

Why Only Jesus?
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There's moments when everything hangs in the balance...a brief moment in time where what is said and done will set the direction, not just for the next hour or the next day or the next year, but for the next generation, and the generation after that, and the generation after that. There's certain moments where the future is set in a direction, a direction that will affect everything. Acts chapter four, verse 18, is one of those moments for the Church. We are here today because of what took place that moment in Church history. In fact, that moment—what took place that day—has affected the generations of the Church from that day forward.

It's in Jerusalem, and it says this. It says, "*When they,*" speaking of a council of leaders in Jerusalem called the Sanhedrin. "*When they had summoned them,*" speaking of two apostles, Peter and John, and along with them a beggar. They had summoned them, and when they brought them in front of the council they made this statement to them. They commanded them "...not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus."

You need to picture this. There's over seventy men gathered in a grand council. These are the ones that, if they give a thumbs-up, you survive. If they give a thumbs-down, you're done. Gathered with that Sanhedrin that day are the whole contingent of the priestly family. Gathered with them that day are the elders, the leaders of the various clans. Gathered with them that day are the scribes, the men who devoted their lives to studying the scriptures and making sure that everybody else stayed in line theologically. Gathered with them that day were all the powerful of Israel. Gathered with them that day were the very individuals who had crucified Jesus, who had condemned Him to death, disowned Him, and turned Him over to the Romans. And that group of men, gathered in grand council, command Peter and John, 'Don't use that name ever again. We don't want to hear that name in this city ever again.'

They called the council because of what had happened the day before. If you turn back in your Bible to Act 3:1 it'll set the stage for that council meeting. And I'm gonna encourage you to do that, 'cause we're gonna cover a lotta ground today; and if you have your Bibles open you'll be able to track along with me as we build this story. In chapter 1...or in chapter 3 verse 1, we're told that Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, about 3 p.m., the hour of prayer. It was a time when, consistently, the temple would stop for a time of prayer. And Peter and John are going up to pray at that time.

The Church had been going for just a short period at this point. It had had a very dramatic start. Jesus, after His resurrection, spent about forty days with His apostles. And as He spent those days with them, He gave them many convincing proofs, it says, that He was alive. And He commissioned them, and He says, 'I want you to tell...your mission is to give witness to Me, to give witness to My resurrection. You who have seen Me from the very beginning to the very end, you are gonna give witness to Me.' And there were others that were with them. And Jesus gave them those instructions, and then He said, lastly He said, 'Wait here in Jerusalem until the Spirit comes upon you and gives you the ability to give witness to Me.'

And so they wait for ten days...for ten days they wait in Jerusalem. And then, on the fiftieth day after His crucifixion, suddenly as they were in this room in Jerusalem, the Spirit of God comes upon them—a dramatic event. And we're told that they began to speak in languages they had never learned. And people gathered around them and were drawn to the noise. And as they gathered around them people that spoke those languages heard these unlearned people speaking in their languages, and they were amazed, and they were astounded!

And so the Apostle Peter steps forward and he explains the phenomenon there in the streets of Jerusalem to the crowd that was gathering. He explains this phenomenon, and then he goes on and he preaches the first gospel message ever preached after Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Amazing thing happened that day...we're told that three thousand people responded when he was done with that sermon. Three thousand people said 'We want to follow Jesus.' Three thousand people who had been in that city when He was crucified now stepped forward and said, 'We wanna follow Him.' And the Church suddenly began to take root. An amazing group of people...they're described at the end of chapter 2, meeting together in the temple, and then meeting together in a home; sharing meals together, worshipping together; devoted to the apostles' teaching, devoted to one another, and devoted to prayer. And that's what's happening this day as we open chapter 3. Peter and John are moving to the temple to pray. And there were probably other Christians that day headed to the same place to pray.

As Peter and John are going there another person is going, only he's not walking on his own, a person that's going to become very important in the hours that follow. We're told in verse 2 that a man who had been lame from his mother's womb...he's about forty years old, the story later tells us...a man who had never walked in his life, forty years old, and he is being carried along. And he's being carried along to the temple so that he can beg from those who are entering the temple, that he can ask for alms from them. And so what they do is they would bring him to this big, beautiful gate of entrance to the temple, and they would set him down. And as people came in he would hold out his hand, and he would ask for help. And people would come by as they entered the temple, and they would give him money, they would give him things, they would help him to provide for himself because he was unable to work, lame, in his condition.

