

## **Preach Jesus**

### **Acts 4:1-12**

Sept. 19, 2010

As we continue to wade through the Book of Acts, what will see is the steadfast courage that the members of the early Church displayed. They possessed a Spirit-given boldness which enabled them to proclaim the Gospel even in the face of fierce opposition.

Indeed, *preaching Jesus* was a risky business in the first century. Proclaiming Jesus as risen from the dead could get you arrested, or even executed.

This has not been our experience, has it? Preaching Jesus may be unpopular in our postmodern society, but in this part of the world it is not the least bit dangerous to profess Christ.

Nevertheless, we share the same mandate as our 1<sup>st</sup> Century brethren. Our mandate is to *preach Jesus*.

I would go as far as to say that *the priority of every Christian should be to promote the Lord Jesus Christ* with our words and with our actions.

I'd like to share an usual experience I had in 2002, as I began pastoring a congregation in Toronto. After a couple of Sundays, it was reported to me by a staff member that a particular couple were no longer going to attend our Sunday morning services. When the staff member asked the

couple “Why?”, they answered, “Too much Jesus. There is too much Jesus in his preaching.”

While I sincerely lament every instance when a person decides to cease attending worship, I must admit that on this occasion I was actually flattered by the reason for it... “Too much Jesus.”

I was flattered because the objection to preaching Jesus put me in the company of the first disciples. Luke describes the scene for us in verse 1 and following, **“The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead”** (Acts 4:1,2).

The religious authorities of the day were so bothered by the proclamation about Jesus, that they physically **“seized”** Peter and John and put them in prison overnight.

I should also mention, by way of background, the healing of the crippled beggar described in the previous chapter. The reason there is such a crowd of people listening to Peter and John in the first place is a function of a miracle they performed, healing a man who was lame from birth.

The lame man, who was sitting at the temple gate begging for money, is approached by Peter who says, **“Silver or gold I do not have, but**

**what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk”** (Acts 3:6).

Peter then helps the man up, and we’re told the lame man’s legs instantly became strong. From there the man did what we would expect anyone in his situation to do—he began jumping, and walking, and praising God (Acts 3:7-9).

As you can imagine, this scene attracted quite the crowd and afforded Peter and John the opportunity to preach Christ to a very large gathering.

As a result, we are told that the number of people who had heard the Gospel message and believed **“grew to about 5,000”** (Acts 4:4)—that’s up about 2,000 people from our last count.

Having spent the night in prison, Peter and John were summoned to appear before the religious leaders the next day and were asked the question: **“By what power or what name did you do this?”** (Acts 4:7).

Unflinchingly, Peter answers **“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”** (Acts 4:10).

Peter then goes on to connect the power Jesus has to *physically* heal a person, and the power He has to *spiritually* heal a person. Have a look at verse 12—Peter, in the presence of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century’s religious elite,

boldly declares **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”**

Prior to their arrest, Peter and John were preaching Jesus. And even while they are in custody, with their wellbeing threatened, Peter and John continue to preach Jesus. And then the religious elite order them to cease and desist, but Peter and John reply, **“we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard”** (Acts 4:20).

Notice that Peter and John are not promoting some *theory of salvation*. They are bearing testimony to what they have personally experienced and observed.

Their message in a nutshell is this: *Jesus*, who was crucified and is risen from the dead, *is the Saviour*.

This great affirmation has its emphasis upon what the Lord Jesus Christ does. And the healing of the crippled man provides the apostles with the perfect illustration.

Peter does not lead the lame man through a series of rehabilitation exercises. He does not say, “Now, I realize that you have never been able to walk in your life, but I have some exercises that will put you right. You must use your will power, and you must focus your energy on moving your muscles. Begin slowly, concentrating on your feet, then gradually work your way up. Eventually you will get stronger and be able to walk.”

No! Peter says quite the opposite.

You see, Christianity is not a course of treatment. The Gospel does not provide instructions on how we can save ourselves.

To a man who was completely paralyzed, Peter declared him healed by the power of Christ.

This is the great principle of the Gospel—that Christ is the Saviour. Jesus did not come to earth to teach us how to save ourselves, but rather, *He came to save us.*

Primarily, Jesus is not an instructor, a teacher, or an example. Primarily, *Jesus is the Saviour.*

This is one of the distinguishing marks of Christianity.

The Gospel tells me that I am incapable of saving myself. The Gospel tells me that I lack the capacity to do the good that is required of me. But the same Gospel also keeps me from despair—it tells me that there is One who has met the standard on my behalf. *The Gospel declares that I have a Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

My encouragement to you then is to cease any attempt to gain salvation for yourself through a commitment to good deeds. This is the angle of the Pharisees.

