

John Bunyan served six months in prison for nothing worse than preaching in a little Bedford Baptist Church. *Baptist Preaching* or preaching inspired by the Holy Spirit, was against the law in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. But Bunyan persisted in breaking the law, and he proclaimed: *If I was out of prison today, I would preach again tomorrow, by the help of God.* Bunyan continued to preach as God inspired him and he wrote the classic *Pilgrims Progress*. In all, he spent a fifth of his life in jail for preaching the gospel, and following his Christian conscience. John Bunyan was poor and he had a wife and four children who were dependent upon him, and all he had to do to avoid prison was to stop preaching in his church. This was because the law of the time stated that preaching could only be done in the Church of England.

I wonder how different our world would be if John Bunyan and other like him had given in to the government? Or if more people like Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer had said no to Adolph Hitler? We make the mistake of thinking we can be carriers of the Christian faith without sacrifice or suffering! John Bunyan's boldness for the Gospel of Jesus is inspiring for our times and we all need boldness!

The Apostle Peter had that boldness when he tried to convince Jewish leaders gathered around the healed man that their only hope was Jesus. Today he has a tougher audience, a much more critical and learned one. This is the same Peter who never quite understood Jesus and abandoned Him when Jesus was arrested. Then Peter was empowered by the Holy Spirit and he preached the Gospel to the most powerful men in the land! Peter was preaching Christ to the elders and educated Jewish lawyers, who all glared at Peter and asked; *By what name and what power; gives you the right to heal a crippled man?* ***Peter empowered by the Holy Spirit, does two things: He points to the crippled man who is no longer crippled, and he points to Jesus who made him well.***

Peter declared to those questioning him that salvation only comes from Jesus Christ, and this is testimony that he's been transformed from a coward to a crusader. Apart from Jesus' trial, this is the first instance of Christians being brought before a court to be tried because of Jesus' name. Peter is given boldness to say what the Spirit gives him; even as he is questioned. Mark 13:11 says: *When you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.* And through the Holy Spirit, it is Peter who takes charge of this trial and it is the one on trial who is admonishing the lawyers, not the lawyers condemning the criminal.

Marvel at Peter's conviction and courage, and keep in mind that this is the same court that condemned Peter's Saviour to death. Then Peter does something we all can learn from. *Peter moves the discussion from the sensation of healing to the hope of salvation.* He quotes the Scriptures these learned men knew well. He quotes from the Psalms to support the main point of his closing arguments: *Jesus was predicted a long time ago. Witness this psalm. He's the stone. You crucified him, but God raised him from the dead. He healed this man's legs, and only He can heal you spiritually.*

What did Peter say about Jesus? He who is the Bread of Life began His ministry hungering. He who is the Water of Life ended His ministry thirsting. Christ hungered as man, yet fed the hungry as God. He was weary yet He is our rest. He served yet He is the King. He was called a blasphemer but He cast out demons. He prayed yet He hears our prayer. He wept yet He will wipe away our tears. He was sold for thirty pieces of silver, yet He redeems sinners. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter yet He is the Good Shepherd. He gave his life to destroy death. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to us by which we must be saved!

Peter was breaking new ground. He was proclaiming good news that had never been heard before: A Messiah for available for everyone who accepts Jesus, and people need to hear this. We need to dispel the myth is that all who live in a supposed Christian nation will be saved. We need to dispel the myth that all people will go to heaven, because how could a loving God send anyone to hell? How often have you heard these arguments against the need for salvation and commitment to Christ? Peter was preaching the truth about salvation: Please don't let us be deluded by believing these myths. We must be saved, saved from ourselves and saved from the devil, and rescued from the world! This salvation comes through Jesus Christ and no other! There is no other name by which we must be saved!

All the rest of the best names, like Buddha, Mohammed, Krishna or whoever, all have two things Jesus doesn't. One, a grave with a body in it, and rules on how to reach up to their standards. *Salvation in Jesus is different from all other religions because we worship a risen saviour who is alive! We don't worship at a shrine or honour a corpse because Jesus is alive!* Another important and stark difference between Christianity and all other religions is that their gods say: *Come up to my level and do certain things, and I will accept you.* In Jesus, God came down to our level because we could never get up to his. No good deeds are necessary to get God's attention. All the other religions have the guru at the top of the mountain, to whom one must climb up and then grovel! Jesus Christ came down to live among us, and then rose up to join His Father. But even then God didn't leave us for He sent His Holy Spirit to live with and in us.

And it's not the name Episcopalian or Presbyterian or Baptist or Roman Catholic on our baptism certificate that will play a part in our salvation; only the name Jesus. John Wesley once dreamed that he was at the gates of hell. He knocked and asked: *Are there any Roman Catholics here? Yes, many was the reply. Any Church of England people? Yes many. Any Presbyterians? Yes many. Any Wesleyans? Yes many!*

Disappointed and dismayed, especially at the last reply, Wesley walked a little further in his dream and found himself at the gate of heaven. Here he repeated the same questions. *Any Wesleyans here?* No, came the answer. *Who do you have here then?* Wesley asked in astonishment. We do not know of any here that you have named. ***The only name of which we know anything here is Christian! When we are faced with judgement the only title we need own is that of Christian, that is all that will count.***

Peter calls to those important Jewish leaders and he calls to us today. His message is that accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour is the only way to salvation. Through being interrogated about the healing of the lame man, Peter taught that we must be saved. And as if the source of salvation wouldn't have been enough of a stumbling block for proud Jews, Peter uses bold language. He didn't say *you can be saved or you may be saved, but you must be saved!* To surrender to Christ is a divine necessity and all must respond, and we must respond because we are all like the lame man Peter healed, except that we are spiritually lame. The crutch for spiritually lame people is the wooden cross where Jesus shed his blood for the saving work has already been done.

In Rotterdam, there was a home known as the House of a Thousand Terrors. It received its name during the sixteenth century when the Protestant Dutch rebelled against the Catholic King of Spain. An army was sent to put down that rebellion. In captured Rotterdam, the Spaniards went from house to house searching out and killing people. One group was hiding in a house when they heard soldiers approaching and a thousand terrors gripped their hearts. Then a young man in the house took a goat and killed it, and he swept the blood under the doorway. The soldiers reached the house and noticing the blood coming out from under the door, one soldier said *come away, the work is already done here. Look at the blood.* The people inside the house escaped for the goat had paid the price that they might have life. The people in the house were aware of the significance and parallel with Christ's sacrifice.

The work of salvation is finished, but the work of the Spirit to let people know its reality, still goes on. Jesus died for everyone: past, present and future. But some don't know it yet. That's where we come in, that's the part that God calls us to play! To boldly preach the Gospel, just as Bunyan did, as Wesley did and as Peter did.

Will God write names into the book of life through our efforts today, as we boldly live for Jesus? Boldly living for Christ and empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit? *Then, filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter said to all: Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Amen.*

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