

“Salvation is found in no one else” (Part Two)

Reflection 16 in the series “Salvation: The Quest”

The reason concepts like “Salvation is found in no one else” (drawn from Acts 4:1-12) come across as so sectarian and exclusive is that Jesus has far too seldom been taught and understood as he really was and is: the most inclusive person who ever lived. In fact, he is way too often understood to be the very opposite. Churchmen for centuries, driven by their own need for power and control, obsessed with darkness and depravity, have largely pictured God – and with God, Jesus – as primarily angry and tyrannical and coming in judgment. So many people, and churchgoers most of all, do not know that Jesus reveals to us a God who loves us enough to become one of us and die for us, who goes out into the wilderness to look for us, who runs to us when we are still a long ways off. Many people do not know that it is Jesus who cautions us against anger and judgment and incessant moralizing, who condemns self-righteousness in all its forms, who calls us to turn the other cheek, to forgive those who wrong us, and to love our enemies.

So, tell me, is there any other way to find salvation, rescue, deliverance, healing on planet earth – any other way than through the teaching of Jesus against anger and judgment and for forgiveness and love, even love for the enemy? So it is no surprise that just before the text under consideration (back in Acts 3:25) Peter declared Jesus to be the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that through his offspring all peoples on earth would be blessed. The truth is Jesus is the defense against all forms of arrogance. It is Jesus who eagerly commends and celebrates faith wherever he finds it. It is Jesus who lovingly welcomes those whom others cast out. It is Jesus who on his own cross prays for God-killers to be forgiven! It’s Jesus who stands up against all coercion, against doing things by force. It’s Jesus who tells his disciples that they are not in a position to know God’s final judgments. It’s Jesus who calls his disciples to sacrificial service, to a love for others that leads – if need be – to a cross.

There is, however, still more to understanding why Peter declares, “Salvation is found in no one else.” It’s been an amazing month or two for Peter, one night drawing his sword to defend Jesus, later that same night denying he even knew Jesus three times, witnessing Jesus’ crucifixion that dark Friday in Jerusalem, then stunned by the unthinkable, a risen Jesus, and blown away by this risen Jesus welcoming, forgiving, accepting him, commissioning him to feed his sheep. So now in the afterglow of the resurrection and filled with wonder, Peter is not envisioning a future when all who never hear the name of Jesus are thereby damned. He is not thinking theologically at all. He speaks not the language of dogma and doctrine but the language of the heart. He seeks to exclude no one. He seeks to include everyone. So when Peter said this then – “salvation in no one else” – and when we say it now, we are not speaking the language of theology but the language of love. There is no one like him. No one has so touched us. No one so speaks to us. No one so heals us. No one so fills us. No one so saves us.

And now our hearts filled to overflowing, we have the courage to do all that we are called to do. What was it about Peter and John that most struck the Sanhedrin? Verse 13: “When they saw the courage of Peter and John they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with

Jesus.” Peter and John had found the courage to defy the Council, and then when released under threat, to pray for what? In verse 29, to pray for boldness, not deliverance but boldness. That’s always the story in the book of Acts. Whoever it is speaks boldly, fearlessly for Jesus. Picture the scene again. Peter and John are standing before the same council that had condemned Jesus to death just weeks earlier and they defy it. This is Peter short weeks ago skulking around in the shadows of the high priest’s courtyard denying he knew Jesus. Now he’s found confidence. Now he sees clearly. Now he speaks with certainty and passion, with wonder and love, and with no hint of apology. He’s found the courage that comes from knowing that you have locked in on the salvation, the welfare, the healing, of the world – that the welfare of the world and every precious baby born in it depends on what this risen Jesus taught and how he lived and how he died.

So Peter summons his courage and says to the Sanhedrin (“the Seventy”) what he now knows to be true: salvation, rescue, deliverance, healing is found in no one else. Aglow in the light of the resurrection and amazed that Jesus had called him again, Peter speaks the language of love. No one has so touched me. No one so speaks to me. No one so heals me. No one so fills me. No one so saves me. There is a vast difference between the language of theology and the language of love. And what I would say this as I reflect on what Peter is saying here and why is that if you cannot speak the language of love about Jesus, the language of love about God, it does you no good at all to speak the language of theology.

Back to Peter: To the Sanhedrin he’s saying that salvation, rescue, deliverance, healing cannot be found in Rome. It cannot be found in the mastery of law. And you will not find it in yourselves. To us he might say: It’s not found in the nation, in medicine, in science. It’s not found in government, or at the office, or in things, or in some profound insight, or even in family. The saving of the world is not going to happen in any of these ways. It’s Jesus – his way, his way of love and forgiveness, of trust and reconciliation. From now on truth has a name and a warm, vital loving presence, and that name is Jesus. And when all this is understood, when it is finally realized just how inclusive Jesus is, we will see that claims in his name are not arrogance. They are our only protection against arrogance.

So we come to the calling of your life and mine. It’s to come with your heart and with your life to this Jesus. He and who he was and what he stood for is the way to healing, to rescue, to salvation. Do whatever you can to know what Peter knew in those first weeks after the resurrection of Jesus, and to see what he saw, and to feel what he felt – to know this of Jesus:

No one has so touched me.

No one so speaks to me.

No one so heals me.

No one so fills me.

No one so saves me.

– Dale Pauls