

This morning let's turn together in your Bibles, if you have them with you. If not, the passage will be given for you on the screens in front of you, and it is from the book of Acts. We're now in Chapter 4.

Pastor Flora led us through Chapter 3 where Peter and John were involved with a miraculous healing. This became the center of much debate among the religious leaders who were concerned with how they were going to be able to contain this event. So they confronted Peter and John, and here we have what happens in that confrontation. It is in this confrontation where we learn many things about how Peter approaches it, how he responds---the center of the message, that there is no other name through which man is saved, except through Jesus Christ of Nazareth. We'll be looking together at verses 1-22. Acts, Chapter 4.

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John and while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and 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, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Anna the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and other men of the high priest's family. 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 cripple and are 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. He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they 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. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

And 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, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For 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.

This is the word of God. Thanks be to God. Please pray with me. Heavenly Father, we would pray that by your Holy Spirit you would open our eyes and our hearts to adore Christ, to see him as he is---the reigning Savior and King---and through no other name can we be saved, O Lord, so we ask. He is that one. He is the one with that name. So now, Lord, by your Spirit set him in our eyes and our hearts to be what he deserves---praised and glorified and worshiped and adored. Lord, help us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

It was the summer of 1985 and I was working for my middle school for a part-time job. That job was to work with a whole cadre of other students who were looking for part-time work, and we were going to

get the building ready for the next school year. It was between my eighth and ninth grade year. It was an interesting summer. My boss was a professing Christian. He was an administrator with the school, and his son was one of the students working alongside me. I can't remember to this day whether he was my age, or perhaps he was a little older, maybe early high school. But I think probably by design, although I have no way of proving it, that his father put his son next to me because he knew I probably needed Jesus. It grew to be a long hot summer. This young man put Jesus before me, but the problem was, is that what he was putting before me was not Jesus himself. What he was trying to do was trying to convince me how I needed to change my life to live like Jesus. But not really understanding who Jesus was and why in the world I needed him, all I heard was law, law, law. And he got so infuriating. He told me one day that I needed to bring all of my record albums---yes, children, ask your parents---these record albums from my home to his church in the parking lot where they would all be burned up together with all the other music. And I'll never forget, I said to him so let me get this straight. I can go home and I need to bring my Stevie Wonder---I don't know why I chose Stevie Wonder, but I said Stevie Wonder, really? I need to burn that? And he said yes. And I said I never want to work with you again

To this day I've never seen him again. But one year later, I would become a Christian. And only in retrospect could I see that what he was trying to do, with very good intentions, was wanting me to see that there is no other name than Jesus, by which we must be saved. I just had no clue what that actually meant, but I knew one thing, and I wanted nothing to do with it. I wanted nothing to do with what he was implying, and that is---not with respect to music, that's not where I'm going---but it's this: That to invite Jesus, to know him as Savior, means to have your entire life reoriented, undone. And I wanted to run from that as fast as I could.

In this passage at the early church, Peter and John have by the Spirit's power performed a miraculous deed, the healing of a man who was born not able to walk. Before the entire town and from the steps of the synagogue Peter and John are now preaching the name of Christ, and the resurrection of the dead, and the freedom from sin and salvation, through that name. And these religious leaders---much like I was as a fifteen-year-old, though they are much older and much more holy and righteous---saw the same thing that I did. No way. It would mean a radical re-orienting of all of life. But that is what is on order here. For to say there is no other name through which or by which we must be saved is not just merely talking about the forgiveness of sins. It is the remaking of one's entire life.

Now we get to see how Peter and John interface with that, what it looks like, and then what is the challenge. So let's look at this together. The three points: *The Principles of Gospel Communication* are here for us to see the ways in which Peter and John engaged this group of people. Secondly, *Salvation and Jesus*, verse 12, and then finally *The Challenge of Unbelief*. And there is a challenge of unbelief, and if you are a Christian, there is a challenge here that you must face. But if you are not yet a Christian, there is a challenge of unbelief that we must consider.

