

## Acts 4:12

### No other name.

A minister, visiting a large family in his congregation, noticed many children in the house

- He asked the mother, ‘how many children do you have?’
- She began to count off on her fingers, ‘John, Mary, Lucy, David ...’
- The minister became impatient, ‘I don’t need to know all the names ...’
- I just wanted to know the number’
- The mother responded, ‘they have names not numbers’
- When we read the account of numbers of New Christians in Acts
- We need to remember that they represent real people
- So after their preaching to the crowd that has gathered to find out what’s going on
- After the healing of the lame man
- Luke records that the number of believing men has grown to about 5,000 (Acts 4:4)

While we should not fail to notice the phenomenal growth of the New Testament church

- It is easy to skip over such a verse, anxious to get on with the rest of the story
- But if numbers were not important Luke would not have mentioned them
- Yet in Acts 2:41 we hear about three thousand being added
- And in Acts 4:4 we hear that the number has grown to five thousand men

In the Western world the church is in an era, not of growth, but of severe decline

- It is therefore very easy to reject any emphasis on numbers – a common refrain
- In order to offer some encouragement/hope we have been told for many years
- That we are called to be faithful, not successful, God wants quality not quantity
- And there is some truth in this – but it is not the whole truth

On the other hand are those where numbers are regarded as critically important

- I have to admit that I normally err on this side
- How many people are coming to the services is really important to me
- I really like it when people tell me that more people are attending
- I don’t like it at all when people tell me that fewer people are attending

At one time I was minister of a church with a very large building in South London

- Behind the building there was a large bingo hall and at the time bingo was popular
- Consequently, I used to have to drive through a maze of parked cars to the church
- For my first few years there, sometimes we would have as many as seven
- Other evenings we would have as few as four, in time numbers picked up a bit
- But when we were at our lowest ebb, the steward could be a bit critical
- I replied, ‘I could fill the building next Sunday’
- ‘by offering cheaper admission, bigger prizes and calling bingo numbers ...’
- but that is not the gospel!’
- if numbers become all-important, we may be tempted to use wrong means
- we may lower our standards, we may water-down the gospel
- we may be less demanding, we might not do any proper follow-up
- we might become obsessed with decisions but not with discipleship
- with blessings but not with obedience, with emotion but not with holiness

I believe that God is interested in both quality and quantity

- a discipleship that is demanding, calling for obedience and holiness
- in Acts suffering and persecution are indispensable features of Christianity
- although we know that many Christians are persecuted for their faith
- persecution is hardly a hallmark of the complacent middle-class Westernised Church
- it is possible to avoid suffering by being a church-goer but refusing to stand for Christ
- fearful of being politically incorrect, insisting of biblical values and views
- both on theological and moral issues
- this has produced generations of Christians who are ‘nice’
- generations of preachers who are ‘nice’
- but ‘nice guys have no cutting edge’

The approach of the Apostles was different from that

- their message was not watered-down, acclimatised to the times, politically correct

‘the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.’

(Acts 4:2)

If from the church we proclaim Jesus as a great moral teacher, a hero, an example

- very few people are going to take offence
- in fact, I suggest, that the overwhelming reaction will be one of indifference
- but the apostles were not suggesting that Jesus was a great teacher, hero, example
- but they were proclaiming the uniqueness of Jesus
- unique in his resurrection, unique in his salvation, unique in his blessing

## I UNIQUE IN HIS RESURRECTION

The resurrection was pivotal to the essential apostolic message

- what theologians call the *kerygma*
- this really means the ‘essence of the apostolic message’
- in the first two apostolic sermons (Pentecost and Solomon’s Colonnade)
- we have already become familiar with the emphasis of New Testament preaching

- 1 *Jesus was the promised Saviour*
- 2 *The death of Jesus was part of God’s plan*
- 3 *God raised him from the dead as he promised*
- 4 *The resurrection was witnessed and proved*
- 5 *Jesus is glorified now and forever*
- 6 *All must repent and believe*

Now that Peter and John have been arrested they have to give account of themselves

- and though this is not a sermon as such many of the familiar features are there
- we should not fail to see that the people before whom they must appear
- the Sanhedrin, are the same people who condemned Jesus to death
- though their hopes of getting rid of Jesus were short-lived
- their question shows that it is not really the healing that is problem but the power

Peter and John are called to give account: 'By what power or what name did you do this?'

