

Acts 4 v 12 Part 2

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[0 : 00] If you were here this morning, you'll know that I said I'm going to use exactly the same text this evening, and it's in Acts chapter 4 and verse 12.

The phrase that Peter had, salvation is found in no one else, only in the name of Christ. For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

And that's the phrase we turn to this evening, by which we must be saved. No other name. Let me repeat what I said this morning in case you weren't here and to remind you if you were, that there were two things that made the Christians in the first century Roman Empire so unpopular and eventually led to their horrendous persecution.

First they insisted that there was only one way to find peace with God and live as God intended us to live through Christ. No other way. And second, that everyone must hear this good news.

Whatever their current religion or philosophy might be, they must be saved. To put that simply in just the two words that I used this morning, it was exclusivism, no other way, and evangelism.

[1 : 18] You must be saved. And you see, as I said this morning, if the first century Christians had merely added Jesus to the Roman pantheon of gods, both male and female, then there would have been no problem.

The Romans would have been perfectly happy to have another one. What would one more matter? They had hundreds of them. Or if like the Jews who believed in only one God, they had kept their heads down, kept quiet and hadn't evangelized and hadn't been too much of a problem, then again they would have been left alone.

Even they could have carried on quite comfortably and they could have saved themselves a great deal of suffering over the next 300 years. But they couldn't.

They were convinced that they had the truth in Jesus Christ, the only truth, and all must hear it. Exclusivism and evangelism. In fact, the evangelism of the early church made it, as the Romans called it, religio elicitas, an illegal religion.

It was a foreign superstition. That was another phrase they used. If you embraced a foreign superstition, you had embraced Christianity. And 2,000 years later, as we said, very little has changed.

[2 : 31] The philosophy that lies behind our modern culture is a philosophy that claims that no one must believe that their view alone is right.

There's no absolute authority. No definite right or wrong. In fact, the only person who is certainly wrong are people like us who believe that we are right.

And that is the only thing that is wrong in today's world. It's the view that is followed by what is known as pluralism, where people try to say, well, of course, there's some truth in every religion and every philosophy and every view of man.

And there is a little bit of truth in that, but not much. And it's the view that in every truth you'll find something, and Christianity is just one of many and must be tacked onto it.

Now this was certainly not Peter's understanding 2,000 years ago in the streets of Jerusalem.

Sadly, there are some professing Christians today, I have to tell you, who are buckling under these pressures, and they interpret Peter's claim a different way.

[3 : 40] And they try and say to us, well, you see, this was Peter's personal devotional testimony. In other words, what Peter was really saying was not, it's the only way for you, but it is the only way for me.

That's what Peter really meant, we are told. It's the only way for me. There is no other name for me, but there may be another name for you. Others will tell us, well, perhaps that's not what he really meant.

But remember, he was preaching to the Jews, and to the Jews, he was really saying, For you Jews, with the clear witness of the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, that are looking forward to your coming Messiah, for you, there is no other way.

But for those who have never heard of Jesus yet, there may be some other way. See, Peter is not addressing the wider world, or the religions of the nations. He's simply addressing the Jews in front of him.

To which I can only reply, presumably then, it's taken us around 2,000 years to really understand what Peter did not mean to say, which isn't very helpful for us.

[4 : 45] Now it has to be admitted that in the first century, this message caused problems, just as it does today. There was a riot at Ephesus, wasn't there? Acts 19.

Because Paul said, well, they claimed that Paul said, and they were right, he says that man-made gods are no gods at all. And then when he went over to Philippi, it was no better, he got imprisoned at Philippi, as you may remember, and it wasn't until the prison fell down around the jailers' ears that he was able to get out.

There was opposition at Athens, because Paul challenged the pagan religions and claimed that there was only one God. Acts 17. And Paul encouraged Timothy, a young man in the ministry at Ephesus, to stand firm on precisely the same message, there is only one mediator, he says, 1 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 5, only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. No one else. In fact, there has been a long history of martyrdom for those exclusive claims. You can turn to Hebrews 11 and find the great role of honor of those who by faith in God trusted him alone. Jesus Christ himself died for his exclusive claims. He claimed to be the Son of God, equal to his Father in heaven. He claimed that the only hope of salvation for the whole world was in him.

