

About today's reading, one witty preacher said "*the beggar asked for alms, and he got legs.*"

Alms, is "a mercy gift". A beggar would ask for "alms" – a gift of money, or food, simply so he could survive. There was no disability pension in those days, and so if one was unable to work, one had to beg. And there was no better spot for begging, than at the Temple. So, friends would carry this bloke there every day, and sit him down at the Temple gate, and there, he would ask to receive a mercy gift (alms).

But from Peter and John, he got far more than he could have ever imagined...

⁴ "Look at us." ⁵ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them.

⁶ But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"

In the mid-1200's, Thomas Aquinas once visited the pope, and he found the pope counting out a large sum of money.

"You see, Thomas," said the Pope, "the church can no longer say, 'Silver and gold have I none.'"

*"True," Thomas replied, "neither can she now say, 'Rise up and walk.'"*ⁱ

You see, when we have nothing to give – when we are at the limits of our resources – when we have no strength in ourselves – that's where faith kicks in. It's only when we come to the end of ourselves – when we know that there's nothing that **we** can humanly do to fix a situation – it's only then, that we **truly** depend on God. And when we begin to

rely on **God** – that’s when God does the most amazing things.

And this is probably one of the most important lessons that we need to learn – The greatest gift – the greatest help that we can give anyone – is **not** what we can do – it’s what God can do....

The reason that today’s reading is a fair bit longer than most that I preach on, is because I wanted to hold the one theme, all together. And the theme that runs right through this passage, is “The Name of Jesus”.

The Name of Jesus isn’t very popular today. The Name of Jesus, is an offence to many. Many people are happy to talk about “God”, but fewer are happy to talk about “Jesus”.

In fact, in a US presidential debate, George W Bush was asked to identify the thinker who had the greatest effect on his life. He named Jesus Christ -- because, as he put it, "He has changed my heart."

The uproar was fast and furious. You would have thought Bush had invoked the name of Osama Bin Laden, or Adolf Hitler, Stalin..... The New York Times found a Bishop to denounce Bush's choice. A superlawyer went on television to complain that Bush's answer was totally out of line. And the chorus of critics all sang from the same hymn-book. Bush had spoken the forbidden name in American politicsⁱⁱ.

But why is the Name of Jesus such an offence? – Well, I’ll give you 2 reasons – firstly, because it’s unique, and secondly, because it demands a response. And we’ll find that, coming out in this reading shortly. But there’s more for us to learn about the Name of Jesus, then why it’s not popular – for instance, the reasons we **cling** to the Name of Jesus.

1. Firstly, the Name of Jesus, is powerful.

In 2014, in Australia, the the most popular name for a baby boy, was “Oliverⁱⁱⁱ” (I was really surprised that “Noah” was number 2). Or if you had a baby girl, the most popular name was “Ava^{iv}” (at least it’s an easy one to spell)...

My parents didn’t stand against the flow of popularity, because in 1969, the most popular name for a boy, was “Michael”.

But, what’s so special about the name “Jesus”? Today, very few people would dare to call their child “Jesus”. But did you know that when Jesus was a boy, “Jesus” was one of the most popular names to be given to a Jewish boy?.... And as you walked down the street, you wouldn’t be at all surprised, if you bumped into 4 or 5 young lads by the name of Jesus before you got to the end of the block... And in the New Testament, we find two other Jesuses being named: Jesus Justus and Jesus Barabbas.

But Jesus **Christ**, is a name, set apart. Christ isn’t Jesus’ surname, by the way – it’s a title. Jesus was proved to be

the Christ – the anointed one – the chosen one. And **this** Jesus – no other Jesus – the name of **this** Jesus, is powerful.

It was God who healed the lame man.... But it was done in the Name of Jesus.

When the religious leaders arrested Peter and John – {by the way, Peter and John were standing before basically the same blokes who Jesus stood before when He was on trial (the elders and scribes. Annas and Ciaphus)} – and when they questioned Peter and John, they wanted to know “**By what power, or by what name did you do this?**” And while it was God who healed the lame man, it was done in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth – it was done in the name of the risen, crucified one. It was done in the name of the One, who had been pronounced “Guilty” by the very same corrupt religious court, that Peter and John were now standing before...

The name of Jesus is powerful. And we find throughout the Bible, sickness is healed in the name of Jesus; the blind are made to see; the crippled are made to walk; the sinner repents at the name of Jesus; Demons are exorcised in the name of Jesus; the dead are raised at the name of Jesus....

The name of Jesus, is powerful.

2. Secondly, the Name of Jesus is unique.

There **is** no other name.

The name of Buddah will not save you. The name of Mahammud will not save you. The name of Ashtaroth; or Sophia; Krishna; or Plato; or Darwin; or Dawkins; or Confusious; or Dahlilama; or Brahman; or Joseph Smith; or the rainbow serpant.... None of these names will save you.

