**SALVATION IS FOUND ONLY IN JESUS**

 June 5, 2016

Acts 4:1-31 / Key Verse: 4:12, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

In the last passage, Peter and John healed a crippled beggar in the name of Jesus. Peter said to the man, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” The man, who had been crippled from birth, got up and walked. Not only did he walk, he jumped around and praised God. He was healed both physically and spiritually. The name of Jesus has power to heal and power to save. In the name of Jesus, spiritually sick men and women can be healed completely and become happy people praising God. In today’s passage, opposition to the name of Jesus arises. The religious leaders try to stop the apostles from preaching in the name of Jesus. But it does not work. Instead, the apostles become stronger in faith and their message becomes more clear and absolute. Peter more boldly testifies, “Salvation is found in no one else (which means only in Jesus), for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Through today’s passage, I pray that God may help us to receive Jesus newly and more deeply so that we may enjoy the joy of the salvation given in the name of Jesus all the more.

Look at verse 1. While the apostles were still speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John. In verse 2, they were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. As you know, these religious leaders were the ones who had crucified Jesus. They hated Jesus to the point of killing him because Jesus’ teaching and all he had done was so challenging to them. Because of Jesus, they couldn’t hide their sin of hypocrisy; the love of money and power. To them who didn’t want to repent, Jesus was like the thorn to their throat. So they killed Jesus thinking that when they got rid of him, they would not be disturbed by him anymore. But they heard that the apostles were preaching about the resurrection of Jesus whom they had crucified and many people were listening to them. The news of Jesus’ resurrection was greatly disturbing to them because it reminded them of the crime they had committed to God. In addition, they were also greatly disturbed because the apostles who were laymen and had no theological education were teaching the people without their permission.

So what did they do to the apostles? In verse 3, they seized Peter and John and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. They did what they could do with their corrupt political and religious authority. But did their persecution stop God’s ministry? Not at all. Look at verse 4. But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about 5000. Where the gospel is working, opposition always arises, too. It is because the enemy of God knows that where the gospel is expanding, their territory is decreasing. So Devil (Satan) desperately works to stop the work of the gospel. But the Holy Spirit is stronger than Satan. Satan cannot stop the work of the Holy Spirit.

Look at verses 5-7. The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest’s family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?” It was a most intimidating place for the apostles to be in since it was the same place where they brought Jesus to accuse him. Also it seems that the religious leaders wanted to use the same strategy against the apostles that they had used against Jesus. They could not deny the obvious miracle that was done. So they wanted to discredit the power source of the apostles. However, how did the apostles respond?

Let’s read verses 8-12. “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: ‘Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: *It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved*.”

Around 50 days ago, Peter had disowned Jesus three times because of the fear of the religious leaders. But now we see how courageous he became. When he was filled with the Holy Spirit, he looked straight at the rulers and elders of the people without any fear. And he boldly and clearly testified that Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom they crucified but God raised from the dead healed the crippled beggar. It was not by human courage but by the power of the Holy Spirit that Peter did this. So here we learn that we don’t need to worry about facing trials. Jesus said in Mark 13:11, “Whenever 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.”

Peter did not stop there and he used this opportunity to witness to them about Jesus more. He quoted Psalm 118:22, which Jesus had also quoted in the parable of the tenants in all three synoptic gospels. Loot at verse 11 again, “He is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’” The religious leaders loved power and money more than God. So, when Jesus’ pure and holy life challenged their corruption, they were overcome by self-righteous pride and rejected Jesus and put him to death. But God raised him from the dead. God made him the cornerstone of his salvation work. Here “cornerstone” is a metaphor meaning the “foundation” of building God’s salvation work.

Peter concluded his message with verse 12; today passage’s key verse. Let’s read it once again. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Here, in Peter’s conclusion, there are two points. The first one is that all men under heaven need to be saved and the second one is that only Jesus saves. In his message, Peter said, “We must be saved.” Peter not only included the haters of Jesus but also himself and all people there. And from what must we be saved? Knowing this is very crucial because it helps us to understand his second point of teaching; “why only Jesus saves?”

When the bible says about salvation, it means the salvation from our sin. Then what is sin? How much are we aware and understand about sin? 2 weeks ago, in my message, I explained what sin is. (1) Sin is to love ourselves and other things of the world more than God; the author of our life. (2) Sin is that I or others or other things rather than God become my lord and master. (3) Sin is to please ourselves or other things more than God. All other sins are originated from this root of sin. According to the bible, all men under heaven are in the state of slavery to sin. There is no exception in this fact. Then what is the consequence of sin? Sin alienates us from God. Sin separates us from God. Sin lowers our identity, value and dignity from heavenly level in which we were created to earthly level.

