

Christ the King – Christus Solus

November 26, 2017

Acts 4:1-12 (EHV) – ¹As Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the commander of the temple guard, and the Sadducees approached them. ²They were very upset because Peter and John were teaching the people and proclaiming the resurrection from the dead in connection with Jesus. ³They arrested them and put them in jail until the next day because it was already evening. ⁴But many of those who had heard the message believed, and the number of the men increased to about five thousand. ⁵The next day, the rulers, the elders, and the experts in the law assembled in Jerusalem ⁶with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all the rest of the high priest's family. ⁷After they made Peter and John stand in front of them, they began to question them: "By what power or by what name did you do this?" ⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, ⁹if we are being questioned today for a kind act that was done for the lame man, as to how this man has been healed, ¹⁰let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that it was by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead! By him this man stands before you healed. ¹¹This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹²"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."

Theme: Christus Solus, Christ Alone

The three *solas* of the Reformation don't fly solo, of course. Grace is shown to us most clearly *in Christ*; saving faith isn't faith in itself but faith *in Jesus Christ*; Scripture is centered *in Christ* from beginning to end. That's why it's important to also include *Christus solus* or *solo Christo* in our Reformation celebrations. That's the *sola* that holds up all the other *solas*! It's all about Jesus! What a great way to end this church year as we focus on Christ, our Lord and King – Christus Solus, Christ Alone! Using the words of the favorite hymn to guide our path through the text, 1) he's scorned by the ones he came to save; 2) he's our Cornerstone, our solid ground; and 3) here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

Setting of the Text

In the chapter before our text, a beggar who had been crippled from birth asked a couple of Jesus' disciples – Peter and John – for some financial aid. In the name of Jesus Christ, they gave him something far better – a complete and total healing! He'd never have to suffer the humiliation of begging again. When people saw him walking, jumping, and praising God, they naturally wondered what had happened. Peter jumped all over the opportunity to tell them about the resurrected Christ, who'd really been the One to heal this man.

Yet not everyone accepted Peter's message about Jesus. Even after he'd visibly left this world, Christ continued to be scorned by the ones he came to save.

Part 1: Scorned by the Ones He Came to Save

"As Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the commander of the temple guard, and the Sadducees approached them. They were very upset because Peter and John were teaching the people and proclaiming the resurrection from the dead in connection with Jesus. They arrested them and put them in jail until the next day because it was already evening. The next day, the rulers, the elders, and the experts in the law assembled in Jerusalem with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all the rest of the high priest's family. After they made Peter and John stand in front of them, they began to question them: 'By what power or by what name did you do this?'"

The Sadducees were one of the groups of Jewish religious leaders. They made up a majority of the Sanhedrin, and the high priests were all Sadducees. They were "better-than-thous," and so they weren't all that popular with the people. As far as doctrine was concerned, they denied the existence of angels, the immortality of the

soul, and the resurrection from the dead. Of course they'd been instrumental in the opposition to and crucifixion of Jesus. Such hopelessness!

So, when they caught wind of the healing of the crippled beggar in the name of Jesus, they weren't at all happy about it. It had happened right at the temple, their temple! It undermined their authority. Anyone who taught without their permission – and then would even dare to teach that Jesus was the promised Savior and that he'd risen from the grave – dishonored the God they thought they knew. So they had Peter and John rounded up and thrown into jail, even though it was too late for a proper hearing.

Attempts to prevent the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ have continued to arise through the ages. From the time of the apostles onward, Satan has used those outside of and even within the church to lead people to trust in so many things – their own good deeds, a spark of goodness that remains inside of them, church practices and traditions, indulgences, you name it – rather than trusting in Christ alone. And every time God uses someone to clearly proclaim the truth of *Christus solus*, Christ alone, attempts are made to silence that truth. Satan remains a cruel, malicious, condemned being who wants to take as many souls as he can to hell with him.

Transition

In Christ Alone! He was scorned by the ones he came to save. But he's our Cornerstone, our solid ground.

Part 2: Our Cornerstone, Our Solid Ground

It wasn't but a couple months earlier that Peter and John had seen this same Sanhedrin in action. I'm sure that neither man would ever forget that night. Earlier, Jesus had made his disciples a promise: **"When they bring you before synagogues, rulers, and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourself, or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you should say."** And on the night of Jesus' arrest, Peter had caved! In the safety of his Savior's presence, he'd been so bold, but this time he denied following – or even knowing – Jesus. So which Peter would we see in round two? Which mechanism would kick in – fight or flight?

