(Begin with video of Peter’s sermon, arrest, and trial) Upon healing a crippled man in the name of Jesus Christ, a crowd gathers, and Peter proclaims the gospel, calling those in the temple courts to repent and believe in Jesus Christ of Nazareth as the Savior of God, the Forgiveness of Sins, and the Messiah who will come and bring with Him the restoration of all things. This is one of the most powerful moments in the New Testament, and yet hardly does Peter conclude his sermon before he and his friend John are arrested. Let’s pick up the story. Let’s stand and read Acts 4:1-12 together.

Luke tells us in 4:1-3, “And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.”

First, who are these people who are arresting Peter and John, and why? Luke mentions the priests…those would be the Levites who were performing their duties in the temple…they are professional clergy. The Sadducees, on the other hand, are lay people of high class and status. The Sadducees would call themselves “realists.” It wasn’t that they didn’t believe in God, it’s just that they didn’t believe in miracles or the supernatural; and they completely rejected any notion of the resurrection of the dead. They were materialists, they were unapologetically political, they were powerbrokers, and to say it quite bluntly—they were corrupt, self-serving prigs who intimidated people with their money and their powerful positions within the community. Of the 71 member Sanhedrin…which was essentially the Supreme Court of Israel…a majority of the members would be Sadducees. The Sadducees were guardians of the status quo because Roman occupation had worked out well for them in terms of finances and politics, so they were very threatened by anything or anyone that might bring about change of their status or fortune. Then you have the Captain of the Temple Guard, which was one of the highest ranking positions in the Jewish Temple and a member of the high-priestly family. According to New Testament scholar Darrel Bach, “The Captain of the temple police served to keep peace in the Temple and NOT allow any messianic expectations that Rome would dislike.” Remember in John 11 that the very same group of people said of Jesus, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” So the Captain’s job was to ensure that the Jews coming to worship in the temple did not get too excited as to arouse suspicion by the Roman occupiers.
So we’ve already answered the question of “why” Peter and John get arrested, right? Peter and John preach Jesus…they claim that Jesus is the Messiah; they proclaim that Jesus arose from the dead; and now they proclaim that Jesus is responsible for a supernatural miracle. They’re drawing a huge crowd, and the people are utterly amazed and hanging on their words. I suspect Peter and John could not have offended the Sadducees any more if they tried!

Notice, Luke records that Peter and John were held in custody overnight because they had already run out of daylight. You know, these are the little details that historians and scholars of ancient texts pick up on, and they contribute to the compelling evidence that what we are reading in Acts qualifies as history, not myth. That’s just a little bonus material for free!

As we look to Acts 4:5 we read, “On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high priestly family.” In other words, the Who’s Who of Jerusalem was assembled to hear this case, including Annas…the former high priest and his son-in-law Caiaphas…the active high priest. Luke credits Annas as the “functional high priest” because once a high priest you held that title for life, but Annas had actually been fired by the Roman curator Gratus in AD 15 prior to Pilate taking over. Along with the high-priestly family, there were the theologians known as the Scribes, along with the “elders” who were likely the old men of esteem from within the power structures in Jerusalem, and other “rulers” who would be powerbrokers from any various segments of the community…clearly the same group of people that Peter refers to in his sermon a few verses ago who acted out of their ignorance when they crucified Jesus (3:17). The Jewish historian Josephus helps us to picture this scene: The members of the Sanhedrin would wrap around Peter and John in a semi-circle with concentric layers so that everyone could see everyone else. That’s why Luke writes in vs. 7 that Peter and John are set in the midst of them. The executive council of the Sanhedrin then begins with this question in vs. 7, “By what power or by what name did you do this?”

They are asking a political question and a religious question. The political question is one of authority: who gave you the authority, as common peasants, to teach and proclaim in the temple courts? It is a rhetorical question, because clearly the only people in position to grant such authority are those in the room, and they already know the answer: YOU HAVE NO AUTHORITY because we did not give you authority! The Sanhedrin is also asking a baited religious question: If Peter and John can be convicted of witchcraft, or performing some sign or wonder in the name of a false god, they can be sentenced to death according to Deut. 13:1-5.

Imagine how terrifying this would be if you were Peter and John. This very same group of people held a similar “trial” for Jesus, and that did not go well. Even though Jesus was clearly innocent of all charges and was even proclaimed innocent by Pilate, this very same group of
people made up false charges against Jesus that led to his crucifixion. Now their sites are set on Peter and John.

