

Power in One Name

Key Text:	Acts 3 & 4
Key Verse(s):	“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Background to the Study

The Apostles were dwelling in Jerusalem and therefore were in proximity to the centre of Jewish life—Herod’s Temple. As Jews, Peter, John and the other disciples attended the different services of worship there. Herod’s Temple was a complex with several precincts or courts to which admission was progressively restricted. All people were allowed to gather in the Temple’s outer court. From there, Jewish people could enter the area exclusively reserved for them. (Gentiles attempting to go beyond the outer court would have been subject to punishment, possibly even death.) The first of the inner courts was as far as the Jewish women were allowed to go; the next area was exclusively for ritually cleansed Jewish men; and the innermost court was reserved for the Temple priests. The healing of the lame man not only would have been witnessed by residents of Jerusalem but also by a mixed multitude of God-fearing Gentiles and Jews who had made a pilgrimage to the Temple from outside the local area. This location provided a rich opportunity for Peter and John to bear witness to the power of Jesus Christ to a large and diverse audience. In particular, it allowed the disciples to challenge a Jewish audience, to acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah. Traditionally, many individuals with sicknesses of all types sat at the Beautiful Gate asking for alms (money, food, or other donations given to the poor or needy). No doubt this lame man whom Peter and John healed was a familiar sight. Thus, his healing was an authentic miracle from God. Both his actions of leaping and walking and his words of praise to God were a testimony to the miraculous event that had taken place. No one present could deny the power of Jesus Christ, nor could they ignore the message that Peter proclaimed after the miracle. Peter’s sermon repeated the theme of “repent” that characterized his first sermon (chapter 2). He admonished his hearers to “repent and be converted” (vs. 19).

Chapter 4 describes the reaction of the religious leaders and their efforts to stop the Apostles. Christ’s followers responded by praying for boldness to preach the Gospel (vs. 23-31). In verse 1, those who “came upon” Peter and John were the chief priests, the Temple guard captain (who was also a priest and responsible for maintaining order around the Temple), and the Sadducees. Many scholars conclude that most of the priests were Sadducees, a political and religious sect which did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Therefore, they were particularly indignant that Peter and John “preached through Jesus the resurrection.” Peter and John were incarcerated for the night. The next day Peter and John were brought before the “rulers, and elders, and scribes” (vs. 5-7). These included the Sanhedrin, which was the highest Jewish court. It consisted of seventy

members and the high priest. When they asked Peter and John the name by which they had preached, they may have been questioning the disciples' authority. Peter began his response with, "Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel," which was a respectful way to address them. He proceeded to boldly attribute the healing to Jesus and to reference Christ's death and resurrection. The words "unlearned and ignorant" in verse 13 referred to the fact that the Apostles had not received formal training as rabbis. The members of the Sanhedrin—teachers who were well educated in Rabbinic schools—marvelled that Peter and John could so confidently and aptly present their theology. To stop the spread of the belief in Jesus, they threatened the Apostles, commanding them not to teach in the Name of Jesus. Peter and John refused to acquiesce, and boldly declared their determination to "speak the things which we have seen and heard." The only response the Sanhedrin could give was further threats. When Peter and John were allowed to go, they met with believers to give a report, to praise God, and to pray for courage (vs. 23-31). The believers' petition was not for protection, but rather that they would have the boldness to speak and work for God. The place where they were praying was shaken, and they received an assurance that their prayers were answered. Verses 32-37 describe the oneness that existed in the Early Church, resulting in the members being sensitive to each other's needs, with some selling their possessions to meet those needs as they arose.

Testimony from Our Day

Many times when we need to make a decision, there are a number of possible options. A while back, my wife and I decided we needed a newer vehicle. We went to a used car lot where there were four or five hundred cars on display and gave the salesman who approached us a general description of what we were looking for and our approximate price range. He directed us to an aisle of cars, and we started working our way along, looking at various makes and models. We discussed colour and style, studied documentation, compared prices, and sat in a number of them. About halfway down the aisle, I asked my wife what she thought so far. She said, "I don't know. They are all running together!" There were just too many choices. Sometimes, however, our options are limited. A few years ago, my wife and I were getting ready to go on a vacation out of the country. About two weeks before we were scheduled to leave, I was examining our paperwork and suddenly realized that my passport had expired. We had paid for most of the trip in advance, and many of those payments were non-refundable, including our plane tickets and hotel. I had a sinking, desperate feeling that our money would be wasted because I would not be able to travel with an expired passport! Thankfully, a bit of online research revealed that others have faced a similar dilemma, and the United States government has an option for people who need a quick passport renewal. For an extra fee, travellers can get their passports renewed in a single day. I made an appointment at the nearest U.S. Consulate in Seattle, Washington, took a day off work, and made the three-hour drive to Seattle. It was the only good option, and I was thankful to have it. When it comes to salvation from sin, there are not multiple options. In today's key verse, Peter said that there is only one Name under Heaven through which we can be saved. He was speaking to the Jewish leaders, and they did not want to believe that Jesus was the way to salvation. Today people may suggest there are many religions and ways to Heaven, but the Bible is clear that salvation comes through Jesus Christ. He who was sinless became the sacrifice for our sins, paying the price for our redemption. His option is the only option, and it is a good one. Over the centuries, it has proved true and reliable for those who have taken advantage of it. Today, we can rejoice that God has made a way for any person to be saved. And once we are forgiven, we want others to know about this way of salvation as well. We want them to find the only option for receiving everlasting life.

A Closer Look

Question 1	The lame beggar by the Beautiful Gate of the Temple asked Peter and John for alms. The disciples had no money to give, but the lame man received far more than the monetary donation he had hoped for. What did he receive, and how? Acts 3:6-8
Question 2	What was the implication behind Peter's words, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . ."?
Question 3	Are there moments in your life when you do not expect God to do the things that He has promised to do in His Word? What can you do to reawaken your faith and have the expectations of Peter and John?
Question 4	How old was the man who was healed (Ch 3. vs. 22) and why was his age significant?
Question 5	The Jewish rulers were afraid that this notable miracle would cause the Gospel message of Jesus to spread. Why do you think that would be a concern to them?
Question 6	How can we have the boldness to proclaim that Jesus is the way to salvation?

Take Home

What challenges are you facing in life today? Do you expect God to show up and work out those challenges for His honour and glory? Remember, you can always count on Him . . . because He loves you!

After the healing of the lame man, Peter saw an opportunity to preach to the amazed onlookers and began by confronting their astonishment. His purpose and desire was to help them see that Jesus Christ, through whose Name the miracle had occurred, was indeed the Messiah prophesied by their forefathers. It is only through him, that salvation comes. We want to embrace that truth and share it with others.