

Title: The Cornerstone  
Text: Acts 4.1-12  
Theme: The inclusivity of Christ  
Series: Acts  
Prop Stmtnt: Salvation is only found through Christ because only Christ can provide it.

Read Text:

Imagine that your friends Jacob and Lynsey were at Children's hospital where their daughter Melanie is in critical condition. You go to visit them and you pray for them and obviously in particular you pray for Melanie. To your joyful amazement, Jacob calls you the next day to tell you that Melanie had made an astonishing recovery and not only had she made it through the night, but she appeared to be completely healed and it was no longer a matter of when she would pass, but when she would be released to go home. Every person familiar with her situation are stunned and giddy with the news.

Word of Melanie's recovery spreads and it attracts the attention of some government officials who send the police to your home. They arrest you and charge you with breaking the safe space civil law because it was determined that you had prayed out loud in the name of Jesus in a public building and since praying in the name of Jesus causes some people to feel unsafe or judged, this is now against the law.

This is not that far-fetched, is it. And while we may be tempted to shake our heads at such a scenario, remember that this is the setting in which the church was born. And it thrived! Peter and John had healed a lame man in a public setting. The lame man was a well-known lame man and his healing could not be denied. The public reaction was understandable and big. A large crowd was gathering around Peter, John and the man who was healed near Solomon's Portico in the Temple area and when Peter sees a crowd he assumes that this is an opportunity to tell them about Christ – so he does. Telling these people about Christ was the natural thing for him to do since the people had asked Peter and John how the lame man was healed and he was telling them that it was through Christ and why Christ and Christ alone has the power to save. You would think that healing a lame man would be viewed as a good thing. But, when it comes to Jesus, doing a good thing is often viewed as doing a bad thing. But, as we see over and over in the Bible as well as in history, the Word of God cannot be stopped.

#### I. **The Word of God cannot be stopped!** (1-4)

Someone alerted the religious authorities so the priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them and they were "*greatly annoyed*" because Peter and John were teaching the people about Jesus and of course, they had to keep reminding everyone about the resurrection of Jesus. When we read this account and I think that we are supposed to laugh. Seriously! (does that make sense?) Luke is the author of Acts, and while there are times when he is an eyewitness to the events that he writes about, there are other times when he gets his material from those who were, like Peter. I am definitely speculating here, but remember that the Sadducees were those religious officials who did not even believe in a resurrection. When Jesus was on the earth, they tried to argue with him about it and of course, Jesus destroyed their

argument. Then you have the Pharisees who while they believed in a future resurrection, they certainly did not believe (or want to believe) that Jesus had risen again. These were some of the guys who had condemned Christ to death, only for Jesus to do the very thing they said could not happen – rise again. So, as you can imagine, this topic is a bit touchy for them and I can only imagine that when Peter is retelling this story to Luke, that he probably chuckles as he describes the response of the Sadducees to what he is preaching to the crowd.

In other words, “greatly annoyed” means coming completely unhinged! They couldn’t stop the preaching fast enough. The verb translated “came upon them” has the idea of hostile intent. They arrested Peter and John and perhaps the man who had been healed. Since he shows up the next day in the trial, it very well could be that he was healed and then got arrested for it, just like Peter and John got arrested for healing him. That should take care of things, but the damage was already done. “Many of those who had heard the word believed.” And this is the point that Luke is making. Yes, the lame man was healed, but the healing was a means for more people to hear the Word, and they did. And they believed and now the number of the men who believed came to about 5,000. Why does Luke put it that way? Is it because the women don’t count? No. In fact, the word for men, could mean men and women (e.g. mankind). I don’t think that is the case, because Luke could have used another word if that is what he meant. In his first comment about the size of the group of believers, he used the word for “souls”. (3,000 souls – 2.41) Here he uses the word for men, traditionally used for the male gender. It’s not that women are not important, I think he is countering the expected reaction that this was a movement that was largely made up of women and therefore, shouldn’t be taken too seriously, which, rightfully offensive to women, was the attitude that many of the Pharisees had. The fact that 5,000 men were believers, means that the early church probably consisted of at least 10,000. It is difficult to know exactly how many people lived in Jerusalem at this time. The general consensus is around 600,000. So, while 10,000 is significant, it has not taken over the city, but when you consider that this movement began with 11 apostles and 120 people in the upper room, the trend is making a point ...

## II. **Jesus cannot be stopped!** (5-12)

There is a glorious irony here. Luke is naming the cast of characters as Annas, Caiaphas, John and Alexander. We know Annas and Caiaphas from the trial of Christ. In fact, when Jesus was arrested by the Temple Guard, he was brought to the house of Annas and then to Caiaphas where the Sanhedrin was assembled. At both of those places, Peter was in the courtyard keeping an eye on the events when he denied Christ. Now, Peter is not in the courtyard denying Christ, he is standing on the same spot where Jesus stood, being interrogated just like Jesus had been. He’s not denying Jesus this time!

Peter was afraid before, but not now. The power of the gospel made it clear that Peter didn’t have anything to be afraid of, only those who deny it, do. The gospel reveals, exposes and rips back the thin veil of image manipulation and shows for all to see how man’s attempts at intimidation and muscle-flexing, are all, in the end, nothing, absolutely nothing. You can’t stop Jesus.