Do you remember Luke 21:12-15? I’m sure you all remember that text and my sermon on that text, right? Just kidding, but let’s turn back and look at Luke 21:12-15 for a moment, because here is what Jesus said in those verses: “…they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.” Turns out Jesus knew what He was talking about, right? Go figure…

So in response to the question, Peter, now filled with the Holy Spirit, first respectfully addresses his accusers and then humorously acknowledges that they are being examined…literally judged…because of a good deed. In vs. 8-9 we read, “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man…” Peter is pointing out the irony here. In most cases in the ancient world, good deeds were rewarded by those in authority, but not now. Perhaps this story in Acts 4 is where we get the saying, “No good deed goes unpunished!” In the life of a Jesus-follower, that is often the case! The miracle performed in Jesus’ name leads to a testimony in Jesus’ name which leads to persecution. That was true then, and in many cases, that is still true to this day.

I remember when I was in India a few years ago a lady was brought up to me by some of the church planters and they asked her to share her testimony with me. She told me that she lived in a very remote village, and for all of her life she was a Hindu until just a few years ago. She said that for several years she had suffered from chronic bleeding that none of the village doctors or witch doctors could heal. Finally, after several years of this bleeding, a church planter had come into her village, and having learned of her bleeding condition, asked if he could pray for her in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. When the church planter prayed over her in the name of Jesus, she was instantly healed, and she never had that bleeding problem again. You can imagine this lady’s joy…so she began to tell all of her friends and family about her dramatic healing in the name of Jesus Christ. She said some 30 people almost immediately placed their faith in Jesus because they knew of no other god who had such power to heal, and they all knew just how terrible this lady’s condition had been for several years. When the elders of the village learned of the healing that took place in the name of Jesus, and that others were becoming followers of Jesus due to this lady’s testimony, they brought her to the center of the village and there beat her publicly. They threatened her, stating that her husband was a Hindu, so she would have to choose between her husband and this god known as Jesus. If she chose her husband, she would need to reconvert to Hinduism and refrain from mentioning the name of Jesus. If she chose Jesus, she would be forced to leave her home and live in the bush. The lady chose Jesus. Her husband was so compelled that he soon became a follower of Jesus and moved into the bush
with her! Soon they were travelling from village to village, sharing the story of her healing. She told me with tears in her eyes that wherever she went to tell her story, people would bring their sick to her, and she would pray for them in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and they would often be healed. Friends…these stories that sound so much like stories straight out of the Bible are happening all over the world every day. The pattern is almost predictable: miraculous signs and wonders in the name of Jesus; public testimony and many conversions; persecution; and then the gospel spreads to new areas. We’ll look at this pattern in greater detail as we go along, but if you are an observer of the Bible and church history, you can almost set your watch by this pattern

Let’s return to Peter’s response. Beginning with vs. 9, “…if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well.”

No doubt Peter remembers the words of his Master who foretold the day when Peter would have an opportunity to bear witness in front of powerful rulers, and Peter fires both barrels. He makes his proclamation not only to the Sanhedrin, but also to all the people of Israel who they represent, stating with power and conviction that it was by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth…the very man they had crucified…the very One whom God raised from the dead…that the man crippled since birth now stands before them healed and well.

I loved the way this scene was portrayed in the video we watched. The high priest asks a good question, and Peter provides a rock solid answer, and there is no rebuttal. The crippled beggar was a common sight on the steps of the Beautiful Gate for years…these leaders knew that man and his family. Many of them had probably condescended to give alms to the man from time to time for many years…and now the man stands before them as one fully healed. We can imagine the high priest turning to look upon the man, and when their eyes meet, there is no doubt that Peter is telling the truth. This man was healed in the name of Jesus.

Peter goes on in vs. 11, “This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.” As if Peter has not been confrontational enough, the Holy Spirit brings to mind Psalm 118:22, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” Peter says in no uncertain terms: You are the builders…Jesus is the stone that YOU rejected…and God has made Him the Cornerstone…the Chief Stone upon which all of the Temple of God rests. Did you see what just happened there? Who is on trial now? Who is the accused, and who is the Judge?

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Peter is using the same methodology that he used on the day of Pentecost and just one day before in the temple courts. He points to Jesus as the Anointed One of God who has the power and authority to heal and to save…He points to the death of Jesus on the cross and makes sure that His listeners understand their role in killing an innocent man and their long awaited Messiah…He then points to the resurrection as the sign and evidence that God has exalted Jesus as the prophets foretold, validating His Messianic identity…and then, as Peter has done in each instance thus far, he will extend an invitation. Listen to the final line of Peter’s response in vs. 12, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Did you hear the invitation? Peter is not only stating a theological truth, he is clearly inviting his listeners to repent for their crimes against Jesus, and to call upon His name for salvation. Now, I’m sure Peter was not too optimistic that there would be a big baptism service following this sermon in court, but we should always remember that even in the face of a hostile audience, our job is to bear witness and challenge people to respond to the gospel. That might get us arrested or killed, but that’s exactly what Jesus expects of His followers. Trust God, trust the Holy Spirit to give you the words, and when you fire your gun, fire both barrels! Don’t back away from telling the whole truth, even if it offends…and invite people to receive Jesus as the sole means of their salvation, even if you think it’s one shot in a million that anybody will respond.

