

## **Only Jesus**

### **By David Feddes**

Today we're going to focus on Acts 4:12, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

The story begins in Acts chapter 3, where Peter and John go to the temple. As they are in the temple, they encounter a beggar, a man who has been crippled for a long time. Every day he is carried there so that he can beg. When he sees Peter and John, Peter says, "Look at us." So the man looks at them, expecting to receive some money. Unfortunately for him, Peter and John don't have any money. Peter says, "Silver and gold have I none." How unfortunate! But fortunately for him, they have something far better. Peter says, "But what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk."

The man gets to his feet, and then he's leaping and jumping and praising God right there in the middle of the temple. He's been a fixture around the temple for years; people know who he is. When they see this man, who had always been flat on the ground, jumping and leaping and praising God, a big crowd gathers. Peter seizes the opportunity to speak of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He says, "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead" (Acts 3:12–15). Keep in mind that this is much the same crowd that had been yelling for Jesus to be crucified, so it takes quite a bit of courage for Peter to tell them right to their face, "You killed him. God raised him to life. We are witnesses of this."

Peter continues, "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see. Repent, then, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything" (Acts 3:16–21).

Peter gives this great message to the people who have gathered about Jesus—their Messiah, their Savior—who is coming again, and who before he comes again calls them to repent, have their sins wiped away, and be refreshed and made new in him.

While Peter is still speaking to the crowd, some things begin to happen. "The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand" (Acts 4:1–4).

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” (Acts 4:5–6). If you’re familiar with the Bible, you might recognize a few of those names. Annas is the old godfather of the temple mafia. He had been high priest himself. Many of his sons became high priests. His son-in-law Caiaphas was high priest when Jesus was arrested. Jesus was first taken to old Annas, and then Caiaphas presided over the trial that condemned Jesus. Peter, meanwhile, had recently been denying to servant girls that he even knew Jesus. That was not long ago. Now he’s hauled right in front of the very people who presided over Jesus’ killing.

“They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: ‘By what power or what name did you do this?’ 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. There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’” (Acts 4:7–12).

“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ‘What are we going to do with these men?’ they asked. ‘Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.’ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, ‘Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to God? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.’ After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them because all the people were praising God for what had happened, for the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old” (Acts 4:13–22).

## **Harvard**

Back in 1636, America’s first institution of higher learning was founded: Harvard. At first it was called New College, but eventually it was called Harvard University. It was named after the Reverend John Harvard, a Puritan clergyman who donated his library and half of his estate to the college so that they could prepare men for ministry.

Harvard said in its early documents what its purpose was and what was expected: “Seeing the Lord giveth wisdom, everyone shall seriously, by prayer and secret, seek wisdom of him. Everyone shall so exercise himself in reading the Scriptures twice a day that they be ready to give an account of their proficiency therein.” They had better read the Bible, and if they were called to account, they had better be able to prove that they knew the Bible really well.

“Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well that the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life, and therefore to lay Christ as the only sound foundation of all knowledge and learning.”

Fast forward a few centuries. Harvard has not been teaching people to be ministers for a very long time. They have a Hindu chaplain, a Muslim chaplain, and chaplains of many different religions. They no longer say that to know God and Jesus Christ is the only way of eternal life.

In August, they appointed a new chief chaplain. Their new chief chaplain, Greg Epstein, is an atheist. He’s an atheist chaplain. That’s kind of like what we hear today about men who get pregnant—an atheist chaplain. His most notable book is titled *Good Without God*. He says, “We don’t look to a god for answers. We are each other’s answers.”

Well, Harvard has a multibillion-dollar endowment. They are prestigious and widely known—and they are worthless. “We are each other’s answers.” What a contrast to how that university was founded.

Today, many of you might listen to this message and say, “He’s preaching about only Jesus. Only Jesus saves. He’s preaching to the choir.” Yes, I am—and the choir always needs it. Somebody should have preached to the Harvard choir and kept on preaching to that choir, because they forgot the only name that saves. They betrayed the only name that saves.

There may be some here who aren’t yet part of the choir and who need to know Jesus as your Savior. I pray that this message will be good for you. But I’m not at all ashamed to preach the gospel to those who know it—or should know it—because aside from those reminders and that constant call of the gospel, we too can be wandering off into all kinds of different notions about how God saves or even that there is no God at all, and that we can be good without him.

It’s interesting that Epstein wrote a book titled *Good Without God*. Back in the day there was an old statement of faith that said, “What is the chief purpose or end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever.” If the main purpose for which you exist is to glorify God, and you say, “We don’t need God; there is no God,” how are you good?

