

Acts 4:8 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."

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. ¹⁵ So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶ "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ 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."

¹⁸ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. ²⁰ For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."]

Dear Friends in Christ,

When a known criminal is found guilty, we are glad. We also love to see a falsely accused person declared innocent. Our God also loves both of these (Proverbs 17:15). Maybe you have thought it would be great to have the chance to testify and free a person who is wrongly accused, or be part of the fact, in our system, even if you are called to testify, you can only testify to what the lawyers ask you about. One man who had been called to the witness stand told me this: "The lawyers' questions were so tricky that when I stepped down from the stand I wasn't sure any more what I had actually seen."

I.

Today we find two of Jesus' closest followers, Peter and John, in a courtroom. But they are not witnesses, they are the defendants!

What had happened was this: one day Peter and John had been going to the temple and found a lame man begging. In the day before social services, that's how someone like that made a go of it. The beggar held out his hands for a donation and Peter and John gave him what they had. Peter told him, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!" The beggar got up and he walked, and he ran and jumped and held onto the smiling apostles' shoulders as they walked into the temple. The crowds turned confused, then amazed eyes at the former beggar. The regulars all knew him. They had seen every time they went to the temple since they had been children. People talked. They came running across the temple courts. And Peter preached to them about the risen Jesus as the only way to be saved (Acts 3).

A commotion like that couldn't be hidden, so the Jewish authorities stepped in, probably for a variety of reasons. A commotion like that would certainly catch the watchful and suspicious eyes of the Roman police state and bring problems for the Jews. And there was another reason. Only a few months before, these leaders had gotten rid of Jesus by execution, but now here were men doing Jesus-style miracles in Jesus' name. This needed to be stopped. Peter and John were arrested and brought

before the court of 70 elders.

“By what power or what name did you do this?” they demanded (7). **“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...’** (8-9). Peter states the case. “Let’s get the facts straight, 1) We are on trial for an act of kindness, 2) this was done for a lame man, and 3) this man has been healed. Is that what we are on trial for? OK, if that is the case **then know this, you and all the people of Israel:** (put it in the record, write it down Mr. Secretary) **It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stand before you healed”** (10).

“Way to go. Great testimony! Jesus be glorified!” This testimony is just the sort of thing the world needs to hear. Not to give them ‘what for’, but to save them from their sins!

The testimony identifies sin. Peter looked at the 70 senior judges and high priests and said, **“Jesus whom you crucified”** (10). In fact they *had* crucified him. Annas was there before Peter. Caiaphas was there. If you know the Good Friday story, those names ring a bell. They were the very same priests who held a nighttime trial to condemn Jesus to death. Peter could truly say, “You crucified Jesus.”

Peter could, however, take his finger and instead of pointing at those judges, turn around and point at us the audience and say, “YOU crucified Jesus.” The message of the Bible is consistent. When it says Jesus died for us, it isn’t as if we were innocent bystanders, kidnapped hostages of some criminal gang. It wasn’t just for us that Jesus’ had to die, it was because of us. Our sins of thought, word and deed, our sins of cowardice and hatred and grudges and so much more are offenses to God. Jesus was crucified because of these sins we own.

While we have Jesus’ blood on our hands (for we are guilty of his death), we also have been washed in that blood. This too was Peter’s testimony to the court: **“[Jesus,] Whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead... Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”** (10,12). Jesus came to save all people – and he is the only way.

“Salvation is found in no one else... there is no other name by which we must be saved”? (12) He who has ears let him hear. This exclusivity does not rest well in our ears. But it is the consistent message of the Bible and Jesus himself. Jesus said, **“I am the way and the truth and the life”** (John 14:6) Not “a way”; not “some truth”; the way and the truth.

We give a true testimony when we say, “This is not a difference of opinion, culture, or preference. Jesus IS the only way to be saved from your failings and sins.”

Listen to Peter’s clear testimony. May our testimony be so clear.

II.

Sadly enough—and I really mean that word “sadly”—Peter’s testimony fell on deaf ears. The judges got the information they wanted. Peter told them how the miracle had been done. As they looked on Peter and John, ordinary men, and that once-lame-now-walking man with them, they could say nothing. They resisted the Holy Spirit. Instead of listening and examining themselves, they ordered the men out of the courtroom and bought themselves some time.

