

“The Inclusive Exclusivity” // Acts 4:1–21 // SENT #5

Prayer for ServeRDU (Music Pad)

- Stand up. Heads bowed. How many signed up? How many planning?

Introduction:

One of the **primary objections** to Christianity is the idea that Jesus is the only way of salvation. **It just sounds unfair...**

- It's like you've got somebody who has never heard about Jesus, and the **moment they die, God appears** and yells “AHA! You didn't receive Jesus!”
- And they say, “**Jesus, who?** I never heard about any Jesus...!” And God says, “Well, it's too late now!” ... and then he casts their souls into hell, and **as they go tumbling down** into hell screaming “wait, wait” he yells “tough cookies” at them in Latin...
- That just seems unfair.

Plus, it's just an **unspoken rule** in our society that you don't tell people that their religion is wrong.

- If you want to be a civilized, educated person, don't say anything that would imply that your belief system is superior to someone else's.
- **You can be sincere** with your religion, but **don't be too excited** about it, and **certainly not so excited that you try** to convert others to it.

I want to show you how Acts 4 deals with this primary objection right at the beginning of the Christian movement.

Acts 4:1–21

1 And as they were speaking to the people, (This is right after the miracle where they healed the lame guy, and they are explaining that this healing gives people a picture of Jesus' power to save the soul) **the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came**

upon them, 2 greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

- The Sadducees had **2 PROBLEMS**: **First, they didn't like Jesus**, because he had been a threat to their power. **Second, as a group, they rejected the concept** of the resurrection from the dead for anyone.
- So they had **no Messiah and no hope** and that's why they were...

3 And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. (Men: Just counting heads of household. Add that to the 3000 that became Christians in Acts 2. The population of Jerusalem was not all that big—if you included all the visitors, **maybe 40K**. This is a massive movement!)

5 On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, 6 with Annas the high priest (you pronounce that Annas not anus, though in this story the latter name might fit better) **and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “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, 9 if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, (in other words, are we actually on trial for healing a guy?) 10 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.

- If you are actually putting us on trial for healing a guy, then let it be known that power comes from Jesus.
- I read an article this week on “the evangelical adoption scam” ... “*evangelicals suffer from pathological altruism.*” Sent it to my research assistant, who said, “When the best slur you can come up with is to label someone a “pathological altruist,” I'll take it. **“How dare**

we seek the good of others! *If we are on trial today for good deeds done to needy children, let it be known that by the name of Jesus these children are alive.*"

11 *This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.* (The way they built buildings back then, the cornerstone was extremely important. Still is today, but back then, especially. The whole shape of the building; the dimensions; how tall it could be, was framed by the strength of that stone.

(then the conclusion of the whole message) **12** *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.*" PAUSE

13 *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men* (these men were not polished men. They didn't have fancy degrees. They were fishermen, regular Joe's, but they were speaking with authority, and boldness) *they were astonished.*

And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. (He must have been like that—a plain guy, but with authority from heaven).

14 *But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.*

- They want to just dismiss these guys, but then there is this guy, grinning like an idiot, saying, "Look at me! I can jump! Want to go for a run?"

15 *But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, 16 saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 But in order that it may spread no further among the people* (because the last thing we want is all the lame people getting up out their wheelchairs), *let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this*

name." **18** *So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.*

- **What's this like for Peter and John?** They know the power of Jesus has healed someone. They know that the Sadducees know. And **they know** that the **Sadducees know** that they know that the Sadducees know.

So Peter says (and can't you hear the sarcasm in this, again...) **19** *But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."*

21 *And when they had further threatened them* ("No, we're serious. No more healings. We see **any more lepers without their spots**, we know who to come to."), *they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened.*

Last week we saw that this miracle showed us God's purposes for miracles. **This week we're going to see** that it addresses one of the primary objections people have about Christianity: **That salvation is found only in Jesus.**

First, you should note that this is **not a new controversy**. People sometimes think that. But **the apostles are not in trouble** because they **privately believe** that Jesus rose from the dead, but because they have **convinced 8000** other people to believe it and **told everyone who disagrees** with them that they are dead wrong about Jesus and will be held accountable by God for it, and that there is **no other name under heaven** by which they must be saved.

