

Acts 4:8-12. ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' ¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

With gladdened hearts, we gathered together and announced: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Our songs and voices swelled on Easter Sunday along with the attendance as the crowd was noticeably larger than a typical Sunday. Fueled by this mutual encouragement we reveled in the truth of the resurrection: Christ was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification!

Two weeks removed from that splendid day, has that joy which swelled just a few days ago already begun to fade. As we toss away a few of the Easter decorations, as we start to remove some of the Easter flowers, and finish off the last of the jellybeans and brightly colored hard-boiled eggs, are we tempted to put away and even forget about what Christ has done for us? The world around us would certainly not bat an eye if we did. There are plenty of entities and outlets, personalities, and people in general, that would be happy to encourage us to grow discouraged and bored with Christ and his Church. They are quick to replace him with anything and everything else and jeer at us to do the same.

Just eight days after Easter, the New York Times published an article about Abraham Piper, the son of a well-known pastor, author, and theologian John Piper (Bethlehem College and Seminary, Minneapolis, MN). Abraham Piper has become a bit of an internet sensation with over 900,000 followers watching his videos on the social media platform known as TikTok. His sudden stardom is mostly built on his "irreverent critiques of evangelical Christianity" as he encourages others who have left the faith and those who are considering the same. 900,000 people tuning in, encouraged to be critical and dismissive of Christ and his Church. How are we to react, dear Christian, as we live in a world that so is actively opposed to Christ and his church? Should we hang our heads and hide away in fear and doubt as the world eats away at the church with a steady acid rain of attacks and barbs and jabs? Should we do as so many others have done and crumble under the pressures of the day and just give in to the influence because there are so many who are so clearly and so adamantly opposed to Christ and his Church?

Take heart and stand firm, for Christ who overcomes the world is not dead and powerless. Christ is Risen! He is risen, indeed! Take heart and stand in the brilliant joy and influence of Easter for the risen Christ lives and he watches over and empowers his church to stand and endure and proclaim his name until the end.

Do not fear, dear friends. Instead, be encouraged by God's Word laid before you today to: **Rely on the capstone. Call on his powerful name. Live under the beauty of Christ's influence.**

Peter too was surrounded by those that opposed Jesus. The leaders and the elders had become influencers of their day who had made their disdain for Jesus abundantly clear. It turns out that those who had stirred up the crowds against Jesus would brew up trouble for his followers as well. But the same Peter who had denied his Lord had been strengthened by the word of the Risen Christ and was filled with the Spirit, and therefore, he would not refrain from proclaiming the name of Jesus and sharing the reason for the certain hope that he had. Peter relied on Christ as his cornerstone and foundation as he lived for Jesus and served his Church by preaching and teaching and helping others in need. And thus, it happened that after Peter healed a crippled man at the temple gate and the chief priests and elders took him to task for this act of kindness done in Jesus' name, Peter spoke up.

Filled with the Holy Spirit he spoke boldly. He knew that many of those in the crowd that day were also there on the day when the crowd had called for the blood of Jesus. Peter knew what these people had done, and the accusation he laid before them that day was a doozy. These same people who now threatened Peter had killed the author of life. "You crucified Jesus!" "You!" Whoa, Peter, wow!

But he did not stop there! He did not just leave this crowd twisting in the wind, agonizing under the weight of some cruel accusation, but he spoke a word of power and eternal salvation. He laid before them the ugly reality of their sin to contrast it with the overarching beauty of God's saving grace. ***11 He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'*** ***12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."***

I can't stand here like Peter did and point out one particular sin that cuts to your collective heart. But God knows what you have done. He knows the doozies that the whole town knows about, and he knows the rest as well. He knows the sins of your youth and your rebellious ways since then. He fully knows the hatred you harbor that you try to cover up with a few kind acts. Scripture makes it clear and our consciences bear witness that the secret things hidden in the dark caverns of your hearts and minds are exposed before the Lord, and we will have to stand before God and give an account. He knows what you have done!

But God, the one that has every reason to point the finger of accusation at you and bring condemnation swiftly down upon you, responds in his amazing grace. In

his profound kindness, he patiently holds out his nail-pierced hands and gives to you the very key to set you free from the prison-house of sin and guilt and hell. And that key is the person of Jesus. ¹² ***Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*** God in his goodness and grace, gives you the name, the only name that saves, that forgives, that grants eternal life. The name of Jesus is priceless and eternal.

The devil and the muttering crowds around you will try to convince you that you don't need Jesus and you can replace him with anything or everything else. You will hear in the grumblings of your neighbors and the way that they live their lives. You will see it in long diatribes of blog posts and newspaper articles that criticize Christ and his church. You may be casually invited to take in bite-sized poison pills of Tik Tok videos and tweets that revel in rejecting Christ and prod at you to do the same. The culture around us, the cold indifference that casts Jesus away, even the empty spaces in the pews next to you today, would all seek to discourage us. These evil influences along with our own sinful hearts try to convince us to cast Jesus away like some outdated decoration because then the things in your life would be just the same or all the better.

But God insists. He speaks up. He sends his Spirit as he sends his saving word and the messengers of his grace to speak boldly this message of salvation that we need. Even to those who rejected and killed God's Son, Peter spoke in the name of Jesus and called them to repentance. And according to his gracious design the LORD carefully builds his church so that his holy word is passed down to you and me, so that we may rest and live in the peace of Christ's forgiveness and walk and live in the security that Jesus brings. Sit underneath his massive and enduring love that arches over you. Rest for a while here as you hear and treasure the meticulous design of God's plan of salvation. *The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.* Promise after promise, stacked one upon the other, the promises of the Savior given to Adam, Abraham, David, Isaiah, and more, and when the time had fully come God sent his Son to be crucified for the forgiveness of our sin. God's chosen one stood in our place, was held accountable for all our sins, and he was pierced for our transgressions, absolutely crushed for our iniquities, and the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we, you dear friend, are healed! You and I are saved by this one, the Only One who could fit in that space that separated sinners like us and a holy God. God gave his Son over to death for us, raised him to life to hand us the gift of eternal life, and the Lord has placed his name before us - for us and for our salvation.

Right here for us each day, this name is there for you. Given to you by God through the passing down of the Holy Scriptures that we may know and believe in him who is the only who saves. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Rejoice in Jesus' name. Proclaim the wonders of who he is and what he has done for the

whole world. He is the capstone, the crowning piece of God's plan of salvation, the keystone that holds everything together for our good.

Recently, I took a walk through Ephesus. Through the magic of technology, I walked on my treadmill and was transported through my tablet screen to the modern-day nation of Turkey, to a city where ancient pillars and archways still stand and testify to the former beauty and strength of this great city. Wooden roofs have crumbled long ago. But many of the archways still stand, built with stone and reinforced by a keystone expertly placed right where it ought to be. Those archways still stand thousands of years after they were first constructed, and it is breathtaking, it's beautiful, and it is still there, for many to walk through and enjoy.

Much more importantly - thousands of years after Christ was placed on that cross, pinned up by the pressure of God's wrath, pressed down by the tremendous weight of our sins, yet he is still right where he needs to be for our salvation. Crucified. Risen. Alive. Ascended. Peter and the others were witnesses of this and we have been gathered by God's grace into this wonderful truth. Stand under the enduring love that arches over you. Call on the name of the risen Christ. Read his Word. Sit and rest for a while in the beauty of his love as we stroll together through the colonnade of God's promises. Rejoice that Jesus Christ has put his name on you and bound forth from the courts of God's house unashamed of the healing and joy, clarity, and certainty that he brings to your life. *Salvation is found in no one else*, and God has revealed him so clearly to you and me.

Yes, he was rejected then, he is rejected by many still today, and yet his Word stands firm and his promises endure according to God's gracious design. In his kindness, God insists. He speaks up. He sends his messengers of grace that we would hear and believe this message that is for you and me and for all people of all nations. You and I are held firm by Christ who is our capstone. Rely on him. Live in the certainty and joy that Jesus brings. As those who have been set free from the guilt and the heavy weight of our sin by Christ Jesus, proclaim the name of Jesus boldly, freely, and with much joy. ***11 He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'*** ***12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*** Christ is Risen! He is Risen, indeed! Alleluia! Praise his name forever and ever. Amen!