The prudent judge-politicians determined that this was not the time for action. They were disgusted. **“What are we going to do with these men?...Everybody living in Jerusalem knows that they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it.”** (16) Then they did what they could under the circumstances: **“They called [Peter and John] in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus”** (18).

Looking at those judges, they look silly in their frustration. Dear Christians, do not laugh at them. Their paralysis was momentary. Less than two chapters later, probably only a few months, this same assemblage of judges seized Stephen and had him stoned to death. Then the Christian blood began to flow. A great persecution broke out as Christians were beaten and dragged from their homes, some of

them killed. Then James was executed, as nearly all of the apostles eventually would be. It continued for centuries in the Roman Empire, and the Muslim conquest of north Africa and southern Europe, and even within the Christian Church in the 12th to 18th centuries against any who would dare preach Christ alone as Savior. It continues to this day in places like Syria, Nigeria, North Korea because of the same testimony that Peter spoke in that Jerusalem courtroom, ***“Know this all you people...Salvation is found in no one else...”*** Jesus alone.

Few, if any, Christians die for their faith in America. But some of you know the difficulties a Christian faces. The world’s expectations of your speech and behavior are often in conflict with a living testimony to Jesus. And there are many clever and devious ways that the world keeps Jesus’ name from being preached and taught. The name of Jesus cannot be shared by a teacher in a classroom or else there will be discipline. In the international science community, if you are a scientist who accepts that God created the world, scientific publications refuse to publish anything you write. You will not be invited to conferences because you bear the name of Christ.

Likewise, as I mentioned last week, our world’s only use for Christians is if we help the sick and the poor. But we dare not let the world’s expectations give up on testifying about Jesus, just because people don’t want to hear it. Our text bears witness that Christians are eager to do good for other people. Yet it is interesting to note that when the disciples preached a sermon to unbelievers, they never said, “Do you see all those sick people Jesus helped? We should help sick people. You should help sick people.” They always helped the sick, but that was never the main message. And so we can testify, “Do you know why I try to be helpful, cheerful, serve others? Well, there is only one Savior who has saved me from myself, from sins. He is Jesus, the sinless Son of God.” The early church always used their humanitarian help to give a specific, clear, exclusive testimony to Jesus.

Sometimes, when I read about these heroic testimonies given in the Bible, or even hear stories of other Christians in trials, I feel like dirt. I have allowed myself to be bullied into silence by the world. I have sought ways to speak that were acceptable to the people of this world, rather than how my Savior would have me speak. How about you? Is it time to return to your Savior and confess your failures to give testimony about him? Your fear of man rather than fear of God? Have you been content to not give God the credit because, “God knows that I give him credit, I just don’t want to do it in front of non-Christians.” Have we hidden Christ for professional acceptance or financial gain?

Peter, the same one who denied Jesus three times—remember that—could stand secure giving public testimony in that courtroom because he knew that the only Savior of the world had also saved him from his own sins. Each of us should rejoice in that same certainty. Jesus is first and foremost a Savior.

This same apostle Peter who was more than once imprisoned for his faith later wrote words of encouragement for Christians in a hostile world, *“But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ‘Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.’ But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”* (1 Peter 3:14-15)

I have heard that passage often. But when I connect that author with his life in Acts 4, it has a whole new meaning. Peter was not a teacher or professor talking theory, Peter had lived it. He could say, “Yep. I have known what it was to fear and fail to give testimony to Jesus. But Jesus has forgiven that. But I have also known the other side. I was wrongfully imprisoned, suffering. But God made me realize what mattered. God strengthened me to testify to Jesus. It isn’t about me. It is about Jesus.”

We have heard the theme for today.

TESTIFY ABOUT JESUS

I. Give a Clear Testimony about Our Savior

II. Be Willing to Testify Even in the Face of Opposition.

Let us pray, “Now Lord, please help me. Help me to speak the truth in love, with respect, but help me to speak the truth about Jesus. And even if the name of Jesus brings me shame or trouble, Lord, let

me never let be ashamed of Jesus, the only Savior from sin. Never let me be ashamed of the name of Jesus who suffered all for my name. Amen.”