The world into which Christianity was birthed was an **extremely pluralistic one**.

- The Romans had perfected this...
- I showed you in the Elijah/Elisha series this summer that this was the question in the Old Testament.

- Throughout the span of all human history, this has always been the **fundamental religious question**... Are there multiple ways to God?
 - Because **that question goes to the core** of what's wrong with the world and how to fix it.

Peter's explanation deals with two of the biggest objections people make today about salvation being found only in Jesus.

Objection 1: "Claiming that Jesus is the only way to God is arrogant."

- People say, "Well, if you think Jesus is the only way, you must think you are just **better than everyone else**, seeing things no one else sees; or you think **God prefers you** and people who believe like you."
- So, let's ask those questions:

Is Peter claiming to be smarter?

- **No.** In fact, the **text goes out of its way** to point out that they weren't that smart.

13 "...when they saw... that they were uneducated, common men they were astonished." (Luke says, "These guys were not the spiciest Doritos in the bag." This is **even funnier to me** when you consider that Luke was a friend of Peter and John's, and a doctor, which meant he was smart. "Yeah, my friend were not really... bright." I wonder if Peter read this later and was like... "Come on, man, that's unnecessary.")

There's **no presumption** here to superior intelligence. **Peter simply says 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.** In other words, "This has **nothing to do** with us being smarter. When it comes to education, you guys **got us beat, hands down**. Your **IQ's** are higher; you got more **degrees hanging** on your wall than a thermometer. But see, there was this guy, and you killed him because you thought he was a fraud, and you put him in a tomb and guarded it with a

garrison of Roman soldiers, but then he came back from the dead just like he said he would, and we saw him and ate with him and watched him ascend to heaven. No offense to your massive education, but if you have a choice between believing some guys with degrees on the wall or a guy who came back from the dead, we just feel like we should go with the guy who came back from the dead."

- **Is it arrogant to believe that Jesus is who he says he is?** No. It can be just as arrogant, if not more, to say that he's not!
- **(Rather famous parable, I heard it in college... ELEPHANT parable. Lesslie Newbigin... Two problems:**
 - **One**, who sees the whole elephant? Narrator: That's how he knows none of the blind men see the whole elephant. Do you hear the hypocrisy in that? In telling that parable you are doing the very thing you won't let us do. The reason you say our view of God is incomplete is because you see the complete picture. So the only difference between what you're doing and what we're doing is that you won't admit it—and you are a hypocrite.
 - **Two**, what if the elephant speaks? "Hey, I'm an *elephant*." Essentially, Christian faith is believing God spoke in Jesus and told us who he has, verified by prophecies, miracles, and, most importantly, the resurrection. To believe that is not arrogant. You might charge that it's gullible, but it's not arrogant.
- Peter said, "Look, the **elephant spoke**. We cannot *but* speak of what we have seen and heard!"
- Believing Jesus is who he says he is, if you ask me, is **quite humble**. It means we admit that we weren't smart enough to figure out truth, so God had to come down to reveal it to us.

Is Peter saying the apostles are morally superior?

- No. In fact, right after the miracle, Peter said this: "**Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, a**

though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?"
(Acts 3:12)

- Peter is still **raw with embarrassment** over denying Jesus 3x! **God's salvation, Peter taught**, was a gift of grace.
 - **Just like God** gave healing to this lame man **when he believed**—not because he had strength in his legs or was better than all the other lame men—so God gives salvation to all who will receive it by faith!

