

The Name of the Lord!

Acts 2:1-21

May 27, 2001

“Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Despite “wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke” wherever we look, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Though “the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood,” so that all seems to be lost, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Is this of interest to you? Are you living close enough to the edge that you can at least see the possibility that life can fall apart? That families can rupture? That buildings can collapse? That cities can implode? That planes can crash? That nations can fall? That empires can crumble? That economies can fail? That friends can betray? That enemies can kill? That asteroids can strike? That a virus cannot be stopped? That an atom can be split? And these things just happen in the normal course of events. They have nothing to do with “the great and terrible day of the LORD.” What will we do when that comes?

“Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” This is a wide open promise. This is a glorious invitation. This is something too good to walk away from. Maybe life has been so good to you that there is nothing that you need to be saved from. But I doubt it. I have never seen that. Either the evil from outside crushes us, or the evil from within eats away at us, or maybe both happen at the same time. Yes, life is good. It is a precious, wonderful, inexplicable gift. And then we do our darnedest to mess it up. If you are too young to know this yet, you will know it soon enough. And if you are old enough to know it but do not, you are involved in some serious denial.

Sooner or later you will come to know, and be forced to admit, that life is hard, that we are broken upon it, and that we need help. We need to be saved. We need to be saved from sin, death, and evil. We need to be saved from the vagaries of life and the certainty of death. We need to be saved from ourselves. When that day comes, do not call on me to save you, because I cannot save you. I will tell you who can, but I cannot save you. When that day comes, do not call on Uncle Sam to save you, because the government cannot save you. Your money cannot save you. Your education cannot save you. Your status cannot save you. Your family cannot save you. Your friends cannot save you. Your church cannot save you, in and of itself. So how can we be saved?

“Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Who is this Lord? This is the God and Father of Jesus Christ. In fact, God has made Jesus of Nazareth both Lord and Christ. To call upon the name of the Lord is to name the name of Jesus Christ. To call upon the name of the Lord is to quit calling upon, and promoting, our own names so much and to begin relying upon God. To call upon the name of the Lord is to repent from self-centeredness and to be lifted into God-centeredness, which is to say Christ-centeredness. To call upon the name of the Lord is to relinquish the tyranny of sinfulness and to take up the mercy of forgiveness. To call upon the name of the Lord is to quit living by our own strength and to draw upon the power of the Holy Spirit. And that is available to us today.

I have seen strange and marvelous things. I saw a tornado once. I have seen a butterfly first stretch its wings to dry. I have seen the sun rise and set and rise again. I have seen a new born baby. I have seen people badly hurt yet able to forgive. I have seen churches grow in faith and number, in giving and mission. Yet, what of that compares to what we have read today? The Apostle Peter had three times had denied Jesus Christ. But now Peter, before the sneering multitude, “standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, ‘Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.’” Then he proceeds to quote and interpret prophecy from the Old Testament and to preach the gospel of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. All of the disciples, simple and uneducated Galileans, people who had never traveled far from home, had been in the house in Jerusalem, waiting and praying. Now, all of a sudden, they were out in the streets, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in every language known to the Jews who had been scattered across the world and who had returned to Jerusalem. Whence this courage? Whence this linguistic ability? Whence this powerful message of the gospel of Jesus Christ? The content of the message came from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The understanding of the message came from the Old Testament. And the courage, the power, the strength, the ability, the knowledge, the wherewithal, the gumption, the intestinal fortitude, the integrity, the determination, the initiative, and the perseverance to preach, all of that came from the Holy Spirit. It had to. There is no human accounting for it. The disciples did not do that.

