

ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

NOTES 13

ACTS 4:1-12

FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP BIBLE STUDY

After Peter and John healed the lame man and proclaimed the risen Lord Jesus to the crowd in the temple, the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees accosted them and put them in jail until they could question them the next day. These Jewish leaders no doubt felt frantic and angry at Peter and John's bold declaration of the Lord Jesus; it was only about two months since they had participated in the trial and execution of the Lord Jesus and had been rocked by the earthquake that shook Jerusalem when He rose from death on the third day.

Peter and John's fearless declaration of Jesus' power to save and His power over sin and death would have caused many recent memories to come to mind. For example, Luke 20:1-8 records Jesus sitting in the temple one day, preaching the gospel (as His disciples were now doing), when the Jewish leaders and scribes asked Him by what authority He did the things He did.

Jesus answered them with a question of His own: "Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?"

Knowing they could not win—if they said, "from heaven," Jesus would ask them why they didn't believe John, and if they said, "from man," they feared the wrath of the people who believed he was from heaven—they refused to answer. Jesus therefore refused to answer them as well.

As the rulers encountered these changed and emboldened disciples, they must have had flashbacks to the boldness and authority of the Lord Jesus Himself as He declared His own authority as the Son of God.

The would also have Jesus' mock trial in their memories. Luke 22:4 tells how Satan had entered into Judas Iscariot, and he has gone to the chief priests and bargained with them to betray Jesus into their hands for 30 pieces of silver. Then, following His arrest, those same chief priests and scribes who were encountering Peter and John now, had heard Jesus say in their council, "If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." So they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am." Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips" (Lk. 22:6-23:2).

Moreover, these recent events of Jesus' trial and crucifixion were directly related to the memory of John the Baptist calling the Jews to repentance. Just before Jesus began His public ministry, John had directly addressed the hypocrisy and deception

of these same chief priests when they came to the Jordan to see what he was doing:

"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance," he said to them (Matt. 3:5-8).

During the past three and one-half years, these chief priests and Pharisees had vainly fought an increasingly hopeless battle: stifling the impact of God through his prophet John and then through His own Son who declared truth and revealed the hypocrisy of Jewish leadership. And now, He was gone—but His disciples were doing the same things He had done: healing, declaring the Lord Jesus as the Way and the means of repentance and salvation, and defying the Pharisees established order and power.

The memory of Jesus challenging their hypocrisy was not a distant blur; it was a recent reality, and now these men's authority which exactly mirrored the Lord Jesus' authority was before them. Their attempts to cover up the evidence of His resurrection and to quiet His influence had been of no effect; Jesus' power was multiplying in His disciples who were preaching and healing with the same boldness He had had.

In fact, the numbers of Jews accepting Jesus as their Messiah was growing. The Day of Pentecost yielded 3,000 souls who were baptized into Christ (Acts 2:41). As Peter and John preached, "more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them" (Acts 5:14-15).

Not only were ordinary citizens coming to faith in Christ, but "the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

The priests were clearly out of control. As Peter and John stood before Caiaphas, the attending priests asked them by whose power or in what name they had healed the lame man. Peter, "filled with the Holy Spirit," replied, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cor-

nerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

This answer rang in the high priest’s court just weeks after Jesus had stood in the same court and had endured this exchange:

“Now the chief priests and the whole Council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, ‘This man said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.’” And the high priest stood up and said, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?” But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, ‘I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, ‘He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment?’ They answered, ‘He deserves death.’ Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, saying, ‘Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?’” (Matt. 26:57-68)

Not only did the priests vividly remember Jesus’ brutal trial and torture, but they clearly remembered breaking the Sabbath on the day Jesus was in the tomb. Going to Pilate, they asked for him to seal the tomb so Jesus disciples couldn’t “steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first” (Matt. 27:62-66).

Then, compounding their duplicity and guilt, Jesus was clearly gone from the tomb on the very next day. Frantic, the priests convened again. After conferring, the chief priests and elders bribed the Roman guards to say the disciples stole Jesus’ body while they slept. They promised to keep them out of trouble if this rumor reached the governor’s ears (Matt. 28:11-15).