So to get there, let's begin with this first point, *The Principles of Gospel Communication*. I've already read them in verses 7-11 and 18-19. Let me just lay them out for you. And it is this. It is very clear that Peter and John were equipped and called, and therefore sent by Jesus to witness to his name, to witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But notice what they do in verses 7-11. The first point of the principles of gospel communication is this: They suited the message to their audience without jettisoning, without getting rid of, the centrality of the need to follow Jesus and to know him as Savior. They did it in such a way that they knew their audience would understand. So Peter here and John here are referencing the Old Testament. Paul will do it later on in the book of Acts. But when they go to speak with Gentile folks, they do not call on the Old Testament. Why? Because that would not have suited the audience. Did the gospel message change? No, it was communicated in such a way that they knew their audience. The gospel should be preached to everyone, but the method and how

we contextualize and understand it, so that our hearers can understand it, must be taken into consideration. These were men who were religious leaders of Israel. They knew their Old Testament. They knew the Psalms. They were the leaders of the synagogue on the steps of which now Peter and John are preaching.

And so they go to the heart of the matter. For the Christian and for the church, we must be aware we've been given a gospel message, but that message is going to go to lots of different folks in a lot of different contexts. I cannot go to Japan and speak the gospel in Korean. I cannot go to Korea and speak about the gospel in exactly the same way that I would in suburban Howard County. The message is the same, the name is the same. The actions of Christ on the cross and the resurrection, the need for forgiveness is the same, but the way in which that is communicated must take into consideration the audience. And Peter is doing that.

We know that more than that, he's also doing the point number two of gospel proclamation. That is, he does it with deep love and respect. Now note this. We learn early on in these verses that what happens after the healing takes place, the leaders don't know what to do. They seize Peter and John. They know it's late at night, so here's what we're going to do. We're going to throw them in jail--for doing an act of kindness, for doing the very thing that the prophet said would take place. They're throwing these men in jail. So now here are Peter and John, thrown in jail by these religious leaders of Israel, and then brought again into their place and asked to explain. But notice after all of that, notice what happens in verse 8. "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers and elders of the people!'" That phrase is a phrase of deep respect and love. Disrespect and dishonor towards those who do not believe, even those who would purposefully persecute you if you are a Christian---responding to that persecution or that trial with disrespect never opens the door for the gospel. It always closes the door.

Having a profound---let me say it---profound love and respect for those who do not believe is not unusual for the Bible. Why? Because the Bible says all have been made in the image of God. Whether they acknowledge God or not, every person deserves our love and respect. But that is a hard thing, is it not, when someone comes at you with purposeful insult, calling you a narrow Christian, calling you unthinking, how could you believe this, haven't you checked your brain at the door. But friends, isn't that what happens here? In fact we know, indeed, what they thought of Peter and John, though they were amazed by their boldness. They were amazed by the boldness because they're looking at these guys going, do you see these guys? I can't believe they have an alphabet from which to speak! They're unschooled! In other words, they were looking at Peter and John in condescension. Now who of you---certainly me---when given condescension, how often will you respond with deep respect and love. Not so often. But I was reminded of the principles of gospel communication---that indeed, responding in kind does not open the door for Christ.

But there is a third. This, I think, is important and often forgotten, and that is: Understand the proper authority on which a Christian speaks, and on which Peter and John speak. This is important, particularly in light of being rejected by these leaders, being placed in jail, having to give testimony and be on trial over and over again---being threatened, we learn from the passage. The reason why it's important to understand proper authority in gospel communication is, if we too tightly believe that we speak on our own authority, or out of our own opinion, or our own ideas about the gospel, when people reject it and put it back in our face, what's going to happen. We become defensive very quickly. But that is not what happens here, because they understand they are speaking not in their own authority, but they're speaking by an authority that has been given to them. The gospel doesn't belong to them, the gospel belongs to the Lord. And if the gospel belongs to the Lord, then, that enables me to enact bold humility. Reject it if you like, but I need to understand that if indeed it's the Lord's gospel, if I'm receiving rejection, if I'm giving it in a way that is deeply loving and respectful, but pointing the way to Christ---what begins to happen? I get taken out of that equation. And I began to

realize what they're really rejecting is not me, though it feels that way. What they're rejecting is Jesus.