*So, Peter's claim (and our claim) that salvation is only found in Jesus has **nothing to do with believing we are intellectually or morally superior!***

- *You say, "Well, I just don't like anything that is exclusive and puts other people on the outside..."*
 - **Listen: all religious claims are exclusive.** For example, if you say, "**All good people of every religion go to heaven.**" OK, well, then **whom have you excluded?** Bad people. And I guess you get to define what is bad... and I suppose **racists, rapists, child molesters**, are on that list... and, depending on your moral convictions, you may put **sexually immoral people** on the list (or, if you're of the opposite persuasion, you might put those who judge others for their sexuality on the list.) But the point is you have a list and some people are on it and others aren't.
 - *Plus, if you exclude bad people—who else do you leave out? Moral failures.*
 - **You might say, "I'm not religious at all. I don't exclude anyone for any reason."** *You still have your standard as to what constitutes a good person.* I used to live right outside of Chapel Hill... (That's a pretty open, accepting place, right)? Try driving an SUV with an NRA sticker on the back and telling people you think global warming is a hoax and that's why you refuse to recycle and you'll see exactly what I'm talking about. (I NEVER DID THAT BY THE WAY) I

always said my neighbors believed in "justification by recycling." **The point is—it's exclusive.**

- **All religious and moral viewpoints end up being exclusive.** *Everyone has a line for who is in and who is out.*
- **But the gospel of Jesus is a different kind of exclusivity...** because the gospel teaches that our acceptance with God is not based on anything about us... not our moral record, our education, our race, or our political viewpoint. **God gives salvation as a gift** to all who will repent and receive it that way.
 - You see, **the lame man** in this story is a **picture of us.**
 - **Did you know** that according to Jewish law, lame people could not go in the Temple? **Lev 16:21**, "The blind and the lame and those with physical deformities were forbidden from going inside of the temple."¹
 - **We are all like that.** "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." We all stand under God's judgment and wrath.
 - **We are all the lame person.** Salvation is a gift of grace to *any lame person* that believes!
 - **You may think you are bad sinner...** he can still heal you.
 - **You may think you're not that bad of a sinner...** God's verdict on you is still lame; dead; wicked.
 - I love how **Tim Keller** says it: "**All religions are exclusive, but Christianity is the most inclusive exclusivity there is.**"
- **And when you believe this, far from making you arrogant and judgmental, it makes you loving and gracious and accepting...**
 - You see v. 11, where it says, "*Jesus has become the **cornerstone***" of God's building?
 - Like I told you, the cornerstone sets the foundation, and the dimensions, and the shape of the whole building!

¹ Lev 21:16–20

- Really believing the gospel changes the whole shape of your life.
 - You're not arrogant, because you realize that you are not accepted because of your good works, and not because you figured out truth because you were smarter than everyone else.
 - God healed you when you were lame. God saved you. That humbles you. It makes you a gracious, forgiving person, because that is what God has been to you.
 - **Illus. Amish Tragedy**
 - October 2007, the Amish community in Lancaster, Pa. Horrific story. A **gunman who was "mad at God"** took over an Amish school... sent out all the kids except for 10 girls and lined them up next to the chalkboard.
 - **2 of the girls** offered to have themselves shot for the others.
 - The **gunman at that point shot all 10**, one by one, in the head, and then killed himself.
 - (**5 of the girls survived** which is how we know the story.)
 - In the aftermath of this tragedy, the parents of one of the little girls who died got into their buggy and drove to the house of the shooter and went up to the door. They said to the wife... **we're not here for revenge; we have lost our daughter**; but your children have lost a father and you have lost a husband. We're here to grieve together."
 - Even the cynical journalists said something supernatural, divine was happening.²
- **The Amish are fundamentalist by any standard, right?** But did their fundamentalism lead to hatred? Where did these girls get the idea to die for their friends? **Where did the parents get the idea to forgive their killer and his family?**
 - Here's where. Even in a fundamentalist group like the Amish, the **center of Christian faith** is a Man on the cross loving people who don't love him back; giving himself for people who hate him; offering his life as a sacrifice for those trying to take it from him. And **having that at the center of our faith** fundamentally changes how we relate to people.
 - ***If you see people who are arrogant with the claims to Christianity (and there are a lot of them), that's not because they believe the message too fervently, but because they don't understand the message at all!***
 - Around here we say they have **theological B.O.**
 - **I've said all this to show that claiming Jesus is the only way is no arrogant.** To our skeptical friends, this weekend, I'd say, "Be intellectually consistent."
 - **Everyone's view of truth** and morality is exclusive, including yours. **This is the most humble, inclusive, exclusivity** because it declares our understanding of the truth and our acceptance before God entirely as a gift of God's grace!

