

SEPTEMBER 17, 1995

CHRIST'S POWER TO SAVE

We've seen the bumper stickers and have heard the words "Christ is the answer." I believe that in the final judgement, the truth of that statement will be very evident. Everyone will see the necessity and all-sufficiency of Jesus for every situation we can face in life, in death and in life hereafter. If the church had just one message it should be proclaiming to a world that is drowning in problems, this is it. However, the world in which we live has become antagonistic to the message of salvation and we can clearly discern the spirit of anti-Christ in all walks of life. The resistance and rebellion against the Lordship of Jesus Christ do not change the truth that only Jesus can save and that He is the solution to every problem of humanity.

Most Christians have not aligned their lives with this truth and, as a result, the world has not seen many role models of how this truth can make a difference in people's lives. We typically look to other sources and resources for help when various situations arise. When all else fails, then we remember God and turn to him for help. Such was not the case in the first century church.

ACTS 3:1-8 Peter and John had spent the previous three years in the company of Jesus. They had witnessed the miracles and they had heard His teaching. They were traumatized by the crucifixion, elated by the resurrection and empowered at Pentecost. What do you think was upper most in their minds as they went about their daily tasks? They were thinking about Jesus and what was happening in the Kingdom of God. These were the focus and central theme of their lives. When they encountered the lame man at the entrance to the Temple, they immediately thought of his needs in terms of what the Lord could do for him. The beggar was hoping for money; however, he had his sights set too low. God had something much more valuable to give him and that was wholeness.

Nothing would have happened that day if Peter and John had not been willing to step out in faith in the Risen Lord. If Peter and John had a pocket full of money, would they have just given the man a few coins and gone on to prayer time in the Temple? I hope that would not have been the case. We should not let the fact that we have some physical resources available to us cause us to lose sight of the greater (indeed infinite) resources we have in Christ Jesus. We should not let the "duties" of a religious system blind us to the needs of people that can be solved only in context of the Kingdom of God.

The results of not relying on our own puny resources but of looking to Jesus were miraculous. Peter told the man, "In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk." He then reached out and lifted him up. We can learn from these two actions. First, we must be willing to speak to problems we encounter in accordance with the will and character of Jesus. Those we help should have no doubts regarding our motivation or "where we are coming from." The power (ability) does not reside in us, it only flows through us. We often overlook the second thing that Peter did. He reached out and took the man by his hand and pulled him up. So often, we in our churches "preach at" the problems but do not turn our hands to help turn the situations around. More often than not, we are satisfied to just throw money at problems and we don't even bother to say anything.

ACTS 4:5-7 The society or culture of Judah in the first century was strongly religious. Prayer times were prescribed throughout the day and people paused to offer prayers at those times. Such religious practice is evident in some more fundamental Moslem countries today. Having a constant reminder of our connection with God and His purposes should influence the way we live. Of course, if a person's belief system is in error, then the influence can be negative rather than positive. Another possibility is that if such observance is prescribed and required, then people will merely go through

the motions. No impact will be made on the way they live.

In situations where “religion” is firmly entrenched, introducing a new way (for example, the Gospel of Jesus Christ) will be met with great resistance. We see this in modern day Israel among the Jews and in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq. The Church in the first century also encountered strong opposition from leaders of the religious system of their day.

It is interesting that the religious leaders recognized a significant miracle had occurred. They knew this was not just a coincidence and they knew Peter and John did not have the ability (in and of themselves) to cause this to happen. Just as the Roman Catholics pray to various saints for specific needs, the Jews practiced calling upon the name of dead patriarchs in their prayers. The Council had called Peter and John to give an answer as to which name they had used or by what power this miracle occurred. They also recognized the possibility that the devil and the forces of evil can do mighty acts. They had heard the stories of how the magicians of Pharaoh’s court had duplicated some things that Moses had done to convince Pharaoh that God had sent him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. The Sanhedrin may have been concerned that Peter and John had used demonic powers.

I do not think we should fault the Sanhedrin for attempting to discover the source of the power demonstrated. We need to be on guard regarding spiritual matters. The Scriptures warn us that the devil will appear as an angel of light and that in the last days the devil will deceive many with “lying wonders” even to the point of causing fire to come down from the sky.

ACTS 4:8-12 Jesus Had promised His disciples “But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time *you will be given what to say*, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you (Matt 10:19-20). The time had come for that promise to be fulfilled and as Peter spoke the Holy Spirit enabled him powerfully.

Peter was probably aware of their concern regarding demonic power. He was careful to point out that what had happened was not just a stunt to impress people. It was a good deed done for someone in need. The fact that good had come out of what had happened should have been an indication of the source. James tells us “every good and perfect gift comes to us from the Father of Lights in Whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning.”

Peter knew this was the same group of people who had condemned Jesus as a blasphemer and had concluded He should die. This knowledge did not stop him from telling them what had happened was by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. It took boldness to confront these religious leaders on their own turf.

Lest there was any doubt about Whom he was speaking, Peter reminded them they had crucified this Man. Though they were powerful in their society, God had overruled them and had raised Jesus from death. Peter then went on to relate Jesus to the Messianic promises and to show what they (the Sanhedrin) had done was prophesied many years before. This same Jesus was “the stone that the builders rejected.” The Gospel of John tells us that “Jesus came unto His own, but His own received Him not.” That was not the end of the story. Our rejection of Jesus does not change the fact that He is Lord. In the words of the Psalmist, “He has become the Chief Cornerstone.”

They proclaimed the truth of the Gospel message that day in the hearing of the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus is God’s ONLY provision for salvation. No other name, in heaven or earth, is sufficient.