Sin is not just theoretical matter but very real to everyone and not sometimes but every day in our lives. Since the first man sinned against God, man became lost from God; man lost their true identity, dignity, and absolute value and man became endless wanderer. Man lost paradise where man was originally placed to live with God and for the glory of God; our Creator and our heavenly Father.

Since man sinned against God and lost the image of God and became alienated from God, man has been struggling to find out and fill what they lost. That is why in human history, numerous religions and different types of religions in modern times have been made in every place people have lived.

But if we try to find out the essence of all religions and code of morality in each religion, it can be summed up with one sentence. It is to struggle to reach to God and his level by our own good deeds or works. One time, I asked one Sikhism believer friend in work place for what the Sikh’s essential teaching is. He answered, “after all, the key teaching of Sikh is to do good deeds so that you can enter better life in this world and in the world to come. When I asked the Buddhism believers and Hinduism believers and Muslims for the same question, all their answers were all same. Their answers are all about their own good deeds or works.

But is it really possible for us to please God and his standard in our own good deeds? Can we really restore the image of God that we lost in our heart due to our sins by our own good deed or work? Absolutely not! It is because the gap between perfect and holy God and sinful man is too big and too high as heaven is far higher than earth.

But here is good news to all of us. Jesus is God incarnate who came down from heaven to earth in a human form like us. Because Jesus was Creator God, he didn’t need to become a man like us. But he wanted to be like us, because he loved us dearly and wanted to save us dearly. To save us from our sins, he willingly gave up his glory and privilege and throne in heaven and became a man just like us. And he died on the cross where we had to die because of our sins. Through his death, he took away all our sins and forgave all our sins. After his death, he rose again from the dead defeating the power of sin and death. Through his resurrection, he became the very first fruit of resurrection of dead man in human history and gave us true hope of eternal life. This Jesus’ death and resurrection has power to give us new life; transformed life from the inside out; free from the power of all ugly sin and death. This Jesus restores the image of God; the character of God in us which we lost due to our sin. In human history, no one has died for our sins. In his history no one has been resurrected from the dead to give us eternal life. Only Jesus died for our sins. Only Jesus rose again from the dead for our eternal life. Jesus is not just another mere man; another hero. He is Creator God. As Creator God, he became a man like us to save us from our sin. Through his death and resurrection he filled the gap between perfect and holy God and sinful man, which no one could do. This is the unique reason of why only Jesus can save us from our sins.

Now the time that we live in is a multi-cultural society of many religions and pluralism becomes social norm more and more in the name of human right and human equity. But in such spiritual environment, we must remember that our changing human cultures and men-made religions cannot replace the absolute truth of God who created this whole universe and owns all of them. The absolute truth of God never changes. The absolute word of God never changes. Jesus said in Mark 13:31, “Heaven and earth will pass away but my word will never pass away.” This Jesus also said in John 14:6, “I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me.”

Last week, Sam shared the beautiful story about Joni Earreckson-Tada who became paralyzed from her shoulders down to her two legs through a diving accident but after meeting Jesus personally became one of the happiest and most encouraging women toward all discouraged and depressed people through her transformed life. Unlike a crippled beggar who was healed completely and praised God, she became a lame physically by an accident but spiritually she met Jesus through that accident and Jesus became her life and joy which she could never tasted when her body was normal. There are numerous examples showing that only Jesus saves. Man’s happiness and life does not depend on human external condition such as worldly achievement, good reputation, wealth, power, human love and so on. It depends on whether he or she has Jesus in their lives.

In verses 13-22, the religious leaders tried to stop preaching the name of Jesus but Peter and John became even more courageous replying, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, no one can stop us in preaching the word of God. In verses 23-31, all the believers were one in heart and mind with the apostles. When they prayed, they also prayed for the apostles to continue to be able to speak the word of God boldly.

Today, in Peter’s message we clearly learn that salvation is found in no one else except in Jesus because he alone died for our sins in our place and he alone rose again from the dead defeating the power of sin and death and Satan. Anyone who accepts Jesus receives salvation from the bondage of slavery to sin and enjoys full life which flows in the heart with joy, and love, and peace regardless of human external condition. So I pray, “May God bless each one of us to accept Jesus newly and more deeply so that we may live joyful and holy life before God forever!” Amen.