

Salvation Found in No-one Else

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[0 : 00] God, give us the same passion as those early Christians who were gripped by the glory of the risen Jesus. And equip us through your word to live that out this week in his name. Amen.

Friends, one of the great tensions among Christians of different traditions and even a tension within churches is how do we as Christians balance our words and our works?

How do we get a balance or how do we juggle the two demands of telling people about Jesus and what he's done, the gospel, and just doing good works as a means of attraction to the gospel?

Where should the emphasis lie? How do we juggle those two words and works? Some Christians emphasize heavily the need for us to actually remain silent and simply let our good works speak for themselves, to not push the gospel onto people because that might put them off, that might irritate them and turn them off the gospel, and we don't want that.

Other Christians emphasize the priority of our words, about sharing about Jesus, about giving out tracts, about trying to win or persuade or convert.

[1 : 22] All of us agree that we need both. We need words and works. But the question of which comes first divides Christians today.

Certainly it's true, and we need to get this straight, that any ungodliness or lack of integrity, any hypocrisy between our words and our lives will turn people off from the gospel and we will lose all credibility for what we would speak.

So we cannot not have integrity and good works and a godly life. And yet, is that enough?

Some people quote St. Francis of Assisi, but in fact he didn't say this, but it's attributed to him that the phrase, preach the gospel, use words if you have to.

Is that right? Does that gel onto the book of Acts? One weak solution that Christians come up with is to say, it's a matter of personality.

[2 : 27] Your personality is different to mine and your gifts are different to mine. So the silent, godly type just says, I'm not an evangelist, I'm not a Billy Graham.

And with a bit of a sneer they say, I'll leave that to the irritating personalities. And the evangelist says, the one who stirs people with their words for the gospel all the time, well they say, the silent Christian is a bit of a weakling, a bit of a compromiser.

And so they put it down to kind of personality types with a bit of a sneer either way. I think in my own background, my tendency is toward the silent, godly type, though I flip-flop a bit.

Australian Christians, I think, tend toward the silent, godly type of witness. And I think, well one negative side effect of this, and I'm sure you'll agree, is that we actually now have generations of unbelievers who totally misunderstand what the gospel is.

Because of the nice, quiet, godly Christians, they've just been led to presume that being a Christian is just being good. They've been misled about what the gospel is.

[3 : 45] And so an unbeliever will talk to us and they will say, being a Christian is just being a nice person. I'm a nice person, therefore I'm a Christian. Or I'm good enough anyway.

Or they might think, I'm not a nice person, therefore I can't become a Christian. Which again is a catastrophe, because they're the very people that we want to become Christians. Christians.

When our neighbours who have been misled to equate goodness with Christianity, when they hear things like, I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me, when they hear those exclusive truth claims of Christianity, they are thoroughly confused.

And it sounds like we're saying, only Christians are nice enough to get to heaven. Because if being a Christian is being nice, and if Jesus is the only way, then only Christians must be nice.

But of course that's not true. Patently untrue. Sometimes you hear a Christian friend say, I've heard this said, I think sometimes when I'm annoying someone with the gospel and they're trying to shut me up, they say, my friend Fred is a Christian.

[4 : 57] This is an unbeliever talking. And they say, my friend Fred goes to church and I've known him for 20 years and his faith is good for him. But what I like about Fred is that in 20 years, he's never once tried to push it down my throat.

And the non-Christian means that as a compliment, but of course it's an insult. It's an insult because what he's saying is, thank you Fred for domesticating your faith for the sake of our friendship.

One of the patterns we see in the book of Acts is the relationship between Christian works and Christian words.

And it comes out very clearly today. We see a people so gripped by their relationship with the risen Jesus that they speak incessantly about him.

They don't stop. In fact, it's quite hard to find the strong, silent, godly type in the book of Acts. In particular, they love to talk about the name of Jesus.

[6 : 00] The name of Jesus keeps coming up, especially in today's event. They love to attribute all their good works, all the signs, all the wonders to the name of Jesus.

Last week, we saw Peter and John used by Jesus to heal a crippled man and they explained that by saying, the exalted Jesus has done this.

And today, we get to see the response to that message. And it's a mixed response. As they're preaching, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees come and they are much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead.

You'll agree that to the outsider's perspective, preaching is annoying. Teaching is annoying. Talking about Jesus is an annoying thing to do.