To have Peter and John standing before them now, unafraid, willing to go to prison, declaring Jesus as the promised Messiah and the Source of their power and authority—this situation must have made the Jews frantic. They not only had failed to eliminate Jesus, but now His disciples were driving home the priests’ and elders’ guilt as they testified of Him before them.

JESUS CRUCIFIED AND RISEN

Peter answers the priests with words God intended for them to hear. Before showing them again from the Old Testament who Jesus was, he reminded them that they had been the ones responsible for crucifying Jesus. He declares to them “and to all Israel” that the One they had killed had been raised from the dead, and it is by His power that the lame man stands before them, healed.

This message has been the consistent point of every message Peter and John have delivered since the Day of Pentecost.

During his sermon in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, Peter said, “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it” (Acts 2:23-24).

Further, just after healing the lame man, Peter had said to the astonished crowd, “And you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses” (Acts 3:15).

Underlying all of Peter’s preaching in Jerusalem was the call to his fellow Jews to repent and to trust the Lord Jesus. In order to experience the forgiveness and life which Jesus came to give humanity, one must first acknowledge his or her own sin. Peter kept reminding the Jews that they couldn’t slide away from responsibility for Jesus’ death just because the Romans technically crucified Him. They had been responsible for requesting His crucifixion and for handing Him over to them.

Peter consistently reminded them of their guilt—not just their natural guilt as members of the seed of Adam, but of their personal and heinous guilt in rejecting Jesus and calling for His death. Along with his reminder of their blood-guiltiness, however, Peter also delivered the core of the gospel: Jesus had died, but He had risen to life. Only God could defeat death and come back from the grave. This man they killed had been their God; they could still admit their deep transgression and receive the gift of His blood to cover their sin of shedding His blood.

THE STONE THE BUILDERS REJECTED

After reminding the priests and elders that they were responsible for killing the Man who could not remain dead, he quoted Psalm 118:22, identifying Jesus as the subject of a psalm they knew well: “He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone” (v. 11).

Psalm 118:22 says this: “I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Isaiah also prophesied about Jesus using similar words: “Because you have said, ‘We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement, when the overwhelming whip passes through it will not come to us, for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter’; therefore thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: “Whoever believes will not be in haste”” (Is. 28:15-16).

Peter was neither the first nor the only person to connect Jesus with the Old Testament prophecies of the stone rejected by the builders. Jesus Himself made this connection. In Matthew 21:33-44 He told the Pharisees the parable of the ten-

ants left in charge of the vineyard while their master was gone. They beat, killed, and stoned the servants sent by the master to collect the fruit. Finally, the master sent his son, saying, "They will respect my son." Yet they killed the son, conniving that if the son were out of the way, they the tenants would collect the inheritance.

Jesus concluded the parable by saying the master would put those miserable tenants to death and give the vineyard to other tenants who would deliver its fruits to him. Then Jesus said,

"Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him" (Matt. 21:42-44).

Mark records Jesus telling Peter, James, and John a similar message. This passage doesn't use the specific metaphor of the rejected building stone, but He delivers the same message of being treated with contempt. It was after the Transfiguration, and Jesus had just finished telling the disciples that they must not tell anyone what they had seen until He arose from the dead. They were questioning what "rising from the dead" might mean, and they asked Jesus, "Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" And he said to them, "Elijah does come first to restore all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him" (Mark 9:9-13).

Jesus repeatedly connected Himself to the prophecies of the coming One who would be rejected and treated contemptuously. At first the disciples did not understand what He meant; they could not understand His statements about rising from the dead, nor could they internalize the reality of His inevitable suffering. Yet Jesus repeatedly stated that He was the One the prophets said would be rejected, and He identified Himself as the cornerstone (the One upon whom the weight of the whole structure of the church would stand) who would be rejected.