No amount of will power, no amount of self-discipline, no amount of good intentions will help us meet the standard.

Spiritually speaking, we are paralyzed. We don't need exercises—we need a miracle. And the good news is that Jesus came to this world to work that miracle for us.

The second prong within Peter's reply to the religious authorities is undoubtedly the most controversial. Secondly, Peter tells us that *Jesus is the only Saviour*.

Peter declares **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12).

Within our postmodern context, this is the most objectionable claim.

The late Reverend James Boice, commenting on this verse, writes, “If you want to be laughed at, scorned, hated, even persecuted, testify to the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ. Say that Jesus is the only Saviour” (Boice, *Acts*, 78).

The postmodern wants to hear a different message. The postmodern wants to hear that *all religions are equally valid*. The postmodern wants to hear that *Jesus is simply one reasonable option among many*.

Unfortunately for the postmodern, the Bible doesn't give us this option. Jesus doesn't give us this option.

**“I am the bread of life”**, claimed Jesus (John 6:35).

**“I am the light of the world”**, He says elsewhere (John 8:12).

**“I am the good shepherd”**, He tells His followers (John 10:9-11).

**“I am the resurrection and the life”**, Jesus explains to Martha (John 11:25).

And most unequivocally, Jesus declares, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”** (John 14:6).

I must confess to you my own nervousness in approaching this subject. I am new here, and I don't know what each of you believe about Christ. I don't know how comfortable, or uncomfortable, you are with the exclusive claims made by Jesus.

Part of me wishes that I could stand up this morning and tell you that it does not matter what you believe, because we are all going to heaven regardless. But, if I told you this, I would no longer be preaching the Bible, and I would no longer be fit to be called a minister of the Gospel.

Now, someone will ask, “Isn't it grossly arrogant for Christians to claim Jesus is the one and only way to God?”

How shall we respond to this?

First of all, I think it would be helpful to respond with the reminder that Christianity is not the only religion that claims exclusivity. Christianity is not unique in suggesting there is a particular way to be followed.

And secondly, it would be important to note that, contrary to popular pluralism which suggests that “all religions teach basically the same thing”, the core elements of the world religions are largely at odds with one another.

For example, Hinduism teaches that there are many gods. The Sikh faith, however, was founded by a one-time Hindu who rejected this notion, insisting that there was just one deity worthy of worship.

Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) similarly rejected Hinduism, but not by proposing the worship of one god, but by denying the existence of God altogether.

As you can see, we have contradictions at the foundational level. If there are many gods, there cannot be just one. If there is one god, there cannot be many. And if there is no god at all, there can neither be one god nor many.

Closer to home, the central belief of the Christian faith is that Jesus is the Son of God and the promised Messiah of Israel. This Jesus was crucified, but rose from the dead.

Modern Judaism denies this, and insists that the Messiah is yet to come.



And within Islam, the Koran denies that Jesus died on a cross and regards the notion of Jesus as being Divine as blasphemous.

It is quite apparent that we are not dealing with complementary claims here. Even the famous atheist and philosopher, Bertrand Russell, saw this, causing him to write, "It is evident as a matter of logic that, since [the world religions] disagree, not more than one of them can be true."

My aim this morning is not to refute or diminish the other religions of this world. My aim this morning is to accurately reflect what the Scriptures are teaching.

*Jesus is presented as the Saviour of the human race.* He is the One who, through His death and resurrection, reconciles us to our Heavenly Father. We cannot save ourselves. We must depend entirely upon what Jesus has done in order to be saved.

And secondly, *Jesus is presented as the only Saviour of the human race:* **"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved"** (Acts 4:12).

This is our impetus for proclaiming Jesus. It matters immensely where we place our faith. It is a matter of eternal significance.

The challenge that remains is the "how". Unfortunately, when it comes to *the manner* in which we proclaim Jesus, the track record of the Christian Church has many blemishes.

The message has been, at times, delivered with arrogance. The message has been, at times (to our shame), imposed by through manipulation and force.

My encouragement to you, however, is to *preach Jesus in a manner consistent with our identity*. As followers of Jesus, our manner must be marked by compassion and genuine humility.

And keep in mind, we're bringing Good News! It is a joy-inducing message which we bear!

When the crippled man was healed, we are told that he jumped in the air and praised God.

My prayer is that you will witness the same as we commit ourselves to preaching Jesus.