And that is what Peter and John do. They get out of the way. They're saying your fight is not with us. When the Spirit fills Peter he says, listen, verse 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...' There's so many different ways they could go from there. *We've been given the ability to do this. How dare you come back against us.* That's not what they say. They say, '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.' Do you see? They got out of the way. It's not about their gifts. It's not about their calling. It's not about their position. It's about the fact that they've been sent. And they've been sent with another gospel---from Christ, not their own. They are vessels. Therefore, part of the gospel communication is to understand when people reject it---though it may feel like they're rejecting you, do not forget that what is going on is a profound wrestling between those who hear the gospel and the God of the gospel.

Because what is being confronted here are twin truths, the Scriptures tell us. Paul tells us in Romans Chapter 1 that indeed the law of God is written on every human heart. If you are not a believer here today, I profoundly respect the fact that you may not believe, but the Scriptures say---not me---the Scriptures say that the law of God and who he is and the fact that he exists is written on your heart. That is the truth, that is simply the truth according to the Scriptures. Therefore, the Scripture also says, that there's another truth that wrestles against that one, and that is this: That we want to be our own God. And those truths are at odds with each other. And when Peter and John are speaking into that, the fact that they get pushed back, the fact that they get rejection, the fact that they get insults---they understand what's going on. If you're a Christian, know that when we profess the gospel, when we witness to Christ and there is push back, don't forget what's going on in that moment. There's a profound spiritual wrestling.

I know this, because when I rejected that young man in 1985, he had no clue what was going on in my heart. It came out as 'I hate you,' but what was going on, indeed, was the fact that I didn't want God to chase me down! And I didn't want him to be a part of it. Do you see? Now I can find fault with the gospel presentation all day long. And yes, there's probably plenty of things I would like to say to that young man if we were to meet up today. It would probably blow his brains, he would be just amazed at what happened. But here's the deal. The deal was there was so much more going on in that moment. Friends, if you are a Christian, do not forget that what we are asking when we profess Christ, and we want others to claim him as Savior---and if you are not a Christian, know this. I recognize this morning what we're asking for. Your life will be completely turned inside out. And there is a profound wrestling. It's just that we believe that when it is turned inside out, it will be made right side and the right way in a much more beautiful and profound way.

But these are just some of the principles of gospel communication: suited to the audience, deep love and respect, with an understanding that the authority is in the Lord. I need not fear rejection or be defensive because of it. We can be led in bold, humble proclamation.

But then they go to the heart of the matter: *Salvation and Jesus*. Now here is indeed where Peter really knows his audience. He quotes from Psalm 118. And in this salvation of Jesus it is very clear what he is pointing to. Two things. First, the absolute exclusivity of Jesus as the way to salvation, and the only way through which we can know God. It is very fashionable today among many Christians---my generation---who have fallen under the belief that indeed someone can still meet God through other faiths: Buddha or Mohammed. And as attractive as that may sound---and I understand the motivation, the desire that the loving thing to say is, well, maybe God works through those other things. It's not to say that God isn't working and bringing the gospel to bear in other faiths in ways we can't imagine, but it is very clear what the Scriptures say here. You cannot come to God,

and make a sudden left turn to Jesus through Buddha or Mohammed. Jesus is the only path to the Father. This is clear when Peter says salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven---no other name under heaven---given to men through which or by which we must be saved. He is telling us that this exclusivity of Jesus means that Jesus is the only agent of salvation. When Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me," he was not giving that as an option on a multiple-choice religion test. He is not a way. He is not a truth. He is not a life. He is the agent.

Secondly, God's plan of salvation is so clearly outlined in that one verse. God means to rescue us from sin through one person only and through one act alone---through the death and resurrection of Christ alone.

Notice a third thing about the exclusivity. It's a gift that is given. He says there is no other name under heaven given to men.... It's a gift to be received. You cannot guilt your way to heaven. You cannot work your way to heaven. It is simply a gift to be received, to call on the name that has been given as a gift to us.