Peter further identified Jesus as the rejected cornerstone in his first epistle, chapter 2, verses 4-7. Here Peter, now fully aware of the revealed mystery of the church which was born on the Day of Pentecost, compares believers to a house of "living stones", a "spiritual house" and a "holy priesthood" that stands on the cornerstone foretold in Scripture: "'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.' So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.'"

Paul also connected the Lord Jesus with the prophecies of the cornerstone. In Romans 9:30-33, Paul compares the hard-hearted Jews of Jesus' day with the gentiles who accepted Jesus by faith. This is what he says,

"What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because

they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'"

Paul makes the clear and stunning statement that the Jews failed to arrive at the righteousness described in the law because they pursued that law by works instead of by faith, and then he identifies the nature of that failure to pursue their righteousness by faith: they stumbled over the stumbling stone. In a word, the Jews' failure to satisfy the demands of the law boiled down to a simple reality: they rejected Jesus. They stumbled over receiving Him as the promised One. He didn't fit their expectations, and they rejected Him.

This rejection was their failure to act in faith. This rejection marked their commitment to their own works.

Peter's identifying Jesus as the stone the builders rejected when he preached in the temple was not an obscure or new metaphor to the Jews. This figure of speech was well-known to them, but its identification with the person of the Lord Jesus was pointed and convicting. The Jews could not miss the fact that they had personally fulfilled the prophecies of their own prophets by rejecting the One sent to them by God.

NO OTHER NAME UNDER HEAVEN

Peter concludes this pointed sermon by stating that "there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (v. 12).

This statement has elicited argument and rationalization over the years. It seems so exclusive, so narrow and "arrogant". What could Peter mean by this bold assertion?

In Acts 10:39-43 we find Peter preaching to Cornelius and his household, the first Gentiles to accept Jesus, to receive the Holy Spirit, and to become part of the church. He says to them,

"And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.

"To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Here Peter declares the same message: forgiveness of sins is for those who believe in Jesus, that he died, rose on the third day, and is the one appointed to judge the living and the dead. In Him alone can one find forgiveness and salvation, because He is the One who bore the penalty for sin and has satisfied God's demands. Only by believing in the Lord Jesus can one be saved.

Peter learned this truth from the Lord Jesus. He said to Thomas in John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Many have said that sincere people who are not Christians can be saved because of Jesus, that because He died for human sin, He opened the way for all sincere people to be saved. Even without knowing or worshiping the one true God or acknowledging Jesus, they will be saved because Jesus died for sin.

This belief, however, is unbiblical. In this passage in John, Jesus did not say, “Everyone comes to the Father because of Me.” His wording is specific and important. No one comes to the Father except through me. People don’t have a relationship with God because of something Jesus did in an isolated moment of time. Rather, they gain a relationship with God through Jesus. Every person comes to the Father by means of repenting and receiving the Lord Jesus’ blood as payment for one’s sin. Repentance and belief changes one’s identity and position: he goes from being in the domain of darkness to being in the kingdom of God’s beloved Son (Col 1:13). He goes from being in Adam to being in Christ. This position is significant. Only those who receive Jesus’ sacrifice on their behalf come to the Father. Those who refuse to accept His blood for their sin remain outside His kingdom.

Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:5, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”

This text describes what Jesus did and why we need Him. First, Paul re-establishes the fact that there is one God—and we know that one God is triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is only one mediator—only one person who bridges the gap and works out an agreement between opposing parties. In this case the estranged parties are God and humanity. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, is God—the holy One whom we cannot approach because of our sin. Yet this holy person became a man—He took on the identity of the party who separated from the Holy God. He became a man while still retaining His full identity as God in order to mediate a resolution between God and man.

Only He could do this job. He represented both parties in Himself. He came and showed estranged man the true nature and justice and holiness of God, and He took on human flesh in order to pay our human debt. He, as a man, gave Himself as a ransom for all of us—He died to pay His own required price for sin so we could be restored to fellowship with the Triune God. Jesus’ willing ransom of Himself was the testimony—the cosmic declaration of God’s love and justice and goodness. In His death and resurrection Jesus declared God’s intention and love for fallen man, and He made a way for fallen man to be redeemed.