Here is the big miracle in today’s reading: the proclamation of the gospel. The noisy wind and burning fire were just signs. The gift of the gospel, the gift of preaching, the gift of both the courage and the ability to tell to all who would hear “the mighty works of God,” that is the miracle. Taking a dozen faulty and halting followers and turning them into the leaders of a new world movement is the miracle. Then as now, what the church needs most only God can give. The church cannot will itself into existence. The church cannot invent its own message, nor can it

rewrite God's message to suit the ideologies of the day. The church cannot force its way forward through the centuries. The church cannot determine the terms of its own existence. What the church can do is wait and pray. The church can wait and pray for the presence, the gift, and the power of the promised Holy Spirit. The church can wait and pray for the promised power for the preaching of the gospel. And when the Spirit comes, and when the power comes, and when the gospel comes, the church can preach the gospel of Jesus Christ near and far, to friend and foe, to people of all races and nationalities, rich and poor, young and old, in all circumstances, in all languages, to the ends of the earth. And when that happens, there is no stopping it, and there is no turning back. To Christ belongs the victory!

For you see, the content of the gospel is summarized in this last sentence: "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." That is, Whoever calls on the name of Jesus Christ shall be saved. And how shall they know that name? The purpose of preaching is to name the name of Jesus Christ, to share the name of Jesus Christ, to tell the mighty works of God in Jesus Christ, to proclaim the good news of the forgiveness of sin, to extend the call to repentance, and to proclaim the promise of eternal life, all so that those who hear may know what name it is upon which we need to call.

When life is easy, we do not think very much about the need to be saved. But life is not easy for very long. It is good to know, when life ebbs, that there is a promise of eternal life. It is good to know, when the forces of nature conspire against us, that the Creator of nature is on our side. It is good to know, when humanity betrays us, that we have a Lord who is faithful. And it is good to know, especially when we betray the Lord, that we still have a Savior.

The wind is silenced. The fire is not visible. And yet, the gospel of Jesus Christ is being preached today from thousands upon thousands, probably millions, of pulpits in Christian churches all around the world. The initial signs of Pentecost assure us of the divine origin of the preaching of the gospel. There is no human accounting for it. And once the preaching was begun, the Holy Spirit has sustained it, encouraged it, expanded it, and extended it around the world and through the centuries. This powerful, spirit filled preaching has called into existence the church of Jesus Christ. This is the new community of those who call on his name. Apart from this, no one knows his name.

Are you weary of the way of the world? Are you unimpressed with the mighty works of man? Are you aware of your own inabilities? Is the world closing in upon you? There is someone who knows, someone who cares, and someone who can help. His name is Jesus Christ. I would tell you that he is waiting for you to call upon him, but that is not right. He is not sitting still. He is not waiting for you to come to him. He has come to us. He has come to us in his life, death, and

resurrection. He has come to us in the Holy Spirit. He continues to come to us in the reading of the scripture and in the preaching of the gospel. He will come to us again in his return. He is telling us his name, telling us the mighty works of God, working within our hearts and souls to give us faith, so that our calling upon his name is not an effort that requires our initiative but a response, an acknowledgment, an admission, a profession of faith, a saying aloud what is already in us: Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we can run away from you no longer; it is you who made us and we are yours; to you and to you alone do we turn for help; we call upon your holy name for salvation; thanks be to God! You see, this sort of calling upon him is not so much an asking for that which we do not know as it is a confident giving of thanks for that which has already been promised to us and which, in that sense, we already have. Is this of interest to you?

You do realize, do you not, that this is the most important news ever announced to the world? We cannot keep this to ourselves. If it is of interest to you, it is of interest to others. Even as the preaching of Jesus Christ has reached us, so does the preaching of Jesus Christ propel us into the world. We cannot help but spread the good news. No, we cannot share what we do not have. Only as we have heard and received the gospel can we share it with others. But no, we cannot contain the good news we do have, either. It is the very nature of the gospel to be contagious. It is the very nature of the gospel to spread like wildfire. Woe be unto us should we attempt to squelch it! The wind and fire would return. God help us to spread the good news. God help us to live the good news. God help us to name the name for all the world to hear. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.”

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To God be the glory, forever and ever! Amen.

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