[6 : 11] I am the way and the truth and the life, he said. And no one comes to the Father. No one comes to the Father. He didn't say no Jew comes to the Father. He said no one comes to the Father except through me.

And yet they saw his life, a life utterly without sin, when he was under pressure, when he was at ease, when he was busy, when he was tired, when he was resting all day, every day, wherever he was.

And yet he was falsely accused. And they heard his teaching and they concluded that there was no one who taught like this man taught, but they still falsely accused him. And they experienced his power when the blind and the lame and the deaf and the dumb were healed, the dead were raised from the dead.

Powerful things were done to still a storm on the lake and the multitudes were fed with a handful of bread and fish. And still they charged him. And they crucified him. And they cried away with this man.

And it rings loudly across our society today, doesn't it? Away with this man. We want nothing to do with him. We certainly don't want Jesus to rule over us.

[7 : 17] And because the early Christians were exclusive in their claim and evangelistic in their action, persecution gradually took an ever more ugly turn.

I mentioned this morning and quoted a little bit of Tacitus, the Roman governor and historian, who actually writing around AD 100, he's writing about the great fire of Rome that took place in AD 64. And when Nero tried to throw off the blame for the fire, which he probably started, though historians are debating that still. But the people believed that Nero had started the fire.

To deflect the accusations against him, he turned it against the Christians. I read a little bit of what Tacitus said. Let me pick up what I didn't read to you this morning. He describes what Nero did. He says, That's what he was doing to Christians in the very first century.

[8 : 39] And remember this, when you read Romans chapter 16 and you read that list of Christians at Rome that Paul sent greetings to, at the end of that list, and there are a lot of them, just pause a moment.

I wonder how many of them ended up being poured with pitch over the top and set alight to illuminate the garden parties of Nero. How many of them? We don't know.

We will find out one day. And so it went on for 2,000 years. The New Testament warns us, all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

And so the early church was persecuted because of exclusive claim, salvation is found in no one else. And some of the worst persecution came through the Emperor Diocletian shortly after the

close of the New Testament, though ironically his second wife and daughter were suspected of embracing Christianity and his minister of finance was put to death for embracing Christianity. And the same was true of many senators, army officers, and high-ranking civil servant officials. That's how far the gospel was spreading. In fact, long before this, in the time of Claudius, when the Apostle Paul was stumping the Roman Empire in Asia Minor, that's modern-day Turkey, and planting churches all over, Claudius sent one of his best generals, a man called Plautius, to a place that became known as Britannia Romana, this wet and windy outpost of the Roman Empire.

[10:11] And you may not know that Plautius had a wife called Pomponia. No reason why you should know, except that she was accused of embracing a foreign superstition.

Her life, as it happens, was saved. There's more to her story than that. But the wife of the general who conquered Britain in AD 43 became a Christian. And if they weren't killed, Christians were blinded, disabled, transported to the mines in southern Palestine as slave labor, and the first thing they did was build a church to worshiping.

Rome could accept as many gods as you like, providing you didn't say he's the only one. And across the world today, I don't need to remind you because surely you pray for them.

Thousands upon thousands of true Christians who believe, obey, and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, just like Peter and John, they are persecuted as cruelly as ever they have been by governments controlled either by Islam or some other foreign, some other religion, or by a no religion government.

But why? Why is this message so urgent that so many are prepared to suffer so much? And the answer is very simply given to us in our text.

[11:29] There is no other name by which we must be saved. First of all, why is there no other name?

Because Christ came to show us what God is like. No one else has done that ever so perfectly as he could. To help us focus on the supreme God.

You see, God knew that all through the history of the human race, we would make up God in our own image. We are created in the image of God, but we make God in the image of man, or as Paul puts it in Romans 1, of beasts and animals or birds.