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, if we are being questioned today for a kind act that was done for the lame man, as to how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that it was by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead! By him this man stands before you healed. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone.'"

Wow! Is this the same guy? What had changed him? Well, for one, Jesus kept his promise! Right on schedule, the Holy Spirit filled Peter with the words to say and the courage to say them. He was at the same time respectful and straightforward. He'd later write down his advice for us: **"Regard the Lord, the Christ, as holy in your hearts. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that is in you. But speak with gentleness and respect, while maintaining a clear conscience, so that those who attack your good way of life in Christ may be put to shame because they slandered you."**

Peter used this opportunity to talk about Jesus! Just as he'd spoken to the crowd on Pentecost, he points out to the rulers that *they'd* crucified him, but God raise him from the dead. And the only reason this crippled man now stood there able to walk around was because the risen Christ stood up and walked out of the tomb after being three days dead.

He takes it further. The religious leaders were bad builders because all their building was done on faulty and unstable stones: the false teachings of self-righteousness and a denial of the resurrection. What they were building wasn't what God was building. The risen and ruling Christ is the cornerstone in God's building. Everything depends on him. On him the Church is built. Without him, you have a building of eternal death rather than eternal life.

It's easy to stay founded on Christ when we're in the safe confines of our church and among our church family. But don't we sometimes build on shakier foundations when we're out there in the world? Don't we sometimes slip into self-righteous thinking? Don't we sometimes deny Christ by our speech or behavior?

Transition

Despite all the persecution – despite building on things other than Christ alone – the Holy Spirit continues his harvest through his same powerful Word. Here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

Part 3: Here in the Power of Christ I'll Stand

“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.”

With these words, the Holy Spirit – and Peter – publicly reaffirmed the entirety of Scripture's teaching about the exclusivity of *Christus solus* as the only Savior for this world. Every human being who wishes to live eternally in heaven must be saved by only this one name: Jesus Christ. If it's going to happen, salvation has to come outside of us; we cannot save ourselves. There's no other Savior than Jesus! This has always been God's one and only plan.

There are a lot of great names in the world – Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, Luther, Washington, Lincoln, your mother, your father, your pastor, your doctor – but not a single one of those names has the power to rescue anyone from sin, death, and hell. Someone once wrote: **“What his name means is what he does. Salvation is surely found in him. It is found in him alone. Without this conviction, there can be no evangelism, no home missions, no world missions. Without this certainty, the church would lose its reason for being.”**

You've probably heard it said that “all religions lead to God, they're just different paths.” Those who say such things accuse Christians of being narrow-minded for saying Jesus is *the* Way. And if there were many different paths, I suppose it would be a bit arrogant and narrow-minded to say that our way is the best way. But that's not the case. The text doesn't say that Jesus is the best way, but that he's the *only* way. Someone must pay the penalty for our sin, and the only one who could do it is Jesus, the sinless Savior. His resurrection proved it!

The voices around us are loud who say “Jesus OR... or Jesus PLUS.” I've attended more than a few funerals where friends and family are led to pin their hopes on the good life of the deceased. Little is mentioned about Jesus' full payment for the person's sin and his authenticating and victorious resurrection. But there's no Jesus PLUS. Not only is it impossible for anyone to somehow earn their way to perfection, but also if we depend on those works, they distort our complete trust in Jesus.

Before Martin Luther, anyone who directed the people to Christ alone either did it quietly or was killed for saying it. Luther faced that fate, too. But when ordered to take back what he'd said, he boldly confessed: **“I cannot recant. Here I stand. I can do nothing else. God help me. Amen.”**

Where does such boldness come from? Of course, the answer is the result of an increasing reliance on God, a trust that's caused and built by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word and Sacraments. So let's pray for boldness and confidence in Christ as we grow in him. Then let's practice it!

Conclusion

If ever a sermon needs preaching and re-preaching, it's that Jesus, alone, is our Savior. There is a temptation to think that our world won't listen to such a message. Many have abandoned the church. There seems to be a hardening opposition to God and his Word. The need is great for us to use the examples of Peter and John, as well as Martin Luther, for the courage to hold to *Christus solus* – *Christ alone*. He's our Cornerstone and solid ground. Here in the power of Christ I'll stand! Amen.