Peter and John arrive at the temple as he arrives. We're told that he looks to them for a handout. And they look at him, and they look at him and they get his attention. And Peter says to him, 'I don't have gold or silver. I don't. But what I do have, I'll give you.' He says this—'In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk.' And as he says that, he reaches out, he grabs the man's hand, and he pulls him to his feet. And the man is immediately standing, and well, and he begins to walk. And he not only begins to walk, but he begins to leap, to jump up and down! And he just starts praising God! This is astounding!

There was a time in my life when I was paralyzed for about three months. And when I was done, and I was regaining my strength and everything else, and my nerves came back and I was able to start walkin' again, I had to have a physical therapist teach me how to walk again. They had me on the floor, and I had started by crawling. And they would teach my legs to start movin' again, and all that sort of stuff. And that's only after being paralyzed for three months.

For forty years this man had never walked. He had never taken a step on his own in his entire life. And suddenly he's walking, he's leaping, and he's praising God as he, Peter, and John go into the temple together. The crowd is astounded. For years, for decades, they had walked by this man day after day, seen him begging, and given him coins. Suddenly he's there, leaping and praising—and they're astounded. They gather around Peter and John. They come as a crowd in total astonishment. And we're told that the man is clinging to Peter and John. He doesn't want them out of his sight! Man, he's gonna hang onto these two.

And they come up and they're looking at it, and they're totally astounded, and they're wondering what's happening. And so Peter once again has to step forward and give an explanation for something that is out of the ordinary. And as he does so he begins by saying this. He says in verse 12, "*Why do you gaze at us?*" 'Why do you look at me and John? Why do you look at us, as if by our own power and piety we made him walk, as if there's somethin' about us in terms of special powers, or we have some special holiness about us that we can make a lame man walk.' He says, 'Why look at us? It's not us!'

He goes on to say who it is. He says, 'This is what's happening,' verse 13. "*The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers,*" 'the God we have worshipped for generations as Israelites, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—that God...that God' "*has glorified His servant Jesus.*" 'He is demonstrating the excellence of Jesus Christ in front of you. He's trying to show you how excellent, how wonderful, how mysterious, how gracious Jesus is! This is done to make Jesus shine!'

It creates a bit of a problem immediately, 'cause these are the very people who had put Jesus to death two months before. Peter goes on; he says, 'This servant, Jesus, whom you delivered over to the authorities, whom you disowned...' and then he repeats it, 'whom you disowned...' and then he goes on, '...and you put to death, this very Jesus whom you denied before Pontius Pilate, who you said "That is not our king; our only king is Caesar," this very Jesus...this very Jesus who you spat upon, who you tortured, who you mocked...this very Jesus who you celebrated at His death...that is who God is glorifying in this. That's the one God has raised from the dead and is showing you right now how excellent He is.'

He goes on from there, Peter does, and he acknowledges...he says, 'You know, you're doing this in ignorance. You didn't understand everything that was going on. But understand this now—those old prophecies of the ancient prophets of old that God gave, of the suffering Messiah who would die, who would suffer and come back,' he says, 'those prophecies have been fulfilled in Jesus.' And having said that, he gets to the 'therefore' of his message, and it goes like this. He says, 'Therefore, as a consequence of this...the consequence of the fact that the Jesus you put to death is now being glorified by God, raised from the dead...the consequence of that,' he says, 'repent and return. Change direction; rethink everything and go back to that Jesus you crucified; and now, follow Him.'

He gives promises with that as he...as he calls them to turn and change direction, he gives promises. The first one goes like this. He says, "...so that your sins may be wiped away," 'so that your slate would be made clean.' And understand what Peter's sayin' right now, is He's sayin', 'You know what? You've killed the Messiah. *We can erase that.* You put to death the King of Kings. You took God's only Son and you mocked Him, you crucified Him. Guess what? *We can erase that.* Turn to Him for forgiveness.'

The second promise goes like this. He says, "...in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." What you need to picture here is a soul that is arid-dry like a desert, parched. And the promise is that from God there will be a flow of water like water in the desert that will refresh and renew, and bring green and flowers to that desert land of the soul. I believe it's a promise of the Holy Spirit. See, when Peter first delivered this sermon, the first sermon he delivered, when he got to this point in that sermon he spoke of the promise of 'if you repent, your sins will be forgiven and you'll be given the Holy Spirit.' This is a parallel concept, parallel sermon here. He's sayin' 'Your sins will be wiped away and times of refreshing will come from the very presence of God; His Spirit will flow into your life bringing renewal.'