Let’s say you wrote a book titled *How to Be a Good Husband While Neglecting Your Wife*, and you say, “Well, I’m a pretty good husband. I don’t kick the dog, and I pick up after myself. I ignore my wife completely.” See, you can’t ignore your wife completely and be a fabulous husband. That’s like saying how to be good without doing the main good thing, which is bringing glory to God.

I won’t pick on Harvard’s chief chaplain any longer. We can pray that the Lord will bring him to a knowledge of the Savior.

### **Only Jesus**

“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Peter, who spoke those words, had come to know them in the depths of his heart and in the knowledge he had from walking with the Lord Jesus. There was a time when Jesus was preaching and there were big crowds following him. He was doing mighty miracles, and it looked really good for the Jesus movement. Then Jesus said some things they didn't like to hear—things like that without him they would perish, that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood, and that his sacrifice was what they would need. Many no longer followed him.

Then Jesus turned to the disciples and said, “Do you want to leave too?” And Peter said, “Lord, to whom else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:67–68). Nobody else has eternal life to give. That's why Peter can say here, “There is salvation in no one else.”

Jesus himself said, “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son” (John 3:16–18). There is no other name.

In 1 John, the apostle says, “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11–12). It's a message that sounds again and again and again throughout the Bible: only Jesus—salvation in no other name.

So we need to begin by simply testing our own souls and asking, What does it mean that Jesus saves?

### **Jesus saves**

- Pays penalty, saves from hell
- Frees us from devil's dominion
- Forgives sins, gives Spirit
- Makes us Father's children
- Enables us to be like Jesus
- Raises bodies, renews creation

Jesus pays the penalty for our sins. We are guilty before God, but when Jesus hung on the cross, he took our sins and the punishment for those sins on himself. He endured the just judgment on those sins and paid for them once for all.

In doing so, he saves us from hell. He saves us from everlasting damnation. He saves us from being driven away from God's presence forever, from perishing forever in the flames. He frees us from the domination of Satan and of his demons and the evil powers that are out there.

He forgives our sins and takes away our guilt. He gives us the Holy Spirit—his own presence, the third person of the Trinity—to live within us.

He makes us the Father's children, bringing us into a personal relationship of love where we are beloved of God the Father, and we love him.

He enables us to be like himself. Salvation transforms. It takes away the penalty, and then, when Jesus gets hold of us, he reshapes us and keeps on transforming us.

Ultimately, salvation gives us brand-new resurrection bodies, transformed, glorified bodies. and we live in a glorious new creation where God makes everything new. That is salvation.

Nobody else can do this. Only Jesus.

Only Jesus pays the penalty. Without Jesus, your penalty is unpaid.

Only Jesus saves from hell. Without Jesus, hell is all that's left.

Only Jesus saves from the devil. Without Jesus, you're under the tyranny of the devil.

Only Jesus brings forgiveness. Without Jesus, there's only guilt.

Only Jesus can unleash God's Holy Spirit and send his personal presence into our lives. Without Jesus, no one has the Spirit of God.

Only Jesus can make us the Father's children.

Only Jesus can make us like him. You can't be good without God. You can't be good without Jesus.

Only Jesus can raise dead bodies. Only Jesus can make the whole creation new. Only Christ has conquered death. So if you want to be saved, there is only one answer: only Jesus.

The great Heidelberg Catechism, written back in 1563, starts with this question: "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" The answer: "That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and has rescued me from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head apart from the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me ready and willing from now on to live for him."

That's what it means to say Jesus saves.

So test your own soul in light of these things. Are you looking to Jesus, and only Jesus, for salvation in all its wonderful dimensions? If you are, then let this message again confirm you in that and assure you that you belong to him, that he is your comfort in life, and that he is your comfort in death.

This, by the way, is also a good way to test institutions, and especially to test churches and preachers. Preachers can talk about a lot of things, and sometimes they try to be experts on a lot of things. But all too often, they become experts on everything except what's really needful from a preacher. If you hear a preacher week after week yammering about this and that, but not saying a whole lot about Jesus—avoid them.

Do they talk about the precious blood of Jesus? Do they warn of hell and the danger of being lost forever? Do they ever mention Satan, or are they too busy talking about this, that, or the other thing? Do they talk about sin, or are they too nice to do that? Do they sound like a reassuring therapist who's always telling you how wonderful you are and making you feel better about yourself? There are times for encouragement and building people up in who God created them to be, but if you never mention sin, get out of the preaching business—please. We must preach salvation from sin, the power and life of the Holy Spirit, and a personal relationship with God, being children of God. These are the things that ought to occupy us as preachers.