I mean, the Sadducees, they're annoyed on about five different levels. They're annoyed because they don't believe in a resurrection. They told Jesus that and now he's raised and they can't disprove it and people are being healed in his name.

[7 : 14] So they're kind of annoyed that their hobby horse is being shattered. They're also annoyed because they killed him and they don't want to be seen to be having made a mistake. I mean, it really just shows God's sense of humour that those who don't believe in the resurrection killed Jesus so he could be raised.

The religious authorities are threatened by this. They're annoyed by this preaching. But more broadly speaking, I think any preaching about Jesus as Lord will stir.

It will always stir. There is no non-threatening way to say, Jesus has been raised from the dead and he's Lord of the universe. The gospel must become annoyingly bad news before it can become good news.

If Jesus is Lord, then your life needs to change. A lot hangs on it. If God has exalted him as king, then you have to respond to him as king.

Otherwise, you're a rebel and you're committing treason to the God of the universe. So the gospel is always annoying, always threatening. Jesus' gospel promises a new heavens and a new earth where Jesus is at the centre.

[8 : 31] But for people who live for this world, who live for their plasma TVs and their sport and their job, then they're going to be threatened by the fact that those things aren't ultimate. That Jesus is ultimate.

And so Peter and John are arrested for their annoying teaching and they're put in custody the first time that Christians have been publicly persecuted since Pentecost.

And you wonder what Peter and John would have thought that afternoon they spent in jail. Would they have said, now I doubt it, but if I was there, would they have said things were going great until we started preaching.

We had the crowd eating out of our hand without healing. But we turned up the Jesus talk too much and look where we are now. We're not telling anyone about Jesus now. You know, we mucked that up, we stuffed that up.

That'd be forgiven for being tempted to think that because they're no longer preaching. They're no longer having an effect in the public square. But while they're in prison, Luke tells us in verse 4, but many of those who had heard the word believed and they numbered about 5,000.

[9 : 48] Now they may have, Peter and John may have got a sense that people were coming around, but they would have had no idea that while they're in jail, the risen Jesus has brought 5,000 new people into the church.

It's an amazing response. From Peter and John's perspective, all they did was annoy someone and get thrown in jail. But from the Lord Jesus' perspective, thousands of souls have been saved.

When you share the gospel, you will feel like you're annoying someone. You'll feel like you're just stirring and they'll tell you that. They'll say, you're so annoying when you talk like that. But we don't know but we can trust that the Lord Jesus uses our gospel words for great effect.

You don't always know. So even the little things we say, even when we say, I love Jesus or I believe that he's risen or can I pray for you, the words that we speak about the Lord Jesus are used by him to great effect.

Even if the immediate response is annoyance and even persecution, you can't judge your effectiveness by the immediate response. For Peter and John that was jail.

[11 : 01] Peter and John are about to go now from the frying pan to the fire because what happens next is that there's an exercise in basically intimidation. So the Sadducees get all their kind of group and all the rulers, elders, scribes assembled in Jerusalem with the high priest Caiaphas.

John and Alexander, all who are part of this high priestly family and they put Peter and John in the centre. They really want them to, they want to pressure them to stop preaching in the name of Jesus.

They say, by what power or by what name did you do this? Now they know the answer but they're trying to pressure them to keep it private. Well, what did Peter and John do?

I think they remembered Jesus' words in Luke's Gospel. Jesus said, you will be brought before authorities and at that time the words will be given to you.

That's exactly what happens. Jesus keeps his promise, he delivers and filled with the Spirit, Peter preaches. Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed, done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man was healed, say, they've done a good deed.

[12 : 20] That's not really why they're questioned. He gives them the explanation, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

And let's be clear, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders.

It has become the cornerstone. That great promise of Psalm 118 that the rejected one would become the basis of the kingdom. And then the stunning conclusion to this sort of mini-sermon, there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given to mortals by which we must be saved.

Peter and John do not keep their faith private. Even under persecution, filled with the Spirit, they stand up for the name of Jesus.

It's amazing, friends, and I want to challenge you to be hungry for the same experience. It's an amazing thing to be put into a situation where God gives you the words and the Holy Spirit uses you to speak about the name of Jesus.

