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<sup>8</sup>Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, <sup>9</sup>if we are being questioned today for a kind act that was done for the lame man, as to how this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup>let 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. <sup>11</sup>This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone.

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

“Stand up! Stand up for Jesus!” is a classic hymn. It imagines Christians as soldiers going off to war under the banner of the cross. It paints life as a spiritual battle, fending off the forces of sin and death. We teach this hymn to kids at a young age, but I’ve found that it holds a special place in the hearts of many seasoned and aged Christians. Why? Because the imagery of fierce struggle here is not really an exaggeration. Life is filled with struggle and loss and pain, and nobody knows that better than someone who’s experienced it for close to a century. But this hymn doesn’t just speak to the struggle of spiritual warfare. More importantly, it points us to the victory won by Jesus.

Peter and John had been put on trial for doing good. They had healed a man lame from birth at the temple gate. This guy went from never being able to walk to running and jumping and praising God. And with that, Peter began to preach the truth about Jesus, about his rejection by the Jewish authorities, his death, and his resurrection. But the religious leaders caught wind of this, and they came and arrested the two men. They put them on trial, and the verses that we have in front of us today are Peter’s response to the question from the leaders: “By what power or by what name did you do this?”

Again, Peter shares the good news that Jesus alone brings. Twice he references the name of Jesus. This name is not some secret passcode, but it’s Jesus himself. They had healed the man in Jesus’ name, by Jesus’ power. And they themselves had been saved by Jesus’ name and power. How can we understand this in a simpler way? Jesus himself had healed this man, and Jesus himself had saved sinners.

This is the gospel, isn’t it? We sin. Jesus saves. We are broken in sin. Jesus heals us with his death and resurrection. It’s simple, yet hard to believe anything this good could be true. But what is less simple – or less easy for us to wrap our minds around – is the fact that only Jesus saves and heals. In last week’s sermon, we talked about how we only need Jesus for salvation.

But this week we see salvation from a slightly different angle. Jesus is not only all we need. He is also the only way to salvation.

We are called to boldly confess the gospel of sins forgiven in Jesus alone. We are to share with those around us that the only way to heaven is through the life, death, and resurrection of the Savior. But maybe this entire message feels a little off to you. Maybe stating “Jesus is the only way to heaven” doesn’t feel quite right. We know Jesus is the only way, but we also live in a culture that is quite universalistic. We’ve been steeped in people saying, “All spiritual paths lead to the same place.” Or, “At the end of the day, we all worship the same God.” Or, “Are you really telling me that God would send me to hell for all eternity for rejecting him?”

Add to that the dangers that have come about from groups claiming singular truth. “There is one true race” has led to the genocide of an innumerable number of people. “We alone hold truth” has led to endless warfare and bloodshed in the name of some ideology. The consolidation of power into a single God-like figure is what has led many cults and dictatorships into a dark existence of murder and mistreatment. Because we’ve seen these things creep up in history so many times, we may be hesitant to say, “Jesus is the only way” or “the Bible is the only inspired word of God.” But here’s where what we believe differs. We believe Jesus is the only way to heaven, because that is what God’s word says. We believe that we cannot remove our sins on our own and instead need his death and resurrection to purify us. Christ changes our eternal status before God and he sends his Spirit to transform our hearts, not to fight against the world or use violence to silence all false teachings, but to serve our neighbors in self-sacrificing love.

There are reasons to be wary of claims of a singular right way, but our confession of salvation in Christ alone is not grounded in subjectivity nor does it motivate us to violence against our neighbors. Instead, our confession of faith is rooted in Jesus, who lived and died to forgive all our sins, even our sins of refusing to confess out of fear or foolishness.

Back to Peter’s confession. He spoke the truth of the sins of the Jewish leaders and the forgiveness that comes from Jesus because this was his chance. Under threat of punishment – knowing what these same leaders had done to Jesus – he did not shrink but boldly proclaimed the truth. And notice that he did it lovingly and respectfully. He addressed them as the rulers and elders of Israel, not trying to smear their positions of authority. And, while it might not seem loving on the surface, he was also willing to call them out for their sin of rejecting Jesus. Peter certainly spoke firmly, but his goal was to win them over for Jesus, not score points by rubbing their wrongness in their faces. His heart burned for his fellow Jews, and he wanted them to know of God’s great salvation so that they could live in the peace that he and the rest of Jesus’ disciples had. These people needed the good news now. And Peter was willing to give it to them, because Peter knew just how powerful the name of Jesus was to transform lives.