When I hear preachers and popes telling me what the weather is going to be like fifty years from now, I guess they're entitled to their opinion. Everybody can have an opinion about climate change, but that is not the gospel. There are people who have opinions about vaccines or this or that. You're entitled to have your opinions, but that's not the gospel. Preachers are in the gospel business, the salvation business, the announcing of Jesus Christ and what he has done. You can say that you want your social agenda to be what the preacher preaches, but that's not what the gospel is. The gospel is Jesus. And so this is one of the great tests of a preacher: Are you constantly being reminded of the importance of eternity, of eternal life, of what's at stake—either eternal loss or eternal blessing—and of what a marvel it is that Jesus Christ has conquered death itself?

We're in a time when people have been extremely scared of the Covid virus. So far, about 0.2 percent of Americans have died of that virus. I have a news flash: 100 percent of Americans are going to die, unless the world ends first. Not 0.2 percent—100 percent. What's going to save you from that? There is 100 percent certainty that we're going to die. We need a Savior who saves from death, who raises the body. No other Savior can do that. Jesus saves. There's no other.

### **No other**

- Whatever feels good
- Experts and rulers
- Being a good person
- Various religions
- Safety in numbers

There are other candidates, but none can save.

One big candidate of our time is: whatever feels good. "I do me." "I'm an all-around wonderful specimen, and when I do me, things turn out well." Good luck with that.

Another candidate is reliance on experts and rulers. We “follow the science.” We look to the government. We think of salvation by legislation: “If only government could control the behavior of all people, then the virus would go away. If only the government controlled the behavior of every last person on planet Earth, we would save the planet.” That’s the formula for a totalitarian dictatorship. When you look to rulers for salvation, you wind up with rulers—but no salvation. “Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save” (Psalm 146:3). God appoints government for certain purposes, but they can’t save. They can’t rescue you from death. They can’t give you eternal life. So when you look to the experts, make sure they have expertise in the thing you’re looking to them for. They cannot save from death. They cannot save from sin and hell. Only Jesus can.

Another candidate for salvation is being a good person. An atheist wrote *Good Without God*. But it’s more common to say, “I’m not an atheist. There is a God, and he requires us to be good. Thank goodness he grades on a curve! I’m better than quite a few other people I know. I do my best some of the time, and overall, I think that if you add up the good and the bad, my good outweighs my bad. I think I’m good enough for God.” That is not exactly the grounds for strong assurance on the day of judgment. The Bible says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Being a good person is not a way to be saved.

Other candidates for salvation are the various religions. Some say, “There are a lot of different paths to God. There are a lot of different religions out there. I think most religions teach pretty much the same thing. They’re all pretty much alike.” This is usually spoken by people who know nothing about any of the religions

If you tell a devout, well-instructed Muslim, “You Muslims believe exactly what the Christians do: you believe Jesus is divine and died for sins and rose again, you believe in the Trinity, you believe in salvation by grace,” they’ll say, “What are you talking about? Off with your head!” Maybe if they’re nice Muslims, they won’t say “Off with your head.” But if you say that Jesus is God or that the Trinity is true, that’s blasphemy in the eyes of a Muslim.

Not all religions are the same. Islam teaches that you are saved by being a good person. You get Allah’s instruction, you follow it, and that is what saves you. Buddhism teaches that there is no personal God. Hinduism teaches that there is no personal God—or else 300 million gods—depending on which angle you take, because Hinduism is kind of hard to get a handle on. Everything you can see or touch is unreal, an illusion.

The various religions have different kinds of saviors. They have their own definitions of salvation. For some, escape from bodily reality and realizing that the physical world is an illusion is your salvation—it’s not all things made new and your body resurrected.

There are different salvations that are taught and offered. To think that all the various religions are just the same, or that in the end they all lead to the same destination, is to call Jesus a liar. If all the other religions would save you, then I can assure you Christianity won’t, because Jesus says the exact opposite of all that. He says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). If there are other ways to the Father, then Jesus is not a way to the Father; he’s a liar. So we shouldn’t fall for the idea that we can lump all

religions together and say they all lead to the same destination. But that is the mindset of our time.

I'm not attacking straw men. I've given you the example of Harvard—the most influential educational institution in America—which did exactly this: it said all roads lead to God. “We’ll have a chaplain for everything under the sun, and then we’ll make our chief chaplain an atheist.” That is actually fitting, because if all the religions are true, what it really means is that none of them are true. Pluralism promotes atheism. Those pious, nice pluralists who say, “Believe whatever you want; it’s all true,” really mean, “I’m an atheist, and every illusion works about equally well.” So Harvard's appointment of an atheist as chief chaplain clarifies where pluralism stands today: all religions are true because none of them are. They’re true only in the sense that they’re “true for me.” That’s the religion of our age: “Whatever feels good. I do me.”