And there is something else about this verse. It is the verb tenses of the verse. The verb tenses are just this: They are a finished product. In other words, when Peter is saying this to them, he's saying this salvation is absolutely, incredibly finished. The debt for sin has been paid. This is a message that he needed to deliver to them, indeed, that needs to be delivered to every human being. And if you are a Christian this morning, or whether you are not, you need to know it is finished. All that the Lord requires of us is to call on that name. Not to be like a lawyer arguing our case for how good we've been trying to be, and oh, I know I've messed up again. No, it's coming to the Lord. It is where our sin runs deep that we see how much more is God's grace. Isn't that what we sang? It is finished.

Not only is Peter pointing to the exclusivity of Jesus and the salvation that he brings, he draws on a rich Old Testament image of the cornerstone. So he looks right at the Jewish leaders who would have used that verse, who would have certainly used Psalm 118---maybe not that verse, but certainly Psalm 118---and would have used it in worship. And now Peter picks up on that verse, and he looks at them, he says the following, verse 11: 'the stone you builders rejected....' Now what's crazy about that is---talk about going to the heart of the matter---if you go back to Psalm 118 it doesn't have that pronoun 'you' in it. He puts it there. So what he's doing is, he's saying to you, the Jewish religious leaders, you've built a house. You're builders. You've built a house. They're standing on the steps of it. You've built a house. But guess what? You rejected the cornerstone. The implication is God is building another house by another cornerstone. And a cornerstone---though it's translated in the NIV 'capstone,' it should be translated 'cornerstone.' A capstone was often used at the top of an arch, but a cornerstone---unlike our building today---is not set underground. It could be seen visibly above ground and was set at the exact first point, and from that place it would be measured. And then you could tell by a cornerstone---its weight and its size and its quality---what kind of building was being built.

When Peter is pointing to Christ as the chief cornerstone, he is telling us something about what this Jesus is all about. Isn't that what he says in verse 10. He says "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." What that's telling us is, is that Jesus, as the cornerstone, has been vindicated. Though they rejected him, God did not, and raised him from the dead. That's why they preached the resurrection of the dead. They fell, they thought. They took care of Jesus and sentenced him to death. But God vindicated him because of his innocence and raised him victorious over sin and death.

But secondly, Jesus, though rejected---he's now saying to them, no, the ones who are mistaken are you. You have mistakenly rejected Christ.

Thirdly he's saying to them, God has reversed your plan. Your plan was to get rid of Jesus, but indeed, God has reversed it and brought Jesus and raised him from the dead---not at the end of the age, but in the middle of history. We are witnesses to his resurrection. God has reversed what you thought was going to be the solution. He's brought the ultimate solution. So he's reversed their plan.

But then this thing. The fact that he says all of that about the cornerstone and then unites it, verse 12: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven by which, or through which, man can be saved." He's telling us something about Jesus and his quality, and his weight, and his beauty. It's because this is what God did in his Son, though innocent. To die on the cross under your sentence, but to raise him from the dead, and to invite you to salvation---he's saying that the building that God is building is monumental. It is so profoundly beautiful

And here is what is most interesting to me in this passage. He's just told them, guess what? The house you've built is on the wrong foundation. Let me tell you about this monumental cornerstone. The implication is there. Though you rejected Christ, though you sentenced him to death, though you put him in the grave---know this: He's been raised, and a new house is being built, and you're invited. You're invited. Isn't that amazing? And maybe where Peter and John learned their principles of gospel communication, guess where they find their source: in Jesus Christ.

So let's take just a moment and think about Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ had nothing on the outside that would draw us to him, says Isaiah. He was despised by men. He was rejected by them. In performing acts of kindness and healing and offering forgiveness of sins, they rejected him. At the moment of his greatest suffering, his disciples ran from him. At the moment of his greatest suffering as the Son of the living God, all they did was stand around. Those who at one point had sung 'Hosanna to God in the highest,' now some of them are at the cross, spitting on him, rejecting him. Yet Jesus's response was...what? "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do." That is the cornerstone, folks. That is the house that God is building. The house that God is building is made for people who were natural-born enemies of the living God. And God, through Christ on the cross and the resurrection, has made a community of his enemies.