[13 : 40] Of all the experiences of the book of Acts, of all the Spirit-filled things you could experience, this is the Acts experience that I want the most, to be used by Jesus, to witness to him as he promised.

In chapter 1, he said, when the Spirit comes, you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth. It's an amazing thing just to be having a coffee with someone and things turn to matters religion and a door opens and they ask, well, what does your faith mean to you?

Why are you a Christian? And you give an answer that kind of makes sense. And afterwards, you think, where did that come from? And you know that the Spirit, the Lord Jesus, has used you to testify to him.

It's a wonderful experience and I commend it to you to pray for and to seek. That's what Peter is doing. It was God's plan, he says, Psalm 118.

The rejected one would become the foundation stone. You killed him, God raised him, we saw him. There is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved.

[14 : 51] Think about, for a minute, friends, your unbelieving friends or people you know from other religions. Think about the power of that statement. There is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.

There's salvation in no one else. That is an arrogant and an exclusive claim in a world of many faiths and many religions. It's a confronting claim.

And you will be asked, I'm asked, why is Christianity so exclusive? Why can't Christianity be right and other religions right as well?

Isn't it unloving for God to discriminate is what we're asked. Well, friends, if God was a distant relative who wasn't involved in our creation, then it would be discriminatory for God to sort of pick from the hat one group and say, they're the one.

But friends, that's not the God of Jesus. That's not the God of the book of Acts. The reason that Jesus is the only name by which we can be saved is because of Acts 1, 2 and 3, that Jesus is the one who is the rejected, crucified Messiah for the sin, to forgive sins, and the one who's been exalted to God's right hand.

[16 : 18] No one else has been exalted to God's right hand. No one else sits and shares the throne with God the Father. It's because God has been so generous in entering our world and achieving salvation and then exalting his son as king that that king can be the only way we can be saved.

It's not because God is stingy or discriminatory. It's because God has been so generous in Jesus. I think at this point, some of the criticisms of outsiders and we heard some of them on Wednesday night, our God delusion event, they're kind of inconsistent because on the one hand people are saying there's no God, there's no evidence for God, where's God?

And then when we talk about Jesus and God's son and what he did and he's the only way, then they're kind of saying God's done too much. It can't only be him, there's too many eggs in one basket.

So one of them they're saying, where's God? And they're saying, God's done too much. Friends, we want to say, God has done everything we need for our salvation and he's given it to us in Jesus.

God has been generous and so I want people from all religions to know the name of the one who sits at God's right hand. That's how you get access to the Father.

[17 : 39] I even want apathetic, non-religious Aussies to know that as well as all peoples of the earth. To be respectful to say a sincere and genuine Muslim and I've had this conversation where I say, would you want to be in a heaven with God where Jesus shares the throne which is what has happened at Pentecost and in his ascension and a Muslim will say, no, of course I don't.

They don't want to have anything to do with Jesus and so we cannot say that all roads lead to Rome because heaven is a place where Jesus reigns at God's right hand. The people who have rejected Jesus don't want to be in that place and they've shown that in their life.

What we want to do is to appeal to people and to persuade them to come under Jesus' lordship now so heaven will be a place where they want to be, not a place where they don't want to be.

The name of Jesus is the only name given and really the name of Jesus controls the tension in this story. They can't deny the fact there's been a miracle so they say, what will we do with them?

Verse 16, for it's obvious to all who live in Jerusalem that a notable sign has been done through them. We cannot deny it but to keep it from spreading further among the people let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.

[19 : 11] They're trying to silence the name so the gospel doesn't spread. That's the very agenda Jesus has that his name, his gospel will spread and Peter respectfully, very respectfully and yet rebelliously says, whether it's right in God's sight for us to listen to you rather than God, you must judge for we cannot keep from speaking about what we've seen and heard.

With genuine Christian respect, they say, we will not be domesticated, we will not just be good people in Jerusalem, we must speak about the name of Jesus, we must proclaim his name, his name, his gospel is everything.

Friends, have you thought about how important names are? it's so important in a church, if I can just give an aside and it's totally irrelevant, to wear your name tag because you don't feel like you know someone until you know their name and you feel distant from someone until you have their name.

That's how I feel. I've just worked out, it's better to embarrass yourself and say, I've forgotten your name, you don't have your name tag on, please remind me. Then I feel like at least I've got a connection with you again.