Keep in mind who is sitting in that room: people like Nicodemus, possibly an obnoxious Pharisee known as Saul of Tarsus. We don’t know who was in that room, and we don’t know what the outcome was among those listening to Peter that day, but we do know an awful lot about what was said once Peter and John were dismissed…we’ll see that in a few weeks, and the only way we would have that information would be that somebody on that Council ends up becoming a Christian who then shares that information with Luke…right? That’s why I would remind you…our job is not to convert people…our job is to bear witness—to preach the gospel with our lives and our testimonies. We never know how the Holy Spirit will use our witness to transform another human life.

Now, in closing, let’s consider Peter’s final statement in vs. 12. Here’s what he said, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Wow…that’s a mouthful. You want to experience some good old fashioned Christian persecution? Go stand in the middle of a university campus and quote Acts 4:12! This singular statement stands in complete conflict with our pluralistic society.

1) First, Peter makes clear that salvation is not possible through anyone else. So, to be clear, it is not possible to be a Christian and at the same time be a religious pluralist, at least not to the extent that we think all religions say essentially the same thing and lead people to heaven. It is not possible to be a Christian and then hold that all religions lead to heaven. It is not possible to

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be a Christian and at the same time believe that the Jews will go to heaven because of their heritage, or that the Muslims will go to heaven because of their prayers, or that good people go to heaven because of their moral accomplishments. If the Bible can be trusted, and these Holy Spirit empowered words of Peter are true, than we can safely say that the message of Christianity is in full agreement with what Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

2) Secondly, Peter makes clear that we MUST BE SAVED. No one is exempt from needing to be saved. No one gets into heaven without being saved. And no one has anything to do with the SAVING of themselves or others. We don’t save, we don’t contribute to saving others. We MUST BE SAVED…and there is only one Savior. His name is Jesus. It is his name by which we must be saved.

Now that sounds exclusive, but it’s not. Exclusivity means that people who want to come in are not allowed to because of who they are or how they are. Christianity is not exclusive. All people are invited…people of every tribe, tongue and nation. People who are rich and poor, men and women, adults and children, leaders and followers, politicians and plumbers. It matters not who you are, what you have done, how much you have accomplished, how much you have accumulated, or what family you come from. Christianity is the most inclusive invitation that there is.

However, there is only ONE SAVIOR. That’s not exclusive…it’s simply an observation and an undisputable fact. There is no competition in this category. No other religion claims to have a Savior who atones for the sins of us all such that we might be reconciled to God. There is only ONE. There is only One who is said to be the atonement for human sin. There is only ONE Lamb of God. There is only ONE who has died the death we deserve so that we might inherit His LIFE that we could never deserve. There is only ONE who rose again on the third day. There is only one in history who said, “I am the Way.” There is only ONE name that casts out demons, brings sight to the blind and makes the crippled dance. There is only ONE who rebukes the wind and calms the sea. There is only One who will sit upon the Throne and separate the nations as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. There is only One who leaves the 99 and searches for the one who has gone astray. There is only One who occupies the center of history, to whom all of our lives are dated as well as every human life who has ever lived. There is only One who has inspired more music, more literature, more architecture, more acts of mercy, more generosity, and more care for the poor and outcast than any other name in history. There is only ONE name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved…and there is no other name.

And what is that name? It is the name above all names, the name of the suffering servant who was obedient to death, even death on a cross. It is the name of he who set aside all power and
entitlement to take on our pain, our suffering, and our shame. It was he who became as a servant and was despised and rejected by men. It is the name of he who bore our sorrows and was stricken for our iniquities. It is the name of the One who now reigns in heaven as the King of Kings and the Lord and Lords, the One who will come again and make all things new. It is the name of the one who declares, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.” It is the name of our brother, our friend, our Master, and our good, good Father.

Friends, and all who may be watching later, and all citizens of the United States, and all who take breath in every corner of this earth, both now in the years to come: Let it be known that Jesus Christ is Lord, and it is His name by which we must be saved. Therefore, repent and believe, for all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Will you pray with me?