### A. **He is true power.** (5-10)

What does man generally do with his power? When people amass tools of power (position, reputation, money, influential relationships), then usually use all of that in an effort to protect their power. We see this in so many power structures in our world, whether they be government, military, business, even churches. But, the gospel is profoundly different. Let's unpack this a bit. True power exposes and intimidates imagined power.

Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit, meaning, he is being controlled by the Spirit of God. And where the Spirit of God is, there is freedom from fear. These men, hiding behind their titles, their robes, their ceremonies, pomp, aristocracy, demeanors and other attempts to intimidate by putting the accused in the middle of them are once again (like they did with Jesus) trying to put someone else on trial, when it is their own hearts that are being tried and because Peter is not intimidated by them, he is free to speak to what they need to hear. And he does it politely. "Rulers of the people and elders."

And then, it's actually rather funny. Here you have this austere gathering of the Sanhedrin who have been convened to deal with this urgent crisis. And what is this urgent crisis that threatens the nation? Well, Peter points out the obvious absurdity with this entire scene. He tells them they (Peter and John) are being grilled and interrogated because a good deed has been done. You gotta admit that this seems a bit strange – right? Let's acknowledge what we are dealing with here. A lame man has been healed and here we are getting the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree for it, when instead of getting all bothered, y'all ought to be praising God. The power of God displayed in the changed life of this man exposes man's "power" for what it is. These men, all assembled in their regalia, dignity and seats of authority could not heal a lame man. But standing in front of them are two fisherman. Two fisherman from Galilee. Two fisherman from Galilee who were not afraid of them. Two fisherman and 1 former lame man from Jerusalem.

One of my favorite stories (so I tell you this story about every two years) is the story of W.A. Criswell, long-longtime pastor of the 1<sup>st</sup> Baptist Church in Dallas, which had the reputation of being a powerful and prominent congregation. Criswell was an educated man, a skilled orator, a proper gentleman and a lover of the gospel. Criswell accepted an invitation to preach at one of the city missions and when he showed up at the door he was greeted by one of the men who lived at the mission. This man greeted Criswell like he greeted everyone else. "Hey, welcome! My name is \_\_\_\_\_ do you know Jesus?" Criswell smiled and said, "Young man, my name is W.A. Criswell, I am the pastor of the 1<sup>st</sup> Baptist Church in Dallas." The young man, without skipping a beat said, "That's alright. I used to be a drug addict and if Jesus can forgive me, he can forgive you too, come on in! Now, if you love Jesus, like Criswell did, a greeting like that makes your heart sing! If you love yourself instead of loving Jesus, then a greeting like that will offend you because you are not taken as seriously as you take yourself.

You can go down the road called the way of this world. Most people do. It is marked by thinking that you are at the center of the world and when you do not get the attention and affirmation that you think you deserve; you are out of sorts. The road of this world says get everything you can, keep everything you can, do everything that you want, be envied by others. Be the center of everyone's world. Be envied by them, be desired by them and when you are envied by others, then you will finally discover what it is like to be happy. What a pathetic pile of nonsense that is. And some of you are teaching your children this.

In the last twelve months, major publications like Time, Psychology Today, etc. have been talking about the mental health crisis of college students. We had a seminar here yesterday on self-harm, because this is one of the ways that people are attempting to deal with their anxiety and depression because they cannot measure up to what they perceive their world wants from them. No matter what they do, it is never good enough. So much of the pressure that they live under comes from the lie that says, if you are successful enough, powerful enough, influential enough, then you will have it all. It's a lie! These men in the Sanhedrin had the "power" but had no power before true power. True power isn't telling other people what to do and intimidating them, it is laying down your life for others and rescuing them.

I will not take the time to go into all of the detail of it, but the office of high priest was a very powerful position that functioned more politically than it did spiritually. It was a means of enormous influence and therefore it was kept in the family and handed around to a trusted few. So, all of these men who are the highest-ranking officials in the land are interrogating Peter and John and Peter and John are not all that impressed. Why not? Well, when you spend 3 years with the Son of God, others aren't all that impressive. That is why I say to you over and over. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. It takes just as much grace to save you as it does me or anyone else. And no one can save himself.

Can you see why Jesus was and is so threatening to most people? As Tim Keller said, "*The greatest nightmare of the approval addict is rejection; of the power addict, humiliation; of the comfort addict, suffering; and of the control addict, uncertainty.*" These guys were power junkies and anything that exposed their weakness and wrongness triggered a nuclear reaction. The mere threat of a nuclear reaction caused most to cower in their presence. After all, they had the power to kill you. But when you kill your biggest enemy and he rises again from the dead, then guess what? Your power isn't all that powerful anymore.