Jesus—the one mediator between God and man—overturned our curse and death and restored us to relationship with God is we accept His sacrifice. More than that, when we accept Jesus’ sacrifice for sin on our behalf, we are adopted as God’s own children, and we become heirs of all that is His. This status is different, more intimate, than even the pre-fall status of Adam and Eve. We are not just redeemed creatures; we are adopted as God’s own children. He shares His life and His Spirit with us, and His only begotten Son shares our humanity. He has fully bridged the chasm that sin created between us and God. He has become one of us so we can become His eternal brothers and sisters claiming God as our true Father!

An angel announced this mystery to Joseph when he was about to divorce his betrothed wife Mary after learning she was pregnant: “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Joseph’s calling was as socially scandalous as Mary’s: God appointed him to marry the woman who became pregnant before being married—a situation that cast doubt and shame on both Mary and Joseph. God further appointed Joseph to be a step-father, the parent of His own Son, entrusting him to protect and nurture the Savior of the world and show him how to be a man of God. Joseph and Mary shared this mystery and miracle: they were appointed to parent the human baby in whom the fullness of deity dwelt bodily (Col 2:9), and this tiny child would grow up to be the savior of the world.

There cannot be salvation in anyone but Jesus. He alone came to the human race: fully God and fully man. He alone is the mediator between God and men. He alone qualifies as the one way to God, because He alone is both God and man; He alone offered human blood in an eternal sacrifice that paid for the sins of the world. Because He is human, He qualified to die for human sin. Because He is God, He is infinite and could both bear infinite sin and pay the infinite price of human sin. In Jesus alone can we be saved.

MEDITATE

God has ordained all your days before one of them came to be. He knows the ways you suffer, and He knows the ways He is glorifying Himself through you. He asks you to trust Him, to rest in your identity as His child and to allow Him to carry you through all the surprises and unknowns of your life—things that are no surprise at all to Him. And if you do not know Him as your Father, He asks you to bow before the Lord Jesus and accept His sacrifice for your sin. In Him is life and peace and joy. Through Jesus alone you will find your true identity as a child of God. †

STUDY

Peter's sermon after healing the lame man is interrupted by the priests, captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees accosting them.

- 1. What do we know about the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees from the recent past that might inform their hostility toward Peter and John?**

Luke 22:3-5 _____

Matthew 3:5-8 _____

Luke 20:1-8 _____

Luke 22:66-23:2 _____

- 2. What has happened to the number of believers since Peter's first sermon at Pentecost, and what happens to it in the near future?**

Acts 2:41 _____

Acts 5:14-15 _____

Acts 6:7 _____

- 3. The priests in the court of Annas and Caiaphas asked Peter and John by whose power or in what name they had healed the lame man. What recent events would their answer have triggered in their memories?**

Matthew 26:57-68 _____

Matthew 27:62-66 _____

Matthew 28:11-15 _____

4. Peter uses the healing of the lame man to point the Jewish leaders back to these recent events. He is filled with the Holy Spirit—speaking the words God intended the Sanhedrin to hear. Before he identifies Jesus using Old Testament Scriptures, what does he drive home to these men again, and why does he lead with this reminder?

Acts 2:23 _____

Acts 3:15 _____

5. What OT passage does Peter use to identify Jesus to the Sanhedrin, and how do other NT writers also use this passage or the essential message of this passage?

Psalms 118:22 _____

Isaiah 28:15-16 _____

Matthew 21:33-44 _____

Mark 9:9-13 _____

Romans 9:30-33 _____

1 Peter 2:4-7 _____

6. What does Peter mean in verse 12 when he says, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved”?

Acts 10:39-43 _____

John 14:6 _____

1 Timothy 2:5 _____

Matthew 1:21 _____

MEDITATION

How have you been persecuted or opposed for the sake of the name of Jesus? How has God sustained you and given you confidence and boldness for His sake? In what is God calling you now to trust Him, to go where you might not want to go for His glory?