And then he comes to the third and the last of the great promises—'and that He, God, may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you.' Right now, he says, He's been received into heaven and there He waits until the restoration of all things. 'But if you respond to Him, if you turn to Him, you will not only be forgiven, you will not only have the Spirit, but there will be a day of restoration when you will be with Jesus...because He will come for you.'

That's the message he gives. We're told people responded. In fact, we're told that that day the Church grew to five thousand men. We knew it already had three thousand...a little over three thousand people in it, but by this time there's so many joining they're not even trying to track numbers of men and women and children. They're just saying, 'well, there's five thousand men now.' Add to that the women and children—the Church is growing. And that day it took a quantum leap forward numerically.

But not everybody was excited about it. Not everybody responded that way. So when you move into chapter 4 there's a tension that build. We're told that the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees came around. They didn't like what was happening. The Sadducees, in particular, took issue with what was being said, and they had linkage to the captain of the temple guard and the priests. The Sadducees...when you see them mentioned in the narrative of the New Testament...this is a group that were kind of the ruling elite. These were the people of money and power in ancient Israel. These are the ones that kind of controlled the temple treasury, controlled the temple procedures. These were the men that had the power and the prestige; and they made up most of the Sanhedrin, the great ruling council.

Now they were very focused on the here-and-now; theologically they had a very big issue when people started talking about people coming back from the dead. In fact, we're told in verse 2, that's why they came up to Peter and John at this point. It says 'they were greatly disturbed, they were upset, because these men were teaching the people and they were proclaiming in Jesus, through Jesus, they were proclaiming the resurrection from the dead. Peter and John were saying, 'Jesus came back from the dead. It happens! There is life after death—look at Jesus!' And as they were doin' that they were promising resurrection for those who believe...life after death. And they were talkin' about an eternal kingdom. And for the Sadducees, that's nonsense. That's foolishness. It's about the here-and-now. And only the foolish get excited about the hereafter and life after death. There's no such thing; you have what you have right now, and that's it. So they were very upset. But it was late in the day, and they couldn't do much about it, so they just laid hold of Peter and John, and they put 'em, we're told, in jail for the night. They put 'em in jail for the night, and they figured, 'we'll deal with them in the morning.'

And that's exactly what they do. They call for the grand council to meet. Not only do they call for the grand council; they call for the elders, the local clan leaders from nearby, to join. They get the whole high priestly family to come in. They get all the scribes they can get there. 'We're gonna check this out doctrinally,' is the attitude. They bring together the gathering of the council. And they put Peter and John in the middle of it. And close at hand is the beggar, only he's not walking and leaping right now. He's just standing.

They pose a question, and the question is this. They look at Peter and John and they say, "*By what power, or in what name, have you done this?*" 'What power have you tapped into? What magical sorcery are you using at this point? Who do you represent that enables you to do this? By what power or what name have you done this miracle, this magic?'

We're told at that moment that Peter was again filled with the Spirit. Picture a wind filling a sail on a sailboat and starting to move it forward. And Peter begins to speak. He speaks to the entire people. He makes it absolutely clear that he wants everyone to hear and understand something unmistakably. And what it is is this. He says it's "...by the name," verse 10, he says it's "*by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health.*" 'That is who we represent. It's His power that is behind this. And if you're confused about who, exactly, we're talking about when we say Jesus, we're talking about the Christ...the appointed Messiah...Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the man who came out of the north...the miracle worker...the One,' he says even more specifically, 'whom you crucified. That's the One we represent. God raised Him from the dead, and it's by His name, by His power, we've done this.'

The council's not sure what to do at that point. They've had what they call a 'notable miracle' done. They can't even...they can't deny it. Everybody knows...this man sat there for forty years, and now he's leaping and praising God. They cannot deny the miracle, but they don't want this movement to keep going. So they send...they send Peter and John out of the room, and they have this kind of executive session. And they wrestle with 'what are we gonna do?' And they make a decision at that point. They decide, 'You know what? We're gonna bring 'em back in here, and we're gonna tell 'em not to speak to anyone at all with that name 'Jesus.' And so that's what they do. They bring Peter and John back into the council, and they say to them, in the verse that we started with...it says

When they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

And at that moment the entire future of the Church hung in the balance. All the following generations of Christianity hinged on what Peter and John would do at that moment. The command was 'stop talking about Jesus'...the command issued by the very people who had crucified Jesus. Peter and John knew full well what these men and this council was capable of doing. And the instruction is 'don't use that name again.'