Objection 2: "Religion a matter of personal preference."

- People say, "Look, you ought to be free to choose **whatever religion works** for you... *If your religion works for you, who am I to say it's wrong?*"
 - If you like **IHOP better than Waffle House**, who am I to judge?
 - If you **unwind by going to a rock concert** with a group of friends and yelling your head off, or if you're the kind who

² <http://ncrcafe.org/node/1560>

would rather go be by yourself on a nature hike, whatever works for you...

- *People think of religion that way.*

But should it go in that category?

- Let me give you a little insight into the **history of Western philosophy**. The father of modern philosophy was a guy named Immanuel Kant. “Religions are subjectively helpful but not objectively true.”
- Are you **clear on the difference** between subjective and objective truth?
 - Objective: capital of NY? Albany/NYC
 - “It is hot.” (My wife and I have this discussion every night!)
- Religion, Kant said, goes in the subjective category, and most of our society has followed along with him since then.
- **But are our beliefs about God really subjective?** Is the **experience of salvation** subjective? Is faith in Jesus good for us just because it works for us—because it makes us **more moral**; gives us **comfort in dark times**?
- *Well, look at **what is being taught** by this miracle!*
 - *This man is lame and can’t walk. **He needed a real power to heal him.*** He didn’t need **stories** about Jesus that made him feel warm and fuzzy on dark nights, or **parables that persuaded** him to be nice to people and encourage him to share his lunch. He needed a **real power** to give strength to his dead legs.
 - **And Peter says**, “Salvation is like that. Our salvation was accomplished by the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus didn’t get out of the grave because of a subjective preference about life but because of God’s objective power over death. And that’s what is needed for your soul’s salvation—not a subjective feeling of religiosity, but the objective power of new life.”

- **According to Jesus and the message of the apostles**, our salvation is **not about a new philosophy** or feelings of comfort. It’s about a **sin debt** we couldn’t pay that, like this lame man, kept us from the presence of God. It’s about being **dead in sin**—chained to our depravity, unable to break our addictions to our flesh, unable to walk in righteousness. And so God did for us what we couldn’t do for ourselves.

- **He paid our sin debt**, by living the life we should have lived, and dying the death... so that when we receive him we could be declared righteous on the basis of what **Jesus has done**, not what we **do**.
- **He raised himself from the dead**, so that he could live in us in the person of the Holy Spirit and infuse us with the power of new life...
- Jesus said: “I’ll be **wounded for their transgressions**; I’ll be bruised for their iniquities; the chastisement of my peace will be upon them, and by my wounds they will be healed. **Though their sins** be as scarlet, I’ll make them white as snow. **They’ll be buried with me by baptism** into death... **Whoever believes in me**, though he die, yet shall he live!”

- **Can I boil down all the various questions about which religion is right into one question?** There’s really only one question that separates the gospel from every other religious message in the world. Here it is. **Who can save us?**
 - **Can we save ourselves? If we can** save ourselves, there can be multiple ways to God. *Choose a path; do your best; try to be a good person in the religious way you have chosen.*
 - **But if God is the only one who can save us**, then **salvation is only found in the place where he has provided it.**

12 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.”

- Two key words:

- **Given:** Salvation is given.
- No other name.