Somebody's name is your access to them and the name of Jesus is access to heaven. The name of Jesus is access to the throne of God. Shakespeare got it wrong in Romeo and Juliet when they romantically say, a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

[20 : 48] Well, that's not true. It's not true theologically but it's not true romantically either. When I was going out with my wife Helen, that's all I wanted to hear about it. People say, how's Helen going? Oh, I'd love to hear that name.

Her name filled my heart with joy and that sense of being in love. The name represented all that she meant to me and her commitment to me and that's what the name of Jesus means to us.

We cannot keep silent about it. The name of Jesus reminds us of what he has done for us, our access to the throne of God. There was a guy, I wish I had kept the newspaper article, I lost it.

The police, Victorian police caught a guy in a crime a couple of years ago and he was homeless and no one knew who he was and so they're putting his picture in the newspaper saying, do you know this man?

And it wasn't so they could catch him, they caught him but they couldn't press charges or do anything to him until they had a name. They had no access to the man even though they had physical access until they had his identity which was his name.

[21 : 53] The name of Jesus is our access to the Father and so Peter and John cannot be kept silent about it and nor should we. They return to the church and they report to the church what had happened and they pray an amazing prayer.

If you want to know how to pray for missionaries, this is how to pray. If you want to know how to pray for persecuted Christians, this is how to pray because my prayers for the persecuted church are something like God help them to witness but keep them safe but this prayer is not like that.

They pray sovereign Lord who made the heaven and the earth, the sea and everything in them. The authorities have been pressuring them but they pray to God as the true sovereign, the true authority in the universe.

It is you who said by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David your servant, why do the Gentiles rage and the peoples imagine vain things?

This is Psalm 2. The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah and they've seen it happen for in this city in fact both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, basically everyone gathered together against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed to do whatever your hand and your plan predestined to take place.

[23 : 28] That is they look to the cross of Jesus and see that God's sovereignty overrules the persecution of human authorities. They look to the cross of Jesus and say if God can use that then he will be sovereign over our persecution.

He will take care of us even if God's plan is our suffering for the gospel. And they ask God for two things. They ask, grant your servant to speak your word with all boldness while you stretch out your hand to heal and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

So they ask for boldness to speak and they ask for Jesus to do amazing works. And in that prayer I think you've got in a nutshell how to balance Christian words and works.

Pray to King Jesus to achieve good things, great things through our lives that will draw attention to Jesus. But pray for us, every one of us, to have boldness to speak words about the name.

Friends, we cannot afford to stay quiet. but are we willing to pay the price? We can't afford to stay quiet about the name. It's the only name given.

[24 : 53] But are we willing to pay the price for speaking? Peter and John, part of the frustration, part of the annoyance of their preaching was that they were unordinary, unschooled people.

You don't have to go to Bible college to be an evangelist. You don't have to be a minister to talk about your faith in the name of Jesus. I believe the Holy Spirit is empowering us today to be verbal witnesses to the Lord Jesus.

I believe God can use us to share our faith, even in small ways, telling people that we think he is Lord, and he will use that to bear fruit. I believe Jesus sits at God's right hand, living, ruling, powerful, able to do miracles in our lives, powerful to grow the kingdom, and most of all powerful to use us as we suffer for speaking about the name.

I believe his name is the only name given by which we can be saved. It's clear, the early church did not experience its explosive growth through a silent, godly witness.

Rather, they prayed for boldness to speak and ask the Lord Jesus to do the works. Friends, let's pray now and ask that for this church and pray that it could come to fruition in our lives this week.

[26 : 24] Our Lord Jesus, we draw on you now and exalt you and we know that you are at God's right hand receiving our prayers and interceding for us.

We pray, Lord Jesus, that you would send us your spirit to speak the message, to talk about your name, what you've accomplished, your death on the cross for our forgiveness and your resurrection to life to God's right hand.

Lord Jesus, do great things through this church, achieve great works through our lives and draw attention to yourself through our speaking in response.

Lord Jesus, enable us, give us opportunities small and big to stand up for the name of Jesus. Thank you for the gospel that we have, that you have been so generous to enter our world and to achieve salvation and Lord Jesus help us to not domesticate that message, to not privatise it, to not suppress it, but to speak it to your glory.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.