

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 422, Acts 4:5-12 † Easter 3, 04-18-2021

“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

Today marks 500 years since **Martin Luther** stood before the imperial **diet of Worms** and stood fast on Scripture. The pope had excommunicated Luther, and the game was up. It was all over but the burning; Luther's goose should have been cooked. Luther was told to answer very simple questions; if the stack of books in front of him were his writings and if he would take it all back. All this talk about salvation by grace alone through faith in Jesus was offensive. He asked for a night and a day to think about it; and, after 24 hours, Luther said he could not go against his conscience. Instead, he stuck his neck out for the name of Jesus Christ, and was from that time forward was branded an outlaw.

Luther risked everything for the sake of his conscience—what he knew to be right and wrong—and for the sake of the Word in its truth and purity. It was in fact the name of Jesus, not Luther, who was on trial all over again. Salvation not for Luther's sake, but for Jesus' sake, and fully and freely by faith in Jesus, was on trial. So time and again we find this pattern: people do not like to hear about a Savior named Jesus who died for sins and rose again from the dead, and ...

The Name Of Jesus Is Again On Trial

1. **Calling all Easter witnesses** In the previous chapter, Acts 3, Peter and John, going up to the temple, were accosted by a beggar who was born lame, crippled. Looking on him, Peter said, *“Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I will give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”* And the man arose and leapt with joy. Everyone was amazed, for they'd known this man his whole life and that he was born crippled. So here was clear proof that Jesus of Nazareth was living and an Almighty Lord, for a dead man does no miracles. By this miracle a multitude of people were drawn in, and Peter preached about Jesus Christ crucified and risen again and the forgiveness of sins in His name. About 5,000 believed. This miracle became a very unpopular thing among the priests, experts, and officials. They considered it a bad move—healing a man—so Peter and John were brought to trial.

The first thing you want to notice in our text is that the men putting John and Peter on trial are the same men who put Jesus on trial. The purpose is the same kind of thing, a miracle (healing a crippled man in the previous chapter) that drew

attention away from the elders and experts of the law onto the gospel. It doesn't take too long before you realize this is not so much a trial of Peter and John, but a trial of the name of Jesus of Nazareth all over again. The name of Jesus was again a living name. He was also living rent-free in the minds of these priests, experts, and officials. The officials and priests would have liked to pray, "Shallow be thy name," to Jesus Christ, as in a shallow grave—that His name be whispered and then die out altogether, never to be heard from again. So this trial of Peter and John in reality became an inquisition of the healing power of Jesus. They put the name of Jesus on trial again, and His healing power and His teaching along with Him. They wanted to put the legacy of Jesus to bed, and to treat the name of Jesus like it's going out of style.

So in reponse, Peter spoke to the priests and officials, saying, "*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.*" He wanted it on record, "in the minutes," not that Peter and John were on trial, but Jesus Christ. There was no suggestion that they had become like gods or more powerful through their own strength or ability because of their faithful following of Jesus Christ. Instead, "*let it be known,*" published widely and broadcast publicly "*that it was by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene.*"

So in this you see what kind of Easter witnesses Peter and John were. They were **eye** and **ear** witnesses, for we hear later in the chapter their saying, "*We cannot help but speak the things we have seen and heard*" (v. 20). They had seen the Lord when He was risen, they touched Him with their hands and examined the nail-prints in His hands and feet. They conversed with Him, ate and drank with Him, and more than once during a period of 40 days. They were **free** and **easy** witnesses. They didn't attempt any exhibits of evidence when laying out the death and resurrection of their Lord. The facts needed no proof; they were self-evident, undeniable, and publicly known. Peter speaks like a man who has nothing to hide and has no fears of being contradicted by anyone. They were in fact **bold** witnesses. There is a stark comparison in Peter's words when he says, "*Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom YOU crucified,*" and the words to follow, "*whom God raised from the dead.*" He was saying to the high court, "Your verdict was different than God's verdict; in fact, your verdict was the opposite of God's verdict. You proved yourselves utterly godless men by trying to choke off all mention and all memory of that name of Jesus. For you are completely at odds with God's intention." Likewise Peter and John were **consistent** witnesses. When the high council commanded them with threats not to speak in the name of Jesus, they replied, "*You decide whether it is right in the eyes of God to listen to*

you rather than to God. For we cannot help but speak the things we have seen and heard.” Not threats, nor persecutions could silence them, and they finally sealed the truth of their testimony with their blood. If we reject these witnesses, what witnesses would we accept in any other case?