If you are professing Christian, know this. The Scriptures say for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and that sin deserves just punishment. Yet just at the right time Christ died for us. While we were yet his enemies, Christ died. What an amazing picture! Father, you have so loved the world that you sent your son to build a house and to build of people out of those who were once your enemies, and who now are brought in as your sons and daughters. What a house! That is what Peter is inviting these religious leaders into.

If you are not a believer this morning---though you may have rejected Christ in the past---know this, that our door stands open wide for the enemies of God, to know that this is a house that was made out of enemies and are now called family and friends. Know that! Bring your objections, bring your doubts, bring your anger. Bring it! Because our Lord has already withstood the anger of Almighty God---for you! And he welcomes you in. That is what the Scriptures call 'Glory.' The weight of God.

In this past couple of weeks as I've been out of the pulpit, I'm so thankful to have had the time to do some of my own soul-searching, in my own deep reservoirs of making sure. And I've been finding that place in a person like Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who at a point in his life had been so busy he was getting to the place where he needed to take a break, and he took a spiritual retreat. And on that spiritual retreat he was praying, he was trying to figure out what was going on in his ministry and he was praying for the Lord to work. He came back from a walk and prayer and was in the process of taking off his shoes, and on his desk he had a book that he had brought with him by A. W. Pink. He looked up while taking off his shoes and he saw one word: Glory. And when he saw that word, he

was caught up, he said, for some two hours rejoicing at the glory and the beauty of Christ himself. Adoring him. That is what we get to do every Sunday morning together. To adore a God who has made those who were once his enemies now his children. Jesus Christ, taking our sin and the wrath of God, and what we get in the exchange is salvation. Amen? [Amen.]

So what is the challenge of unbelief? The challenge of the unbelief is twofold. First I would consider the challenge of unbelief as we see, because guess what, he said these things, he was preaching and filled with the Spirit, but they did not hear. They did not want anything to do with it. In fact, they just tried to figure out a way to keep their mouths shut. They didn't know what to do. They could not explain away what they had seen.

So there are a couple of things I would want for the Christian to understand is the challenge of unbelief. One. This strikes at the heart of every pastor who ever gets up in front of a group of people or anybody who's ever tried to share their faith. It's this. We wish that miracles and logic were enough. You see, I wish, if you were not a believer, I wish I could stand up here and demonstrate to you the miraculous power of God at the snap of a finger, so that you would see that God is real, because you may believe he is not. I wish I could use, with such eloquence of John Stott or Tim Keller or C. S. Lewis, the razor-sharp logic of the gospel. But here is the great comfort that I find in this passage. Guess what? The miracles and logic were not enough. These leaders were still rejecting. They were still trying to explain it away. That is because unbelief is a stubborn thing, because it sets up camp deep in the crevices of the human heart, to war against the truth that God is, and we are the ones who want to be.

Which means that this is the second point: The challenge of unbelief must remind every single Christian that we absolutely need the power of the Holy Spirit. That unless the Spirit works in us and through us and in the hearts of those who hear me, I cannot change one mind, nor can you. I can't change a human heart, nor can you. I can't even change my own. It required the Holy Spirit. Know this: We can do nothing apart from Christ. To proclaim and to witness to him requires the Lord's power and presence---his Spirit.

But a third thing that the Christian needs in the challenge of unbelief is this: That opposition and persecution does not shut down the gospel's expansion. It often times leads to greater times of witness. That's what's happening here. Because at the very night that they're put in jail---in jail---it tells us...what? It says in verse 4, 'And the number of men---now that's just the men---grew to about five thousand.' So in the first chapter we started with 120. By the third chapter, we have 3000 men. Now we are in Chapter 4, we're up to 5000 men, which means it's a lot more than that. So the fact that opposition and persecution is happening doesn't mean that God's purposes are thwarted or that the doors of the gospel are closed, or there's not an opportunity to witness. Indeed, Acts tells us the exact opposite, that the gospel in church grew the most at the times of the greatest persecution and trial. If you are a Christian, do not see opposition and persecution and being belittled as a closed door. Indeed, it may be the greatest opportunity for the gospel to shine through.