- the miracle of the healing of the lame man threatened the Jewish ruling council
- they were supposed to have authority over religious matters
- and yet they have no authority comparable to what these ordinary men have
- Luke offers a two fold explanation the power comes from the Holy Spirit
- The authority (in whose name) comes from Jesus

The chief priests and many members of the Sanhedrin would have been Sadducees

- As far as the Sadducees were concerned the Messiah was an ideal not a person
- They were particularly concerned that the apostles were teaching the resurrection
- Partly because of their hostility to Jesus
- Partly because they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead
- When they heard that the believing community had grown to five thousand men
- They were deeply concerned that the message was taking hold

Although Peter and John were being tried before the council that condemned Jesus

- Their aim was not just to get off the hook
- They used even this most difficult opportunity to declare the gospel
- It is a lesson for us, when so often we fail to use the easy opportunities
- Peter and John made the most of a difficult opportunity
- And this became a characteristic of Christian witness
- Not only in the New Testament church but in the whole of church history
- Often, the church has enjoyed the most spectacular growth
- When the believers have known the most persecution

Jesus had reminded his followers:

But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

(Luke 21:12-15)

Witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ is not like writing an essay on apologetics

- An essay writer might get a flash of inspiration, I have needed one often enough
- But the persecuted witness is promised the help of the Lord Jesus himself
- When we are at our weakest, then he is enabled to speak through us
- God gave the apostles a special anointing that might witness to Jesus

The apostles preached through Jesus the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead

- This was preaching in two parts
- Belief in the resurrection was verified by the resurrection of Jesus
- The first, the chief, had risen from the dead – his resurrection was their warrant
- Secondly, resurrection was secured by him for all believers
- Resurrection to eternal life was attainable through Jesus and him alone

## II UNIQUE IN HIS SALVATION

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)

There is no point hiding from the fact that teaching is as controversial now as then

- First we must clarify the meaning of the word 'saved'
- Although the word can simply mean 'healed'
- The word is used here in a closer way to Acts 2:40
- 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation'
- and in the sense of an attachment to the people of God (Acts 2:47)
- 'and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved'
- Peter is talking about a change in status from being rebels to being the people of God

So here is the critical question, is it still appropriate for Christians to proclaim

- There is no other name under heaven given to men
- By which we must be saved?
- Today, this question is met by a variety of responses that I describe briefly

The first response is *pluralism*

- Pluralism is very attractive to the modern ear
- It is the idea behind the thinking of people who say
- I am happy that your religious views work for you as long as you don't bother me
- According to this view, while Christ may be unique to Christians
- This is not an absolute uniqueness that applies to adherents of other faiths

The second response is *inclusivism*

- Inclusivists will accept that all who are saved are basically saved through Christ
- But they add that salvation does not necessarily require knowing the name of Jesus
- In this view devotees of other religions are 'anonymous Christians'
- Trusting in Christ without knowing the name of Jesus Christ

The third response is *agnosticism*

- On the whole this view prefers not to address the question
- Of whether those who have never heard the gospel of Jesus can be saved
- I think the common objection 'what about those who have never heard?'
- Is an important question – it is usually coupled with a question about fairness
- There are clearly some things that we do not know and some things we do know
- So, with regard to those who have never heard the good news of Jesus
- We have to form a Biblical response

Jesus himself said:

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.

(Acts 14:6)

But we must also remember the promise to Abraham

- ‘Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?’ (Genesis 18:25)
- so if *agnosticism* on this point just means not knowing all the answers
- then I have some sympathy with the position
- but ultimately I do not believe it to be the right one

The fourth response is *exclusivism or particularism*

- this is the traditional view that maintains that you have to believe in Jesus to be saved
- here ‘believe’ means ‘trust in’ have faith in
- while ‘Jesus’ is the name with which the Eternal Father honours the Eternal Son
- it is the Eternal Son, who is exalted to the right hand of God
- it is the Eternal Son, who is in very nature God
- it is the Eternal Son, who is revealed, veiled in flesh
- if we accept that in salvation it is God who does the saving
- then the conclusion is clear enough – the name of the divine Saviour is ‘Jesus’