We make God in our image one way or another. We make up our religion. God knew that. And so in order to help us focus upon who God is really like, he said, I will send my son into this world and you will see in him what I am like.

That's why Jesus could say, if you've seen me, you have seen the Father. And as we said this morning, he's the only man who's ever walked the face of this earth who could look his accusers in the face and say, which one of you can convince me of sin?

[12:36] No one else would dare say that. I am what God is like. If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. He said, if you worship me, you worship the Father. If you love me, you love the Father.

And if you reject me, you reject the Father too. And so he came with a compassionate life, healing, teaching, providing, to show us that that is what God is like.

And he taught the highest standard of morality the world has ever known and ever seen, because that is what God is like. And without Christ, we make up God, I say, in our own image and according to our own likeness.

Hence all the religious idols and icons of the world. They are only made in our image. But the only image of God we should ever have is the likeness of Jesus Christ in our own lives.

No other name. His is peerless beyond all the others. There is no other name but the name of Jesus. But why must we be saved?

[13:42] The very fact that Peter uses that expression when answering the Jewish parliament in Jerusalem implies that of all the reasons he could give for defying their order and continuing to preach about the gospel of Jesus Christ, this is the greatest.

The desperate need of the human race demands it. We must be saved. Now I know people laugh at this idea.

You've got people maybe, colleagues that you've worked with or still working with and you talk about the Christian faith to them and they say, don't think you're going to get me saved. It's a big joke. This idea of saving people is a joke.

Well I want to show you that it isn't a joke at all. It's a very important thing because it really means rescuing someone from imminent danger. We talk about that today.

It's almost universally recognized that this is precisely the great need of the world today. Rosie and I, after the morning lunch, we had a little walk along your lovely pier but they closed the storm gates because the waves were washing right over the top.

[14 : 44] Why did they bother to do that? Because they wanted to save us from being so stupid we'd carry on walking and get washed overboard. And so they wanted to save us. There's nothing wrong with that. People you know today, dedicate their whole lives or some part of it in their efforts to save or rescue.

There's nothing unusual about that. We're doing it all the time. You do. In fact, more effort is put into salvation today than any generation before us. Have you forgotten that?

We watch harrowing scenes of suffering and cruelty and hunger and the devastation of a tsunami, flood, cyclone or an earthquake and we conclude I must help save those people. So we put a few pennies in a box or something like that.

We give a few pounds in some form of charitable aid. Some give their whole lives and they go to help at great risk as we've seen recently. Almost all of us give something, some time to someone, somewhere to save something.

We all do. We watch melting ice caps and are bothered about our environment so people join the Greenpeace or the Green Party and we go organic. We campaign against the use of aerosols and pesticides and toxic waste and effluent.

[15 : 55] We recycle our cans and our plastic paper and just about everything. Why do we do it? Because we've got to save our planet for the next generation.

We must save our children. You see, it's very common, isn't it? We're doing it all the time. Others devote themselves to saving whales or pandas or bats or birds or badgers or butterflies or beetles or frogs or flowers or forests or hedgehogs.

There are people, you can join a society for any one or all of those if you want to save things. In other words, we all at some time do something to save something.

There's nothing funny in saving. We're doing it all the time. Every time you put a can in the right bin, you're saving something. You see, salvation is very respectable and most of us are involved so we don't laugh at the word.

And we know what the word means too. Generally, it doesn't mean let's start a collection to keep those things in a museum. It can mean that but it doesn't normally mean that.

[16 : 55] It means let's do something to rescue these things from danger and extinction. Let's give them life and a future. So when Peter came to Jerusalem declaring we must be saved, he was very modern, wasn't he?

Very 21st century. Very contemporary. But the question is saved from what? Well, what had caused the present rumpus and brought about them to trial was in fact a sermon that Peter had just been preaching.

A poor man had been healed from paralysis and then Peter applied the lesson. And the great thrust of his sermon was very simply this, repent then and turn to God that your sins may be wiped out.

And in exactly the same sermon Peter looked his congregation in the face and he reminded them of what he called your wicked ways. People don't like that but Peter went right to the heart of it.

