

Sermon for January 26, 2025 – The 3rd Sunday after Epiphany

Acts 4:8-12 EHV

Theme: God raised Jesus to be our only Saviour.

- 1) Don't reject Him because He doesn't fit your life.
- 2) Let the Holy Spirit build your life on Him instead.

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, ⁹if we are being questioned today for a kind act that was done for the lame man, as to how this man has been healed, ¹⁰let 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, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead! By him this man stands before you healed. ¹¹This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹²"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."

Why do people reject Jesus? I mean, the good news of who He is and what He has done for us fills me with such hope that I can't imagine being without Him! But when I consider how my sinful heart often strives after the things of this world more than after Christ, then I begin to understand.

Our sinful, human nature likes to think we can know and achieve everything on our own. While we may not mind some help along the way, nevertheless, we don't want to believe that we are so bad that we need a Saviour to rescue and reconcile us to God. Consequently, while the world is willing to acknowledge Jesus as a great teacher and exemplary person, it rejects the notion that He is our only way of salvation.

In light of this, how important it becomes for us to contemplate what Peter said to the Sanhedrin regarding Jesus' place in our lives. **God raised Jesus to be our only Saviour.** 1) Don't reject Him because He doesn't fit your life. 2) Let the Holy Spirit build your life on Him instead.

Part One: Don't reject Him because He doesn't fit your life.

Our sermon text took place shortly after Pentecost. Since Jesus' crucifixion had just occurred a few months earlier, it was still on everyone's mind.

Peter and John healed a lame man at the temple in Jesus' name, which impressed many people gathered there. However, what impressed the crowd even more was what Peter preached after the miracle: that God had raised Jesus from the dead. He is the Saviour God promised in Scripture – forgiving all who repent of their sins and turn to Him in faith.

Enraged by Peter and John's preaching, the priests had them arrested for spreading the message of Jesus' resurrection. Their motives were not rooted in any lack of evidence regarding the resurrection but in their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

The next day, the entire Sanhedrin convened to address the situation. ⁷*After they made Peter and John stand in front of them, they began to question them: “By what power or by what name did you do this?”*

⁸*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, ⁹if we are being questioned today for a kind act that was done for the lame man, as to how this man has been healed, ¹⁰let 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, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead! By him this man stands before you healed.*

The high court that condemned Jesus to death did not intimidate Peter and John. Why? Because Jesus kept his promise to fill his followers with the Holy Spirit when called to testify.ⁱ So, Peter was happy to answer their question: the person who healed the lame man was Jesus the Nazarene, who they crucified for blasphemy, even though no deceit was found in His mouth.ⁱⁱ They rejected Him as their Saviour, even though He fulfilled every prophecy of Scripture concerning the coming Christ. Yes, everyone can know that Jesus is the LORD’s promised Saviour. How so? Because God raised Him from the dead, proving beyond any doubt that He was who He claimed to be and had God’s approval. More than that, Jesus still performed wonders in His name that no one other than God could do, as demonstrated by healing the lame man in the temple.

Understand Peter’s bold, direct preaching wasn’t gloating. No, He wanted it to serve another purpose: to get the very people who crucified Jesus to recognize their sins, repent, and be saved. For that reason, Peter alludes to Psalm 118 to show how their actions against Jesus fulfilled Scripture, proving yet again that Jesus is the Christ.

¹¹*This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone.*

¹²*“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.”*

The problem the Jewish leaders had with Jesus is the same problem the unbelieving world has with Him today. Instead of acknowledging Him as the divine Messiah, they view Him as just another human teacher vying for our attention. Sure, most people will admit that Jesus did remarkable things, but beyond that, they have no use for Him because He does not fit their idea of what kind of Saviour humanity needs. In doing that, they reject the very cornerstone God provides for their lives.

Cornerstones were crucial in ancient architecture. They were typically heavy, large, and uniquely shaped. They dictated a building's geometry and guided the placement of every subsequent stone. Understanding this concept can shed light on the grave mistake the world makes regarding Jesus. People perceive Him merely as another stone that can be conveniently incorporated into their lives, disregarding His foundational role. They recognize Him as an exemplary figure, embodying genuine care for others and inspiring us to emulate His qualities. However, this superficial understanding inevitably leads to disappointment and the missed opportunity to experience the foundational forgiveness, hope, and everlasting life He offers to all who embrace Him in faith.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, our sinful nature also tempts us to form distorted notions about how Jesus should fit into our lives. For instance, we may believe that following Jesus will result in a carefree and effortless life, despite Jesus' warnings to the contrary.ⁱⁱⁱ Then, when He allows us to face trials that we perceive as unjust, we become dismayed, disheartened, and upset! Why? Because we built our faith upon our preconceived expectations of who Jesus is, rather than aligning our thinking with the revelation of Scripture. May the LORD forgive us for this. And forgive us He does, inviting us, in the peace of His forgiveness, to receive Jesus in faith as the true foundation of our lives.