- **Runway**
- **So here's the question:**
 - ***Did Jesus really rise from the dead?** Because if Jesus rose from the dead, then he was doing something to save us we could not do for ourselves, and he lays out the runway for salvation.*
 - ***Do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead?** And, if so, are you willing to let him makes the rules about salvation?*

Church, when we believe this, it changes how we see the world. **Four elements** stand out to me of Peter's witness:

- **Bold:**
- **Humble** (and gracious)
- **Tenacious** (even if you put us in prison, we'll keep preaching—God deserves it and the importance of the matters demand it)
- **Urgent** (we'll tell everyone as fast as we can)

***By the way, God did not love and accept them because they were bold, humble, tenacious and urgent.** Don't put these things on a to-do list and think, "If I could ever do this, maybe then God would be happy with me." God gives his acceptance as a gift because of Christ's finished work (and they understood that), and that's what made them bold, humble, tenacious and urgent.*

***Church: Do you want to start a movement?** That's how you start one. Think of the unlikelihood of this movement growing as large as it did. A bunch of fisherman in a backwoods part of the world who within a few days of the movement's beginning are already in prison? How did this sweep the world? They believed the gospel and took its implications deadly seriously.*

You say, "It's just not fair that everybody doesn't know." Listen, God owes no man salvation. That any of us have access to it is an act of unspeakable grace.

- But **what *is* unfair** is that those of us who do know it not do all we can to get it to others.

Church, what if this is true? What if the world really is completely lame; shut out from the Temple, the presence of God? What if the power of salvation really is found only in the name of Jesus?

- **Illus. I've had people question me** over the years **why we'd send people to other countries to persuade people about the truth** of something that would set them at odds with their culture, maybe their family! If it's not true, or its about subjective preference, that is cruel. But if it is true, it would be cruel not to say anything. How cruel would it have been for Peter to walk on by and leave this man lame if he could heal him? How cruel is it for us to not do all that we can!

It was **in college that I became aware** of what that means...

- I was studying the book of Romans one semester. Romans 2:13.
- The Joshua Project estimates that 2.6 billion have little to no access. 6,645 UPG's. (group of 10K or more united by a common language with no gospel witness.)
- I knew it before... In that moment it made sense to me...
- **I knew in that moment I had 3 choices:**
 - **Deny it...** this is what many Christians choose to do. Deny the clear teaching of Scripture. Rob Bell. Path to liberalism why so popular...
 - You suppose that there were other ways to hear—that God has a plan B.
 - Not one time in Acts is the gospel shared by anyone other than a member of the church. Even with Cornelius—the angel tells him to go talk to Peter.
 - **Ignore it ...** just don't think about it... give lip service to believing but live as if it's not true... Jesus is someone who gives me purpose, or helps my family...
 - Or, I knew I could believe it and **embrace it.** I could say like Isaiah, "**Here am I, Lord, send me.**" **My prayer changed**

from, “God, if you tell me to go, I’ll go,” to “God, here I am: send me. God, I want to make a difference. Show me where and how to use my life to bring others to Jesus.”

- Are you willing to embrace the implications of Jesus being the only way? **You have to make one of those 3 choices...**
 - **I don’t know where the answer will lead you.** It won’t look the same... you won’t all be missionaries or pastors like me. God definitely calls and equips some to be doctors, lawyers, butchers, bakers and candlestick makers. But you can ask God to use your life for his purposes. You have to wait for what the Spirit says to YOU.

When you stand before God and he says, “What did you do with your life in light of these global realities?” are you going to have a good answer for him?

There are 2.6 billion people in the world who have never heard.

- **Hudson Taylor**, one of the first missionaries to China, could sometimes barely stand to be in a church in England where he as from and hear the sound of 1000 Englishmen sing the praises of God when there were untold numbers of Chinese... He said, ***“Would that God would make hell so real to (the church) that we cannot rest.”***
- *Would that God make hell so real to our church that we cannot rest until they have figured out how to reach those around us.*
- **Spurgeon:** *How could we be saved?*
- **Carl F. H. Henry:** the gospel is only good news if it gets there in time.
- Have you ever thought about your life in light of global priorities?

Invitation/Conclusion

Have you believed the message?

- This is what it is all about. It’s either true or it’s not. If it’s not, reject, walk away from it, try as much as possible to persuade others that it is not true.
- If it is true, then come home to it.
- Maybe you **don’t know all the answers** yet, but you see that he died for you.

Church, have we taken its implications seriously?