And in his letter to the church at Rome the apostle Paul concluded exactly the same. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. You see, that's it then.

[18 : 07] Then as now. It's as clear and plain as that. Then and now all men and women everywhere whatever their age whoever they are wherever they come from they need rescuing saving from the inevitable results of their sin.

That's what he was talking about. It's very important. The value of calling the great problem sin is that it focuses our attention on the standard of measurement and the solution.

You see, if you call it greed as some people do or selfishness anti-social behaviour damaging the environment well that's comfortable because we all have a yardstick and we can measure ourselves by it.

We measure ourselves by our yardstick and it's always somebody else. And in the light of other people the ones I'm particularly wanting to think about at the moment I'm doing very well.

You see, if I put a if I put a little ruler that size beside me and I stand up tall I'm a giant. But of course if I put a 20 foot rule beside me I shrink immediately.

[19 : 23] And so long as I pick up other people and compare myself to them and I choose the people I want to compare myself with then I'm doing very well and you all are. But if you put yourself alongside Jesus Christ and that's why he was sent.

So that when somebody boastfully wants to believe that and wants us to believe that there's nothing much wrong with them I only met in door to door visitation I've only ever met one man who actually said I've never done anything wrong.

The problem was that his wife had died about a year or two back and so I couldn't check him out immediately. I've never done anything wrong. Then stand alongside Jesus Christ and at that moment because that is God's standard he is God's standard suddenly we all shrink.

We've all realized what we really are like. And you see all these things we can talk about so easily greed, selfishness damaging the environment environmental antisocial behavior and so they're symptoms.

And today's today governments and sociologists and police and the religionists and the moralists they all treat symptoms. There's nothing wrong with treating symptoms but you ought to go to the cause of them.

[20 : 39] And it's better than nothing to treat symptoms first aid has its place. But it's time we dealt with the cause of the problems in our nation. Peter called it sin which directs us immediately to our relationship with God.

Now I know we're told today by many well-meaning but completely misguided Christians that we are not to preach sin because modern men and women don't like it.

Well I understand that. I perfectly understand it. Of course they don't like it. Don't think I liked it when I first heard it. For years you'll remember no one talked about a dreaded disease called cancer because it described a horrible complaint that we didn't want to talk about.

Today realism has taken over and why? Well because for most of us and for most cancers today there is a cure. So now we talk about it. We're not afraid to talk about it.

Well I have to tell you that sin is far far more devastating than cancer ever was or ever will be. Sin affects 100% of the population throughout the entire millennia of the human history.

[21 : 49] You want to know what is wrong with this world? The answer is sin. Disobedience to Almighty God. Breaking His laws. Cutting across His commands. Thumbing our nose at God.

Stuffing our fingers in our ears and saying we don't want to hear you. Get away. We want nothing to do with you. And that is what the hordes of people moving around your streets in Whitby this afternoon and this evening that is what they are saying.

God we're not interested in you. And that's why the world is in the mess it is in. And it's what enables somebody like Richard Dorking. You've all heard of him so I don't need to introduce him.

Why it led him recently to advise a woman who asked what should I do if I found I was carrying in my womb a Down Syndrome child and his answer was it's on record so I'm not making it up.

Abort it and try again. It would be immoral to bring such a child into this world. That's what enables him to do it because we've turned our back upon God and we can now say we make up our morality as we go along.

[22 : 51] In fact it looks as though we have to go to Richard Dawkins to find out what is right and wrong from here on. It's what spoils this world isn't it? It's what spoils my family, my life, my office, my factory, my workshop, my classroom, and me.

It's called sin. And every one of us are in the same boat, in the same place. But the good news is that there is a perfect guaranteed cure for sin and its ultimate effects.

You see sin puts us on the wrong side of a holy God. So how are we to be saved from sin? And that is precisely why Christ came into this world and why he died on the cross.

Not only to leave us an example, oh there are many people that have done that before, the ancient Egyptians taught prepare for the judgments of Osiris by observing the right rules of conduct.