The name of Jesus Christ, stands alone. He is unique. Peter said, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given among men by which we **must** be saved.”

We are saved through faith, in **one** name, and **one** name only – the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that’s why, later today, Scott, who professes faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is going to be **baptised**, in the **Name** of Jesus Christ.

The Name of Jesus is unique – and many take offence at that. And that’s what we find in this reading – the religious leaders took offence, at the Name of Jesus. They had rejected Him – threw Him away in the rubbish heap – but now God puts His stamp of approval on Christ and on Christ alone.

I’ve sometimes watched brickies at work... And as they select the bricks to to construct the wall, I’ve been surprised sometimes, to see them discard, what seems like 1 or 2 pallets of bricks... - Bricks that are too deformed, or mishapen, or chipped where they should not have chips... They pick them up, and rather than lay them, they throw them away...

But can you imagine, going to that pile of discarded bricks, and finding one brick that was discarded, and saying, “This

is the most important brick in my house”... It’ll be the cornerstone. It’ll be the one which, when laid, is the most important brick – and the rest of the house will be built onto and around that one brick....

And that’s the image that Peter gave. You religious leaders – you’re supposed to be, the spiritual builders – but you rejected Christ.... And God’s overturned your decision. The stone that you rejected, God has made into the corner stone – the beginning of the building that **God** is building...

This uniqueness of Christ, is an offence to many.

Today, Bible-believing Christians are accused of being arrogant or exclusive, in that they exclude all other religions... The fact of the matter is, there **is** only one way to life, and that’s Jesus. That’s the truth. And if we were to ever shy away from the truth, just so people don’t get offended... Well what good will that do them? If someone’s on the road to destruction, don’t you think they need to be told, “Hey, you’re on the wrong road”....

3. Thirdly, we are saved through **faith** in the Name of Jesus.

We’ve really already covered that, over the last few weeks. But doing good stuff won’t save us. Believing in some un-namable God won’t save us. It’s faith in Jesus Christ that brings forgiveness of sins, and salvation. And so we’re saved through faith in the Name of Jesus.

4. Fourthly, in the Name of Jesus, they proclaimed the resurrection of the Dead

Peter said, ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out,

Why do our sins need to be blotted out? What does it matter if I **am** a sinner?????

Well, Peter says, so ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord

What Peter was saying, is “Jesus has ascended into heaven for now”. But He’s coming back. Don’t think you missed out, because you rejected Him at the start... There’s still time to believe in the Name of Jesus.

And the Name of Jesus is being preached – right across the world today, the Name of Jesus is being preached. Those who listen – those who repent, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, can look forward to these times of refreshing in the presence of the Lord, when He returns....

“But”, Peter said, every soul who does not listen shall be destroyed from the people.

The resurrection of the dead. All will be raised – those who believe in the Name of Jesus, will be raised to life. And those who have rejected Jesus, will also be raised, but only for the purposes of judgment.^v

5. And so, the Name of Jesus Christ, forces us to a decision: Do I repent and believe in Him? Or, do I stay the same and reject Him?

6. The Name of Jesus is the only hope, for humanity. And so the Name of Jesus must be preached.

The religious leaders, were really worried about this new movement – it was a movement of the Holy Spirit, but they wouldn't accept that... It was a movement that was bringing spiritual life, and bringing people close to God, but they wouldn't have a bar of it.

And, in order that it may spread no further among the people, they decided to warn Peter and John, to “speak no more to anyone in this name.” ... ¹⁸ So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

And they were ‘right on the money’:

- Christianity, does **not** spread, when Christians do not speak in the Name of Jesus.
- People are **not** saved, when the disciples of Jesus do not speak or teach in the Name of Jesus.
- People do not find life in Christ – the lost are not found – the weary are not given strength – the hopeless are not given hope... when the disciples of Jesus, fail to speak and teach in the Name of Jesus.

And we wonder why the Kingdom of God, seems to be growing ever so slowly....

in order that it may spread no further among the people... , do not speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus...

But Peter and John said to them, “Should we do what you say?, or do what God says??? – you decide for yourself”
But as for us, we have to keep teaching in the Name of Jesus.

And when they got back with the other disciples, they prayed for a boldness – they prayed for strength, to continue, in the face of opposition, to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

They knew that, while they were obedient to preaching in the Name of Jesus, God would be doing His work, and stretching out His hand, to heal, and to perform His signs and wonders, through the name of His Holy Servant, Jesus...

³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

ⁱ Cited by F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 77–78.

ⁱⁱ www.holwick.com Copyright (c) 1999 Prison Fellowship Ministries. Reprinted with permission.

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ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.babycenter.com.au/a25011573/top-boys-names-of-2014>

^{iv} <http://www.babycenter.com.au/a25011575/top-girls-names-of-2014>

^v John 5:28–29 (ESV) ²⁸ **Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice** ²⁹ **and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.**