Peter and John responded at that point, and they set the course of Church history. They came back with this response. They said, 'We cannot stop.' They said a little more than that. They said, 'You know, if we're gonna heed God or heed you, if we're gonna obey Him or obey you...you decide what's right. We know what's right.' And then they go on and say "*We cannot stop speaking about what we've seen and heard.*" 'We have seen and we have heard Jesus, the crucified, raised from the dead. We cannot stop talking about Him.'

Kinda wonder why not? Why not? Why not just talk about ethics, principles? Why not talk in general theology? I mean, none of us have a total handle on all that God is. Who can say we know everything about God? Everybody must have aspects of truth. Let's just get along with that. Why is it that these men are so persistent about speaking of Jesus?

I remember a reporter in the past month, and we've had many reporters through. But I remember this one reporter, and his face got flushed, and he became beyond argumentative. He actually started getting indignant with me. And he just kept pressing the issue. And he was so frustrated and angry that we would dare to say that people need to hear about Jesus, and need to respond to Jesus. And the attitude is 'Why can't you guys just get along? Why can't you...why can't you just join hands with the Islam...I mean, the Muslim, and join hands with the Jew, and join hands with the Hindu, and join hands with the Buddhist, and join hands with the people that just got their own theologies. Why can't you all just get along? Why do you, as Christians, have to keep talking about Jesus? Why?'

Peter and John gave the answer when they spoke to the council. You'll find it back in verse 12. They'd been asked, 'by what power did you do this? In what name?' And they had responded, and they'd made it very clear. 'This was in the name of Jesus that we did this. And understand, He's the one who was like a precious building stone that you rejected. And God has picked Him up and made Him the centerpiece, the cornerstone.' And then they add this note, and this goes beyond what they'd been talking about. Beyond that particular incident, they're gonna go on and talk about something more. And they do it this way. Peter says

"And there is salvation in no one else..."

'Hey, there's another point you need to grasp here. We wanna talk beyond this one miracle. You need to understand—there is salvation in no one else,

"...for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved."

And the word 'must' there is emphatic in the Greek. It is absolutely necessary—there are no alternatives here. There is only one name by which you can be saved.

Now understand again, they're talking from a big picture perspective. They're not talking about just this instance. You need to see what they see as apostles of Jesus Christ, who had been under His teaching. They recognized that with Jesus Christ at the cross, and His resurrection, we have now moved into the end times, the final days on our way to, ultimately, the great and glorious Day of the Lord. We don't know how many years or generations that may be, but we are in that time that the Bible calls the final age, as it moves to the grand and glorious eternal kingdom of God, the day that is called the Day of the Lord, the dreadful and glorious Day of the Lord—dreadful yet glorious Day of the Lord, when God's kingdom, eternal kingdom, will be established forever.

They know, and they understood, that as we move towards that day there will be a time of resistance and rebellion against God that will intensify and intensify and intensify, until the world can no longer go forward. And God will intervene. And when He intervenes, there's gonna be that great and final day. It's gonna be a dreadful day, because it'll be a day of judgment—a day of judgment for all, the quick and the dead. There is no one that opts out of this. A day of judgment, but also a day of glory, because it's the day that ushers in the eternal kingdom, the return of Jesus Christ. His apostles recognized that. They saw that. And they want it understood that with that day ahead, there is only one name under heaven by which we must be saved.

See, we can look at the gospel message and we can be excited about the promise of forgiveness, that God would wipe our slate clean, that He would even speak to those who had crucified His Son and say, 'We can wipe that out. We can get that off your record.' We get excited about the promise and the wonder and the mystery of the times of refreshing that the Holy Spirit poured out into us, bringing renewal. But what these apostles are talking about is something bigger than all that. They're talking about the return and the restoration of all things, and entering into the kingdom of righteousness.