Part Two: Let the Holy Spirit build your life on him instead.

Let's go back to Peter's statement regarding Jesus, whom God raised from the dead: ¹¹*This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone.* ¹²*“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.”*

Jesus' name in Hebrew, “Yeshua,” means: “The LORD's Saviour.” The fact that God sent Him underscores our urgent need for salvation.

But what do we need to be saved from? Not just from bad politics, economics, and societal issues, but from sin itself. The Bible describes humanity as so corrupt that even the inclinations of the human heart are only evil all the time.^{iv} It says no one does good, not even one.^v Our sinfulness, our evil and rebellious nature in opposition to God and His law, is something we inherited from our parents, going back to Adam and Eve. Despite our outward ability to perform good deeds in the eyes of others, God knows the truth of our hearts. Our sins have separated us from Him so much that God describes all people as dead: unable to reconcile themselves to Him.^{vi}

Whenever people build a tall building, they need a pit in which to pour the foundation. Skyscrapers, for example, have foundations that go very deep in the ground to withstand all the intense storms that beat against them.

How does that apply to us? Recognizing our sins is like the pit into which a foundation is poured. If we only think of ourselves as a little sinful, we will assume we only need a little Saviour – and Jesus won't fill that kind of pit. If, on the other hand, we accept what the Bible says about our helpless condition, then only Jesus can fill that void. And he freely does so out of undeserved mercy and love. Only Jesus, true God and true man, could satisfy God's demand for perfect obedience to his law in our place – thereby earning the righteousness we need to stand before God. Only He could take the sins of the world upon Himself — suffering and dying for them all to fulfill God's justice. And how do we know that Jesus accomplished all that? Because God raised Him from the dead.

There is salvation in no one else. No human, angel, idol, or other god could do what Jesus did. Blessed is the person whom the Holy Spirit awakens to this truth. Acknowledging the depths of their depravity and need for a Saviour, such a person will turn to Jesus in repentance. The Holy

Spirit will fill the void of sin with the foundation of Jesus. And upon this foundation, they will build their lives.

Yes, when the Holy Spirit sets Jesus as our cornerstone and foundation, we, by faith, will build our life on it under his guidance. We trust what Jesus says about himself, God's love, and our future. We will not view this world as the end-all and be-all of our existence, but recognize that we are strangers here: heaven is our home. We will trust his promise to work in all things, even the great evils we may experience during our time on this earth, for our everlasting good. We will trust that He will provide all we need when needed. He will listen to our prayers. And if He doesn't give us what we ask? Then we will nevertheless trust that His grace will be sufficient for us because His power is made perfect in weakness.^{vii}

When the Holy Spirit places Jesus as the cornerstone of our lives, our lives gain new purpose and meaning. We live in hope when the rest of the world despairs. We can endure the storms of life that devastate others. We radiate the grace of Christ, reflecting His saving love to the loveless world around us so others might be saved, too.

Yes, having Jesus as the foundation of our lives changes us. We no longer strive to earn God's favour. Instead, we live in the assurance that we possess God's favour by grace through faith. When feelings of guilt and shame arise, we take them to the cross, knowing that Jesus paid for them all. Through Baptism, the Holy Spirit has cleansed us from all sin, clothed us with Christ's righteousness, and made us children of God by granting us a new, spiritual birth. Because God raised Jesus from the dead, we have unwavering confidence that He will also raise us on the last day to live forever with Jesus in God's house, just as He promised.^{viii}

Brothers and sisters in Christ, rejoice in the beautiful hope you have in Jesus, and – like the apostle Peter – be willing to share it boldly with the world. **God raised Jesus to be our only Saviour.** 1) Don't reject Him because he doesn't fit your life. 2) Let the Holy Spirit build your life on Him instead. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. Mark 13:11

ⁱⁱ Cf. 1 Peter 2:22

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. John 16:33

^{iv} Cf. Genesis 6:5 and 8:21

^v Cf. Romans 3:9-18

^{vi} Cf. Ephesians 2:1ff

^{vii} Cf. 2 Corinthians 12:9

^{viii} Cf. John 14:1-6