But the only way the witness of Peter and John could be so free, bold, and consistent was because they were ***filled with the Holy Spirit***. That means they had faith in the promises of Jesus. They were changed men who would never mumble about matters of the resurrected Lord again. What about each of us? Do we treat the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth like it’s going out of style? Or do we treat it like it’s trending? The name of Jesus is again on trial, and our world is not so accepting of free salvation. The name of Jesus is calling all Easter witnesses. Is our witness of the name of Jesus free, bold, and consistent? Aren’t we filled with the Holy Spirit, too, full of knowledge and grace? Don’t we routinely pray, “Hallowed be thy name?” If so, then for what, if we aren’t the ones “hallowing” it? You might look for more opportunities this week to share that name, because it is the name that forgives you of your bashfulness, your silence, your fear of the awkward witness, and your lovelessness of the Lord Jesus in regular conversation. His Easter victory covers over our sins of a weak witness, and He sends the Spirit once again to tell freely about your great God who lives again.

Peter and John knew that Jesus Christ of Nazareth was one of a kind, the only true Lord, who was worth every ounce of energy in their being, until their dying breath, to take a stand. They took a stand because Jesus Himself ...

(2.) stands alone as Savior. People really want this part to not be true. “*There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.*” People really resist the whole idea that there could be no saving alternative than the name of Jesus Christ and Him alone.

But what every pastor—in fact, every believer—has to realize is that we at some point have to say, “No, that behavior is not right. No, that narrative is incorrect. No, that belief is off. I love you, and love must be sincere, and as sure as I deny anything that ruins you, *there is no other name that saves.*” As it turns out, there are false doctrines out there, that threaten the truth like poison to a cup or like a leak in a dam. Every “no” to a false savior is a “yes” to the truth. So different religions have separate truth claims, and many of those truth claims contradict.

For instance, another religion says, "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammed is his prophet." Compare that claim to this (v. 12), and you have two conflicting truth claims. Something has got to give. I have also heard this truth claim; no one can know anything for certain, at least no more than anyone else. Salvation or heaven is just too lofty a mountaintop to climb. And in our sin and our addiction to failure, we human beings cannot believe in a gospel that could be just this good. However, there are those world travelers who have returned to tell us the trails they've hiked. There are those struggling actors and writers who have returned from Broadway or Hollywood to tell us the celebrities they've met. There are those mountain climbers who have returned from Everest to tell us the way. There is the Word of the prophets and apostles more certain to tell us the risen Savior they witnessed. There is the gospel to tell us the name of Jesus. And there is Jesus Christ Himself waiting for us at the end of this life.

It is a great and awful sin not to tell any soul entrusted to us again and again what treasure it has in the Lord Jesus. To keep someone from believing in Jesus is such an awful sin that words cannot express it. A preacher who restrains a soul from confidently laying hold of Christ—no matter whether he does it consciously or unconsciously, purposefully, or ignorantly—deprives that soul, as far as he is concerned, of everlasting life. Instead of being a shepherd to that soul, he becomes a ravenous wolf to it; instead of being its physician, he becomes its murderer; instead of being an angel of God, he becomes a devil to that person. So many preachers to their dying day have no idea how many souls they've kept away from Jesus Christ by their unevangelical preaching. By their own fault they caused the souls entrusted to them to die of spiritual starvation. Some present Jesus as a more rigorous lawgiver, with many and more rigorous laws than Moses. Some present Jesus as a social justice warrior with a new set of puritanical rules, and not first as the Ransom and Redeemer of souls.

Let's treasure the sweet name of Jesus enough that we would sacrifice life and limb, property and reputation. For that was His sacrifice and more. Nor is there any power that can rob us of our conscience, faith, or salvation. At the end of this life is the prize! As long as this life endures, how can we miss our chance to tell about Him? It is in fact not you, but the name of Jesus on trial. The name that won our prize is on trial again, so speak again in that name, Amen.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.