Take Peter himself as an example. He had fled from Jesus in his hour of need. He had rejected Jesus multiple times, though he swore he would never do any such thing. But then Jesus came to restore him. “Feed my sheep,” Jesus said three times. Now, he was preaching the good news of Jesus and healing in his name. And if Jesus could do that for a hot-and-cold man like him, he could certainly save the Pharisees.

Our urgency should be high too. There is only one truth and one name that saves. And that means there are many people putting trust in people and ideas that will not save. And on top of that, God’s time of grace that he gives to a person is limited. We pray for long and full lives for both believers and unbelievers, but we also don’t know how long each person will live. Ecclesiastes compares life to vapor, here in one moment and gone in the next. There is only a limited time that a person can come to know Jesus.

But confessing Jesus also often comes at a cost. Confessing our faith is not just found in our words, but in our actions too. If you say one thing but then show yourself to be a hypocrite about it, those words begin to lose their value. Confessing our faith is not just saying the right things. It’s living those things out too. And that’s where it gets really tough, because that means confessing our faith in words and actions also means sacrificing our wants for our neighbors’ needs.

So, we promise that we will be bolder in our faith later, but not now. But how many important things do we kick down the road of life, especially those things of spiritual value? We know there are conversations we need to have, maybe even hard conversations with adult kids about how they are living their life. But we’ll get to it someday. Patience quickly turns into an excuse. We know a certain temptation has us in its grip. And we know we should deal with it, but it’s going to take so much willpower and will ultimately cut a pleasure out of our lives that we really enjoy. So, we lie to ourselves that we are truly sorry and that God will forgive this pet sin, even though true repentance is not there, and we have no desire to flee from the poison killing us. Understand, our confession of faith in word and action is not just for us. It’s for the people around us. And we confess with urgency because the day of life is short, and the people around us that need to hear about Jesus for the first time or be strengthened in their faith are many. When we shrink from sharing the truth, even the hard truth, this is not love. This is not hearts burning for other people, willing to walk through fire that they might know the truth. This is the normal go-along-to-get-along attitude that Satan desperately wants us to wear, saying nothing with many words.

We may not show urgency, but Jesus shows urgency for us. He did not delay in coming to save us. He did not skirt around Jerusalem when the week of his greatest suffering came. He lived for us and he died for us, setting us free from sin and death. And even now, Jesus meets us at our deepest need. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve come away from studying the

Scriptures with a comfort that I went in lacking. And I can't tell you how many Sundays, after the service, someone said, "That was exactly what I needed to hear after the week I had." And I know it was God's doing and not mine because I don't pick the readings for each week. But the Holy Spirit knew that that person needed to hear that passage on that day. Jesus does not slow in coming to us. And because he knows we are so quick to forget his mercy, he comes to us again and again and again.

Jesus not only shows his urgency for us. He also shows it among us and through us. If you are looking for a sign from God that now is the right time to deal with that sin you've grown comfortable with, take this sermon as that sign. If you've been looking for an opening to share Jesus with that neighbor who doesn't know Jesus, but you know has been hurting with the body blows of life, take this sermon as encouragement to go create an opening. If you've been waiting on the sideline to have that conversation with a friend or family member about the sin they are dangerously comfortable with, take this sermon as the coach subbing you onto the field or court. Maybe the short version of all that's been said is this: Speak your faith. Live out your faith. Share the message of sins forgiven in Jesus in every avenue of your life. Go and do what Christ has transformed you to do.

So, if you'll allow me some creative license today, maybe we shouldn't just say "Stand up! Stand up for Jesus!" but "Stand out! Stand out for Jesus." Live your life in the joy that Christ's calling brings. And if people put you on trial for doing good – if they challenge your faith and your love for others – see it as an opportunity to boldly and urgently confess the good news like Peter, that the gospel which transformed you from sinner to saved might bring about that change in others too. Amen.