cursing their enemies and complaining about all the persecution they're experiencing. They came together and prayed.

And let me conclude by reading the prayer that these early believers prayed, starting in verse 24. Sovereign Lord, you made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them.

You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David. Why did the nations rage and the people's plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his anointed one.

Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

[34 : 56] Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant, Jesus.

Let's pray that we too may have boldness to proclaim Jesus as the only Savior for all people. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for sending your Son to be our Savior.

We thank you for sending your Spirit to fill us and give us courage. We praise you because your word says that you want all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth and so you have provided Jesus Christ as our Savior and our Savior.

Lord, we pray that you would give us boldness to proclaim this message with freedom and openness, with love, with fearlessness.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[36 : 24] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.