Beware of counting on safety in numbers. A lot of people think all religions are good. A lot of people think you can be good without God. That doesn't make it true. Jesus said, “The road to destruction is wide.” There are many lanes on it. Traveling in any of those lanes, you might say, “Wow, this is a busy road; it’s wonderful. It must be going somewhere good.” But there is no safety in numbers. The broad road leads to destruction, not salvation.

There’s an old story about an atheist back in the days of horse-drawn coaches. He came out of a meeting, got into a coach, and told the driver to go, and to go fast. So the driver did. After a while, the atheist said, “Where are we going?” The driver replied, “I don’t know, but we’re going very fast.” That sums up the situation much of our world is in. They’re going, and they’re in the fast lane, but they don’t know where they’re going.

Trust Jesus and only him. Those who don’t know him need to, or there will be no salvation. And those who do trust him need to overcome the misgivings that come their way and the other messages that bombard us from every direction.

### **Only Jesus**

“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). This verse is the most important verse of our time, if I can risk saying that one verse is. I’m not saying it’s my favorite verse, but it’s *the* verse for our time. In this time of universalism and pluralism that says “anything goes” and “everything works,” you’ve got to know this verse.

I’ll invite you all to say this great question and answer with me from the Heidelberg Catechism:

Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong— body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.

He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Jesus is our great and only comfort, because Jesus is the great and only name that saves. Once you have that comfort, and that clarity, and that conviction, then you will also have boldness in witness. When you know that only Jesus saves and you have his Spirit is in you, you don't fear what others will think or do to you.

When Peter and John spoke boldly to the enemies of Jesus, they noticed the courage of Peter and John, and it reminded them of someone else. It reminded them of Jesus, who never backed down, who was never afraid to say it like it is, who was so hard for them to trap or outwit. These uneducated, untrained fisherman didn't go to Harvard, they didn't go to the finest schools that these leaders liked. They were considered hayseeds. And yet Peter and John weren't scared of the big shots. They spoke with a clarity and power that the big shots couldn't. These were the very people who had arranged the execution of Jesus Christ, and Peter and John told them right to their face, "You builders rejected the one who is really the cornerstone. You'd better repent."

Mealy-mouthed religious functionaries don't lead anyone to Jesus. They're too busy qualifying what they say and allowing for "this and that and the other possibility," so that they never get around to saying, "Jesus saves, and nobody else does. You need him, and you need him now." That's how Peter preached. But all too often, people who don't know for themselves that Jesus is the only Savior don't preach like it either. May God give us preachers who know Christ themselves as their only comfort, and then they'll be ready to proclaim him as the only comfort of others.

If Peter and John thought the gods of Greece and Rome could save, do you think they would have risked their lives bringing the gospel to the Gentiles? If they thought that Jewish rituals or following those unbelieving, scholarly priests would lead to salvation, would Peter and John have preached Christ to the very people who killed him? Those priests had a lot in common with religious institutions, priests, and pastors who don't have a message of salvation anymore. But Peter and John knew the Savior. They knew salvation is only in Jesus. That was the source of their boldness. When you know there's no other name, if you love other people, you'll tell them. It may sound rude to some, but Peter and John said, "If you repent, times of refreshing will come; if you turn, you'll have salvation."

The nice, genteel person who minces words—do they really care about people's eternal well-being? I think it was Charles Spurgeon who said, "If someone gets up in a building and says politely and quietly, 'I do believe that the process of combustion is occurring,' it might not have much impact. But if they yell, 'Fire!' somebody might listen."

If we nicely suggest, "It would be a nice idea if you followed Jesus; he'll make you a nicer person," that's not enough. "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

## **Prayer**

Father, give us the comfort and assurance of your salvation. Keep us from being fooled and corrupted by all other avenues that seek to replace or reduce Jesus. Thank you, Jesus, for all that you have done: for the precious blood, for the glorious resurrection, for the gift of the Spirit, for the promise of eternal life and a wondrous new creation. May we live in the joy and assurance of that salvation. May we continue to bring that message to the nations. Give us, Lord, boldness and courage so that others will take note that we have been with Jesus, and that Jesus is in us by his Spirit. May they know that Jesus is indeed the loving and wonderful Savior of the world. We pray in his name. Amen.

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**Harvard**

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**Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 1**

Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

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