In proclaiming Jesus, the apostles have a boldness that come from the power of the Spirit

- the observation that Peter and John were unschooled ordinary men (Acts 4:13)
- has bred a type of anti-intellectualism among some people
- but we must not forget that for three years they were taught by Jesus
- the powerful witness of the apostles demonstrated they had been with Jesus
- this is so different from Peter’s last encounter with the Jewish authorities
- when he had denied that he had been with Jesus

Often when there is a special movement of the Spirit of God

- religious leaders are the one who oppose it
- anything that can be used to undermine the work of God’s Spirit is used
- when their children become believers parents feel their position is threatened
- when a wife becomes a Christian the husband is jealous of new man (Jesus)
- when a husband becomes a Christian the wife is jealous of a new woman (the church)
- those who do not like the message will often criticise the medium
- sermons are old-fashioned or too long or whatever else it is
- but as long as we consistently maintain the Lordship of the Saviour Jesus
- we shall not be going too far wrong

It is clear that the apostles were given great courage to proclaim the gospel in a hostile world

- it is said of the great Scottish reformer, John Knox (1514-1572)
- ‘he feared God so much that he never feared the face of any man’
- there was an urgency about preaching the gospel

We should spare a moment to distinguish testimony and evangelism

- testimony is personal experience and effective in commending Christ
- testimony is telling others what Jesus has done for me – but it is not the gospel
- evangelism is telling people what Jesus has done for the world in history
- and commending Jesus to them as their own personal Lord and Saviour
- Jesus, crucified, risen, ascended, glorified, coming again
- And commanding men and women everywhere to repent and to believe

All this is too much for the Sanhedrin so they ask Peter and John to leave so they can confer

- No one could deny that an outstanding miracle had been performed
- The Sanhedrin are not against miracles but preaching/teaching in the name of Jesus
- The only thing they can do is command Peter and John not to do this (Acts 4:18)
- But the two apostles reply that they must obey God
- For they cannot help speaking about what they have seen and heard
- Even such bold defiance cannot bring about punishment
- All the Sanhedrin can do is to threaten the apostles further and release them

### III UNIQUE IN HIS BLESSING

It is interesting to notice that the first thing that happens on their release is that they pray

- We should not miss that prayer, in itself, is a great blessing
- The prayer, although *ex tempore*, is saturated with scripture
- Like many spontaneous prayers in the Bible it is full of biblical teaching
- A lesson that we must learn here is that we need to store the scriptures in our hearts
- So that, as a sponge that has been soaked in a bucket of water, will when wrung
- Produce water, so we as believers when spiritually elated or spiritually wrung out
- Will offer up scriptural prayers of thanksgiving

After the thanksgiving, there are only two requests in this prayer, both about evangelism

- Enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness
- Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders
- (through the name of your holy servant Jesus)

The great blessing that came upon the apostles was the ‘presence of God’

- there is no greater blessing than the presence of God
- when you long to be with someone – the most extravagant gift is no substitute
- when God’s presence descended the place where they were meeting was shaken
- and the result of the coming of God’s presence was none other than
- ‘they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly’ (4:31)

The re-filling with the Holy Spirit confirms what we noticed previously

- the initial filling of the Spirit we called the ‘Baptism of the Spirit’
- but there are subsequent occasions that are the filling of the Spirit
- I guess because we are leaky, earthen vessels – in need of refilling
- A special anointing of the Holy Spirit came, so that there would be proclamation
- We should notice that they prayed for miraculous signs and wonders
- But the first answer to prayer was the presence of God and anointed preaching
- God can use miraculous means like dreams, visions and prophecies
- But more often than not he uses the scriptures
- There was no time in the New Testament church that it did not evangelise
- Today our evangelistic method has too often been that of Little Bo-peep
- In the New Testament evangelism was a priority and people gave so it could happen
- In Buenos Aires, members gave so generously to the church that pastors told them
- He wants your house with you living in it, he wants your car with you driving it
- The gospel demands not simply giving but stewardship and consecration
- Because we proclaim a unique resurrection, a unique saviour and a unique blessing