

... everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved

Acts 2:1–21

Psalm 104:24–34, 35b

1 Corinthians 12:3b–13

John 7:37–39

Text: Acts 2:21

Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Introduction

Do you remember the phenomenon known as the ‘flash mob?’ At a shopping mall food court filled with Christmas shoppers suddenly a woman stands and, with a beautiful soprano voice, begins to sing the Hallelujah Chorus; other members of a choir join the chorus one after another—each member dressed to blend in with all the other shoppers—until the mall is filled with the sound of their music. Perhaps you have experienced one of these or even participated in one. I note with you that the delight of the flash mob works because a place filled with unsuspecting people is chosen as the venue for their music.

1. As Luke tells the story of the early church, it is clear from the first chapter of the Book of Acts that the launch of the continuing work of Jesus in the world will not be complete, and that his followers will not be fully prepared for their work, until a notable activity of the Holy Spirit has taken place. Jesus had said to his disciples, “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” Luke wants his readers to understand that this notable action of the Holy Spirit occurred on the day of Pentecost.

As you read the story of this day of Pentecost, you might say that God orchestrated a ‘flash mob’ of sorts. Suddenly there is a sound like the rush of a violent wind and these 120 followers of Jesus, likely praying together at the temple, are launched into the temple courts crowded with worshippers from all over the world and they begin to speak about God’s deeds of power. For Luke, this is code for speaking about Jesus and his ministry, his death, and his resurrection.

Note that God picks a busy, crowded public place for the launch. The disciples have been waiting. Since the day of resurrection, seven weeks have passed. The risen Jesus has met with them, teaching them the meaning of his death and resurrection. They witnessed the ascension of Jesus and another ten days have come and gone—they continue to meet and pray together, waiting. And suddenly,

on the day of Pentecost, the day when Jerusalem is filled with worshippers from all over the world, it happens, and everyone hears their proclamation in their native language. Maximum exposure with everyone experiencing internal closed captioning for maximum impact.

Comparatively speaking, Jesus' resurrection occurred in relative obscurity. No one saw the event of Jesus raised from the dead. The disciples struggle to embrace the reality of meeting the risen Jesus in closed door sessions and private events. The ascension also occurs in relative obscurity with only a few observers. What is public and for the world, what is to be seen in the world of Jesus' work, is the church bearing witness to Jesus Christ. On this Pentecost day some of the crowd asked, 'what does this mean?' Luke gives us the meaning in Peter's sermon when Peter cites the prophet Joel for an answer. The witness of the church to Jesus Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit is so that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." I invite you to reflect with me on what it means to call on the name of the Lord.

2. We must be careful to note that, biblically speaking, the name of the Lord is not a word that has some mystical power we wield because we say the name. When we pray in Jesus' name, we don't say his name as if to add some sort of powerful punch to the prayer we offer. 'Name', in scripture means person, presence, power, purpose, and deserved reputation. To call on the name of the Lord is to call on the person of the Lord, to call on the presence of the Lord, to call on the power and the purpose and the deserved reputation of the Lord.

(a) First, thinking about calling on the 'name' as calling on the person of the Lord.

Calling on the person of the Lord puts front and centre the identity of God. When the Israelites speak of God, they mean a particular person. They mean the God who made himself known as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They speak definitively of this One as the God who called Moses at the burning bush and when Moses asked his name God said, "I am" or "I am that I am." They do not mean 'higher power.' They mean the God whose commands, given to Moses, prohibited taking God's name in vain.

Out of reverence for the name of God, Jewish people would not write or say the name of God. In the Hebrew of the Older Testament four consonants were inserted in the text for the name of God whenever it was written—it is unpronounceable. This four-letter unpronounceable word is known as the tetragrammaton. (Christians put some vowels with these consonants and say "Yahweh" or

“Jehovah”).) In the Greek translation of the Older Testament the Greek word “Lord” was chosen as a stand-in for this unpronounceable four-consonant word for the name of God. This is the word that appears in the prophesy of Joel when he prophesies ‘that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ This is the word found in the Psalms in the oft repeated phrase, ‘the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever.’

In God’s declaration given through the prophet Joel, “I will pour out my Spirit”, the gospel asserts that the Spirit isn’t a vague power but God himself among and within us. The church fathers insist that the whole God is found in any one ‘person’ of the Godhead. The Spirit isn’t 1/3 of God, but the whole God, wholly among and within us. I note that God pours his Spirit on all flesh; no one is excluded from God’s purpose to save. Long before the church’s witness reaches the ears of someone the Spirit has been at work, calling, convincing, convicting, converting, wooing.

And in speaking of the person of God, Peter goes on to identify the Lord as Jesus of Nazareth. “Therefore,” declares Peter as he drives to the point of his sermon, “let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2:36) The gospel assert that Jesus Christ is the manifest face of God; to see Jesus is to see the Father. To call on the name of the Lord is to call on this person revealed in God’s self disclosure in conversation with Israel and in coming among us in Jesus of Nazareth.

(2) We turn our attention for a moment to consider calling on the name of the Lord as calling on the Lord’s presence. Among the wonders the gospel asserts is that the God who infinitely transcends us also comes TO us in the person of Jesus Christ, and comes WITHIN us in the person of the Spirit.

In Psalm 139 the psalmist exults in the glory of God’s presence. “Just think”, he exclaims, “regardless of where I go, or think I might go, or try to go, I can never outstrip God’s knowledge of me”. As he revels in the God who enfolds him the psalmist asks two rhetorical questions: “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?” