

## ***“No Other Name.”***

### **Acts 4: 5-12**

Tony Campolo tells about a time when he was on an airlines flight and he struck up a conversation with a man in the seat next to him. They made some small talk; and then they got around to talking about their families. Eventually the talk drifted into their respective lines of work. The man seated next to him asked Campolo what he did for a living, to which Tony replied that he is an Ordained Minister in the American Baptist Church and a Professor of Religion at Eastern University.

Once he found out that Tony Campolo is a clergyman, the man said to him: *“You know, I think that all paths lead to God.”* Tony asked him, *“What do you mean by that?”*

The man said, *“Well, you Christians are always saying that your way is the only way, but I think that is rather narrow minded! I mean....we all can believe what we want to believe, and its all true. One person might get to God by way of Buddha and someone else might by Hare Krishna or Mohammed. Every path leads to God.”*

Right about that time the voice of the pilot broke in over the intercom advising the passengers what altitude they were flying at, as well as the direction of travel of the airplane.

In his account, Campolo says: *“I turned to the theological expert in the seat next to me and said: ‘I’m glad that the pilot of this plane doesn’t agree with your theology.’”* The man said, *“What do YOU mean?”*

Tony said, *“Think about what that pilot just said. He told us that the control tower has given him an exact course that he must follow in order to get us safely to Philadelphia. The pilot is to fly this plane at a specific altitude and in a specific direction. I’m sure glad that the pilot doesn’t think that it’s narrow-minded to fly this way and just go off on what he feels is the best way to go. He would fly us into a thunderstorm or even another airplane if he did that!”*

Let me begin by saying that a basic tenet of Christianity is NOT that our way is the only way, or even that our “religion” is the only true religion. That’s not what we’re about, and that is NOT what I’m saying here today.

We aren't about proclaiming a "religion." We ARE about , rather, proclaiming Jesus Christ. A basic tenet of Christianity is NOT that Christianity is the only way, but rather that Christ is the only way.

Just imagine what would happen if a couple of us went into a Starbucks coffee shop somewhere and said these words about Jesus: *"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."*

How do you think the people in that Starbucks might react? I can pretty well guess that they would call us "bigoted" and "intolerant," among a few other choice words! We would alienate them right away.

Well, these words were actually spoken, and it wasn't in a Starbucks. It was in a Court of Law in the land of Palestine during the First Century A.D. The Apostles Peter and John have been arrested for preaching the Gospel (a crime in that time and place) and brought before the authorities.

It is Simon Peter who tells the authorities: *"No other name,"* and he does so not at the risk of being called a bigot, but at the risk of being put to death.

It's amazing that the apostles were even considered outlaws to begin with. They had just healed a guy! That in and of itself is good practical work. It contributes something to society. It increases the tax base by adding another person to the workforce. Healing is good!

What got the apostles into trouble, however, is that they also started talking about Jesus. And, they didn't talk about Him as if He were just a good guy with some nice teachings. No, they couldn't leave it at that.

If you read the chapter before this one (chapter 3), you will see that they speak of Jesus in terms of the supernatural. They proclaim that God raised Jesus from the dead. They say that He is the Messiah Who the prophets foretold. They call Jesus "Holy" and "Righteous." They also call Him the "Author of Life." This is what got Peter and John into trouble.

This can get people in trouble even in our day and age – perhaps *especially* in our day and age. I realize that what I'm preaching today is quite offensive to some of my UCC brethren. Please know that it is not my intention or desire to offend you. I respect your right to your own interpretation of scripture, and I do not begrudge you if you should happen to disagree with mine.

However, what I'm preaching today is not something that I have made up. It is something that is actually contained in Holy Scripture and further, it has been embraced by the majority of Christians for the past twenty centuries of the church's existence.

What I'm preaching is, that according to scripture and to the historic teachings of the church – there is only one way to God, and that is through Jesus Christ.

We already know from today's text that Peter boldly asserts: *"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12)

But the New Testament affirms this in other places as well. The Apostle Paul wrote to young Timothy: *"For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus himself human who gave himself a ransom for all."* (1 Timothy 2:5)

Even Jesus Himself made exclusive claims in regard to His nature and purpose. He said this about Himself: *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* (John 14:6)

Making exclusive claims is offensive to our post-postmodern, western, and egalitarian sensibilities, but we need to bear in mind that each of the major world religions makes exclusive claims. Christianity isn't the only one. But the one that Christianity makes is that Jesus Christ is the only way to God, the only way to the Kingdom of Heaven.

But what about those who have never heard the Gospel? What about the Muslims? What about the Hindus? My answer is this: **I don't know, but it isn't up to me who's in and who isn't. That's up to God.** I will tell you this – God is perfectly righteous and merciful, and God is perfect love. You can be sure that every decision that God makes is a perfectly right decision! And – God's mercy and grace extends above and beyond any of our theologies!!

So what's the point, you may ask? The point is this: **We need to take Jesus seriously.** When the New Testament affirms that Jesus is the only way we can be saved, we need to take that seriously. When we read in John's Gospel that Jesus Himself says that, we need to take that seriously.

Over in Rotterdam, Holland there was a home known as the House of 1,000 terrors. It received its name during the sixteenth century, when the Protestant Dutch rose up against the Catholic King of Spain.

A great army was sent to put down that rebellion. In captured Rotterdam, the Spaniards went from house to house searching out and killing citizens.

One group was hiding in a house when they heard soldiers approaching. A thousand terrors gripped their hearts. Then a young man had an idea. He took a goat and killed it. With a broom he swept the blood under the doorway.

The soldiers reached the house and began to batter down the door. Noticing the blood coming out from under the door, one soldier said: *"Come away, the work is already done here. Look at the blood."*

The people inside the house escaped. The work of salvation is finished. It was the Lamb of God Who shed his blood for all of us upon a cross. The redemption of the world was accomplished by no other name.

AMEN.