Just so there is no confusion, Peter speaks very plainly in v.10. "let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ (Messiah) of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead (oops, y'all got that one wrong) – by him this man is standing before you well." I love how Peter speaks with clarity. Jesus is the Messiah. That means that Jesus is the chosen One of God and the Savior and true King of Israel. The point could not be clearer. If you are in a position of power and you are fighting against the Messiah, then you are an imposter. Jesus was crucified by you. Jesus rose again from the dead by the power of God. Jesus, who was condemned by you was vindicated by God. You are in trouble if you don't repent. And if you want further proof, look at this man standing here in front of you. It was the power of Jesus that healed this lame man. But, Peter is not done. What he says next is right and it is brilliant!

## **B. He is sovereign (11)**

Earlier in the service we read from Psalm 118. Psalms 113-118 were sung at the Passover season and the 118<sup>th</sup> was the final Psalm sung by the pilgrims as they passed through the temple gates and into the temple courtyard. In this Psalm we read/sing about a stone that these builders rejected because they did not consider it valuable or useful for their building. But, not only was

that stone valuable, it was so perfect that it was identified and used by another builder as the cornerstone for a building. Peter quotes from Psalm 118 and identifies these men as the builders who rejected the stone, the Messiah, who was chosen by God as the master builder who positioned Christ as the Cornerstone for a new project called the church.

This appeal to Psalm 118 clearly establishes the Sovereignty of God over this entire story. These men sang this Psalm. These men sang about their own rebellion, their own sin and their own judgment, if they did not repent. Peter uses their own Bible to show them themselves in it. Here you are! But, he is not done! He does not leave them without hope.

### C. **He is salvation.** (12)

Look at the end of v.12. Peter ends his mini-sermon with an invitation for them to trust Christ. He says, “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.” Isn’t that beautiful? Here is the good news! You really messed up. You crucified God’s Son and that was a bad idea. You aren’t done with Jesus. God raised him from the dead. You are going to have to face him and you are going to have to face what you have done. What hope do you have? Seriously, what could you say? What excuse could you give? But when Peter says that there is salvation through Jesus, he is saying that this salvation is available for them too!

At the beginning of the message I said that when it comes to Jesus, doing a good thing is often viewed as doing a bad thing. For example, when we repeat this truth that there is salvation in no one else but Jesus because there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved, we are accused of being exclusivists. Are you saying that all of these other religions are wrong? Who are you to say that your way is the only way?! That is so narrow-minded, so arrogant, so condescending.... You’ve not only heard all of this, but get this. In a recent poll conducted by Ligonier and Lifeway, “46 percent of self-identified evangelicals in America believe that ‘God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.’” That means that what Peter said here is not only controversial in the world, it is controversial among professing Christians. So much so, that in another survey among young adult Christians, almost half think that it is wrong to even tell others about the gospel because that would be judging them. I do not have a platform to speak to all of them, but I do to you and I want you to understand this clearly. The problem is not the exclusivity of the gospel. The problem is not, why is one saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone based on the Word alone? That is not the problem. The real problem is, how can God save anyone? Do you realize how offensive our sin is to a holy God? And yet, here is what is stunning! Christ Jesus came into this world to (for the purpose of) save sinners. That is a very inclusive mission. Jesus came after sinners! And who are these sinners? These are the ones who rejected his law, rejected his authority, rejected his love, rejected his counsel, rejected his Word and rejected his will and plan for life and then after making a complete mess of things turn around and curse God for how awful life is. Who are these sinners? They are all of us.

This is essential to grasp, for what you often hear is a twisted caricature of this message that comes in the form of a question that says, “How can you believe in a God who sends people to hell? How could a good God allow so much suffering in this world, or allow so many people to

die. Wouldn't a loving God accept someone into heaven who is sincerely trying to do good to others even if he never hears about Jesus, or if he does, doesn't trust him? Surely God would be okay with that, right? That doesn't seem fair. The problem isn't that God isn't fair. The problem is that God is fair. God is just. Every single one of us have sinned and because God is perfectly just our sin has to be atoned. It has to be paid for. It has to be paid for with a sacrifice that is big enough to cover our sin. And a life of doing good for others is not enough. The reason why Jesus is the only way, is not because God isn't fair, it is because God is merciful. He provided a way because everyone of us had gone our own way and had no way out. Only Jesus. Only Jesus could live the life that you and I were supposed to live. Only Jesus could then die as a perfectly, righteous sacrifice in our place to pay for our sins. Only Jesus could absorb all of the just and righteous wrath of the Father that should have been poured out on me. God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus came for sinners. Even here, the very council that condemned Christ to death, are hearing the gospel preached to them. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. He said what God wanted him to say and he preached a message of hope to these men. "by which WE must be saved."

#### Philippians 2.1-11

So, 2 things: 1) The name of Jesus is the name above all names – why? Because Jesus made his name lower than our names. (Phil. 2.7) He died so that we would live. He humbled himself so that we would be exalted. He suffered so that we wouldn't forever. And because God loves to save and the Father sent the Son to save and the Son secured our salvation – the Father gave his Son a name above all names. What does Jesus do with this authority? He saves everyone who comes to him. You really don't need to worry about what others think of you, or someone getting more attention than you. Use your God-given influence to care for others. 2) Jesus not only came for sinners, and loves to save sinners – He has accomplished our salvation. You can confidently trust in him to save you and you can confidently tell everyone that if they trust Jesus, they will be saved – forever.