This is one of the hardest things to preach as a pastor; because when you talk about it it's like you're talking about a great lake of grandeur and peace that's up ahead. And as you talk to the fellow travelers with you on the river, in their kayaks and their canoes and their rafts and their inner tubes and everything else, you keep warning them that, 'You know what? We're gonna get to that lake, but before we do...before we do there is gonna be the wildest whitewater falls you've ever seen, and you're not gonna make it through. And I don't care how sunny and calm the river is right now. Some day up there we're gonna turn the corner in this river and there's gonna be the most rushing, wild water falls you ever saw, and you can not survive. You need Jesus.'

And the reaction becomes, 'Well, why...why only Jesus? Why only Him? I mean, is God just tryin' to do a control thing here that says "It's My way or the highway"? Is it God just tryin' to say, "I wanna control this, and I decide there's only one, and you can only go through that One"? Is it Christians just being narrow-minded?'

Hear well. There's a very, very clear explanation as to why only Jesus. It's because, in all this universe, He's the only one who *can* save. The reason His is the only name given whereby we must be saved is His is the only name that *can* be given. There's no one else. There's no other name you can give. There is no other name God could give other than the name of His Son who died for us. You have to grasp that.

Listen—on that great and dreadful day you can call out your mother and your father's name, and they will not be able to help you. On that great and dreadful day you can call out the names of your best friends who've stood by you through all the ups and downs, all the twists and turns, the ones who've been there when life was most desperate—you can call out their names and they will not be able to help you. You can go out and you can call upon the names of all the great leaders of history and the great heroes of history that have captured your imagination throughout the years, the people you'd say "Those are the real heroes; those are the people that matter." You can cry out each and every one of their names and there will not be an answer. You can cry out the names of every religious leader you can think of—Billy Graham, Billy Sunday; you can call out upon John MacArthur; you can call out upon Mohammed Gandhi; you can call upon Buddha; you can call upon...you can call upon Allah...you can call upon any name you want. And there is no one who can save you on that day other than the person named Jesus. That's why His name must be spoken.

That's why Peter and John stood there that day under the command of God and said, 'We can't stop talking about Jesus.' And it's the same for us. We must speak the name of Jesus. We must, with clarity and with confidence, give testimony and give witness to His reality, His wonder, His mystery, and His grace. If we do not speak the name of Jesus to our children with clarity and with confidence, if we do not speak the name of Jesus to our friends and family with clarity and with confidence, if we do not speak the name of Jesus to our friends and our community with clarity and with confidence, then we have not helped anyone. We haven't. We've not given them the one name...the one name they can call upon and be answered with a person who is able to save their souls.

There's a picture, I just love it, in this story at the very beginning when the Apostle Peter first sees the beggar. And the beggar looks to him, and the beggar's expecting silver and gold. And Peter says, 'I don't possess silver and gold. I don't have it.' *"But what I do have, I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!"*

All we can do is act, and represent, and extend grace through Jesus and Him alone. We don't have the money to solve the world's problems. We don't have the energy, we don't have the skill, and we don't have the strategy, and we don't have the strength. Our name is not gonna save anybody. It's Jesus.

The immediate question would be, 'Well, what's our next action step, Larry? What do we do next?' Well, I can tell you what the early Church did. They prayed...awesome prayer; awesome prayer. They got together. They said, 'Lord, You knew this was gonna happen. You knew this resistance would be here. Lord, give us the boldness to speak. And work through us in the name of Jesus to do amazing things, to confirm our message. Lord, keep us talkin' about Jesus.' And we're told that the building shook, that there was a working of God that moved through them, and they began to speak of God with confidence. They kept talking about Jesus.

That was their next action step. Our next action step—November 2nd. November 2nd. We'll talk about that. We're gonna take two more weeks working on this subject as we go on further in Acts. Right now, right now all I want you to do is get your mind and your heart around that amazing, that fundamental, that absolute and controversial truth—that we must speak the name of Jesus. Grip it with your mind, with your heart. November 2nd we'll talk about we'll talk about what we're gonna do with that as a congregation.

Let's stand.

Our Father in heaven,

We thank You for Your grace. We thank You for the wonder that that long ago You moved in Peter's life at that moment when everything could have been shut down, at that time when he could have kept quiet and everyone else also; they could have just started talking about morals and principles and ethics and theological concepts. Father, we thank You that You moved by Your Spirit and they chose to speak the name of Jesus.

Father, in the weeks ahead I pray and I ask that Your hand will be upon us, giving us clarity and direction for our next step in speaking the name of Jesus clearly and confidently.

In His name we pray, amen.

Grace on you.