Nothing new about that. Confucius prescribed walk in the trodden paths and be a good citizen of the celestial empire. Buddha advised walk the noble eightfold path.

[24 : 05] And Islam encourages you to this day stand by the five pillars of conduct. conduct. But all of that is on the emphasis on what we do.

And if we does it, we fail it. There's no question about it. You could take any one of those and we don't. We can't. We all fail. And Jesus Christ on the other hand invited us, here are his words, come to me and I will give you rest.

What that means is not you won't have to work anymore, but you won't have to work for getting rid of your sins anymore. He meant stop trying to earn your salvation. And he told the people who came to him in repentance, to come to him in repentance and faith and when they did he said, your sins are forgiven and only God can forgive sins.

And the whole message of the New Testament is that Christ has done all that is necessary for our salvation by his own life, his own death, because he lived a perfect life and he had no need to die for his own sin.

He died to take my sin, my punishment upon himself so that I could go free. 700 years before Jesus was born, the Old Testament prophet Isaiah brilliantly described what Christ would come and do for us.

[25 : 23] 21 times in Isaiah 53, it's one of the shortest chapters, not the shortest, but one of the shortest chapters in Isaiah, 21 times in that short chapter, the emphasis upon what he would do for us.

Listen to it. He was despised, he took up our affirmatives, he was pierced for our transgressions, he was oppressed and afflicted, he was cut off from the living, he was assigned a grave with the wicked.

On and on, what he will do, not what we will do. Or as Peter expressed it in the New Testament, he himself bore our sin in his own body on the tree so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness.

righteousness. That's why Peter was convinced there is no other name, salvation would be in no one else. Why no other name? Because of who Jesus is.

Why must we be saved? Look at the consequences of sin in our lives and in this world. But why must we be saved?

[26 : 24] Well the first reason is because God commands it. He commands it. The Bible, you see, never sees the offer of salvation as a timid God offering men and women a choice.

It's never Almighty God, the creator of the universe, coming to men and women like you and me and saying to you, I've got some good news for you. If you would like it, please, I'd love you to accept my wonderful offer of salvation.

God commands every man and woman on the face of the earth to repent, to turn away from their sin and turn to God and receive the salvation that he has for them. It's a command.

Paul at Athens, listen to him in Acts 17 and verse 30. God commands all men everywhere to repent. This is a royal summons from the creator of the universe and we must acknowledge that our sin is an offense first of all against not our neighbor or our wife or our children but against him, Almighty God.

We must be saved because God commands it. There's another reason why we must be saved because the alternative is unavoidable. If we're not saved, we're lost.

[27 : 33] It's one or the other. And what does that mean? Well, let me let you listen in to Christ's description of the alternative. You'll not like this, but these are the words of Jesus and they're found in the words of Jesus recorded in the Bible.

He speaks of hell, hell fire, the damnation of hell, eternal damnation, the resurrection of damnation, everlasting fire, the place of torment, destruction, outer darkness, fire that is not quenched, a place of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, eternal punishment.

These are all the words of Jesus. He told the truth. And that's before we come to what Peter and Paul and the rest of the New Testament have to say.

Just take one example of Paul's letter to the church at Thessalonica of those who are lost. He says, they will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power when he comes in glory.

God can't overlook sin because it's so serious and he is so holy. He must punish sin. And you say to me, oh, that's all unacceptable.

[28 : 57] Well, my friend, it may be unacceptable, but it's unavoidable. Sadly, too many people go optimistically to hell. They go happily to hell, but they'll not be happy in hell.

God commands the alternative is unavoidable. And the third reason why we must be saved is because the time is short and shortening.

Everywhere the Bible speaks of urgency in responding to God's order to be saved. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart. On the 8th of October, 1871, the American evangelist D.L. Moody preached to a large congregation at Farwell Hall in Chicago. He preached on the text Matthew 27 and verse 22, What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?

He closed with these words, I wish I would take this text home with you and turn it over in your minds during the week and next Sabbath. We will come to Calvary and the cross and we will decide what to do with Jesus of Nazareth.

