

Sermon Notes: Acts 4:1-22 - 'No other name'

Introduction

The world we live in has become increasingly suspicious of absolute claims. If we think of the scientific world, we have seen theories superseded by others. Yet Jesus has continued to make the same absolute claim on our lives for the last 2000 years, that there is no other name by which we can be saved. There are many wise teachers in the world and its history, but only one saviour.

1. You killed him, God raised him (vs 10)

After the healing of the man at the beautiful gate, Peter and John began to preach and were arrested. I began my preaching ministry on the streets, I was moved on sometimes but never arrested. Peter and John were held in a cell overnight and then made to stand before the Sanhedrin the next day. They could have been forgiven for thinking it was history repeating; this happened to their master Jesus only weeks before, were they heading for a cross too? Peter made no attempt to flee; filled with the Holy Spirit he is ready to face captors, he and John are led before the Sanhedrin. According to the Jewish Mishnah the Sanhedrin sat in a semicircle so they could see each. It's likely that Peter and John would have been positioned intimidatingly within the semicircle, trapped by the leaders.

Peter is not intimidated, in verse 10 he tells them two important things, firstly 'you killed him (Jesus)'. They cannot be let off the hook, nor can any of humanity, the death of Christ was an act of religious jealousy but more properly it was the sacrifice for humanity's sin. Peter in his letter says 'Christ also suffered. He died once for the sins of all us guilty sinners although he himself was innocent of any sin at any time, that he might bring us safely home to God. But though his body died, his spirit lived on' (1 Peter 3:18 LB). The Sanhedrin had done what they had done but they weren't solely responsible, all humanity share in the sad death of Jesus. Yet death is not the end of the story, it's not the most important part, Peter continues 'whom God raised from the dead'. Sin buried Jesus, but the life of God caused the Son of God to rise again. Even death cannot beat God. We cannot escape it but by God's grace and power we will not be beaten by it.

2. No other name (vs 12)

When Peter spoke to the leaders it wasn't on a whim or a bright idea, it was a healing event that had taken place - remember that signs were of crucial importance to the Jewish community in first century Palestine. They expected the Messiah to 'have healing in his wings' to quote the prophet (Malachi 4:2). Peter was there before them explaining the sign 'it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth... that this man stands before you healed.'

Peter continues, 'Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.' (Acts 4:12) The absolute claim here is

because only one died for sin and rose again, this is Christianity's unique story. I don't disbelieve the wise teaching and practices found within other religions and philosophies. But Jesus is Jesus and the claim that he makes is to all people as he is the saviour of all, only Jesus, lived, died and rose again, only Jesus can provide forgiveness of sin from God's side and provide us with the assurance by the Holy Spirit that we have been forgiven.

David Williams says, 'In Jewish thought the Messiah was never essential to the Kingdom. But the Christians had learnt that their Messiah was indispensable'. Jesus' claim is indispensable to the Christian and therefore the claim of Jesus is absolute.

3. We cannot help speaking (vs 20)

For Peter and John, this absolute claim; that there was no other name by which we are saved, wasn't a bookish dogma, it was forgiveness, life and love from God. No doubt the Sanhedrin were baffled by the two fishermen turned disciple, turned teacher. Theologically the two should have been easily dispatched by the older 'wiser' religious leaders.

Yet Peter and John were full of the very person that the Sanhedrin were meant to be followers of, God. 'As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.' (Acts 4:20)

I guess if you have never come to the point in your life where you have experienced something of the love of God, then the absolute claim here must just sound like dogma. Yet the claim can only be made because of the kind of person Jesus was. Jesus was the servant King. There is a Hillsong song from the 1990's 'Jesus, lover of my soul, Jesus, I will never let You go, You've taken me from the miry clay, Set my feet upon the rock and now I know, I love You, I need You, Though my world may fall I'll never let You go, My Savior, my closest Friend, I will worship You until the very end.' Religious dogma is often hard to swallow but once we have experienced something of the love of God in Jesus, and it's heartfelt nature the rest makes sense.

Conclusion

As humans, we have wanted to liberate ourselves from God's rule over our lives, our race even killed God's son. Yet God raised Jesus, and now in love beckons us to believe in him and be saved and be filled with his Holy Spirit.

Connect Group questions.

1. Can you remember a time where you felt God's Holy Spirit at work in you, helping you to stand strong in your faith?
2. Can you think of ways that might help us to share something of the love of God in a truthful but undogmatic fashion?
3. It's important to share Jesus with a smile on your face, after all its Good News, how might our faith help us to develop a joyful disposition?