Now, the challenge of unbelief is also for those who don't believe. That may seem ironic, but here you go. It's two. First. That these religious leaders were righteous, and they were holy. They gave themselves to the law. They led the people in their worship. But know this. It's very clear that they were using their righteousness as a way to avoid Jesus. If you're looking at your life and you're holding it in the balance---you're saying I've done more good than I have done bad, then what you're doing is you're trying to figure out a way to leverage your righteousness before a holy God so that you might avoid Jesus. There are all kinds of ways to avoid Jesus. Maybe your righteousness----maybe you're not trying to prove anything to God. But maybe what you're trying to do is pursue a righteous life, a just life, by filling it with all kinds of great pursuits. Those pursuits and those great things may be

great in and of themselves, but they will never love you back. They will never love you back. And you need to see them for what we see in these men---they were using it as a way to avoid Jesus.

And here's what I would put forth to you as the second challenge of unbelief, if you do not believe, and it is this. Are you open to being wrong? I am. If you believe I'm wrong, let's talk about it. Let's dialogue about it. I'm open to that. Are you? They wanted to question Peter and John, but they didn't want to be questioned. Are we all able to be questioned?

Another question: What is your absolute value? You see, what's going on in the life of these elders is everything's imploding in on them. They can't control it anymore. It's a wildfire. They've got people who were once amongst them who are now believers. They've got people who were in the synagogue who are now followers of the way of Jesus. These men are performing miraculous things which they cannot deny, and it's like the world is spinning upside down and they're trying to figure out ways to keep it under control, because their ultimate value was in their ways of thinking about God. What God was and what God wasn't. What God would do and what God wouldn't do. And how they interpreted the Bible and how Peter and John interpreted the Bible. But what's happening is, that's where their ultimate value was placed. Where is your ultimate value?

Let me use the wise words of C. S. Lewis as a conclusion. This is for all, to both those that believe and those who do not. And it is this. He says in his essay called, "Is Christianity hard or easy?" Lewis says this. "The Christian way is different. It is harder and easier. Christ says give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work. I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there. I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the truth or crown it or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent, as well as the ones you think wicked. The whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you myself. My own shall become yours. It is an impossible thing to hand over your whole self, all your wishes and your precautions to Christ, but it is far easier than what we are all trying to do instead. For what we are trying to do is to remain what we call 'ourselves', to keep personal happiness as our greatest aim in life, and yet at the same time we're trying to be good. We're all trying to let our mind and our heart go their own way, centered on money or pleasure or ambition, and hoping in spite of this to behave honestly and chastely and humbly. And that is exactly what Christ warned us not to do. He said a thistle cannot produce figs. If I am a field that contains nothing but grass seed, I cannot produce wheat. Cutting the grass may keep it short, but I shall still produce grass and not wheat. If I want to produce wheat, the change must go deeper than the surface. I must be plowed up and re-sown."

There is no other name through which man must be ground up, tilled up, and re-sown, except through Christ. And when Christ comes in, we question ourselves. We look at what our ultimate values are, and we receive something far greater. We see a Savior who loves us and who offers us a life far better than we could ever imagine. But far harder than we think. But he is good. Let's pray.

Father, by your Holy Spirit help us to adore Christ, to see him as the cornerstone of great weight. And the house which you are building is of monumental stature, that you have made a community out of your enemies. You have taken sinful human beings and drawn them to yourself. We experience more than forgiveness, we experience new life. You do not help us to live life well, you give us a whole new life. I pray, O Lord, this morning that you would impart new life to us. And I pray for all here who do not know you. I ask, O Lord, that you would so set Christ before them, that they cannot help but come to him. For those, Lord, who are trying to avoid Jesus, either with their righteousness or their pursuit of sin, I pray, Lord, may you enable them not to avoid him any longer. I pray, O Lord, that you would set Christ on our hearts, Christ on our minds, and Christ on our lips. In Jesus' name, whose name is above all names. Amen.