[30 : 12] That night, a fire started in Chicago that destroyed the city and Farwell Hall was burnt to the ground. Hundreds perished in that fire and Moody never saw that congregation again.

In 1893, he was preaching on the 22nd anniversary of the great fire in Chicago and this was his comment. Since then, I have never dared to give an audience a week to think over their salvation. My dear friends, none of us know the day or the hour. Any one of us may go out from here unsaved and may never have another opportunity.

Every day and every week seats us all nearer the grave, whether we like it or not. Daily, that time is short and shortening. So my friend, what will you do to respond to Christ this evening?

I can't say to any of you, come back next week. Not only because I'll not be coming back next week, but your pastor will be here preaching, but you may not come back next week.

[31 : 27] You may not be able to come back next week. You may not be anywhere next week. But in the local morgue, God commands it.

The alternative is unavoidable. The time is short and shortening. And finally, because it's the very best plan God has got for you.

You know, I've never heard anyone jeering at the surgeon who offers a life-saving operation. Have you? Silly fool. What did he do that for? I've never heard anyone laughing at the RNLI Cox who rides his boat onto the deck of a sinking ship.

Have you? Or the fireman who plunges into a burning building to rescue a child trapped in the fire. Ever heard them mocking him? Yet their best efforts save only a few more years.

The patient, the sailors, the child, they'll all die sooner or later. But when Christ came to this earth, lived a sinless life and accepted a sham trial and endured the cross so that we might be saved from hell and go to heaven forever with eternity with God and all the glory that he has in that, people mock and ridicule and scorn.

[32 : 45] Does that make any sense to you this evening? They did it when he hung on the cross. They do now. But my dear friends, what better can God do?

He offers forgiveness, new life, peace, confidence in everlasting life and he pledges always to be with us in all our circumstances of life and through the shadow of death and on into eternity.

He who believes in me, Jesus said to Martha around the graveside of Lazarus, though he dies, yet he will live and whoever lives and believes in me will never die, will come to be with me in eternity. Can he offer anyone anything better than that? And yet we laugh at him and turn our back upon him and stuff our fingers in our ears and go our own way. But there's no other name given under heaven among men by which we must be saved because God commands it.

The time is short and shortening. The alternative is unavoidable. And it's God's best plan for you. The BBC One ran a program in October 2002 entitled simply The Pyramid.

[33 : 59] You may have seen it but you've forgotten it. It was the story of the pyramid of King Khufu, how and why it was built. And the program closed with these words. I took them down because it was incredible.

The BBC should even think of putting them down. These were the words in which the film closed. What happens when we die and what should that mean to us while we are alive?

These are the greatest of all questions. And the Egyptian answer was the great pyramid. My dear friend, you have no need of a pyramid.

You have a saviour who died and rose for you. He towers above all the futile efforts of man, all the religions and all the philosophies the human race has ever invented.

My friend, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart. And why? Because salvation is found in no one else.

[35 : 03] For there is no other name given under heaven among men by which we must be saved. Let's pray.

Oh Lord, sovereign Lord, if there is just one person here this evening, young or old, who is unsaved, bring them to the foot of the cross where your son, our saviour, died. And show them, show them in their repentance and faith. They can have the assurance of the forgiveness of sin, peace with God, everlasting life, and the joy of knowing that they are on the side of ultimate victory.

Oh Lord, our God, hear our prayer. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Please turn to your hymn book as we close.

Number 569 is our hymn. It's a plea all the way through to respond now.

[36 : 18] Today thy mercy calls us to wash away our sin. However great our trespass, whatever we have been, however long from mercy our hearts have turned away, thy blood, O Christ, can cleanse us and make us pure today.

Let's stand to sing. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. All embracing the single and our open door, what should we do without thee and what are thy good Lord?

When all things seal against us to drive us to despair, we know one gate is open, one here will hear our prayer.

Today the gate is open and all who enter in shall find a father's welcome and pardon for their sin.

The past shall be forgotten, a present joy be given, a future grace be promised, a glorious crown in heaven.

[39 : 11] Amen.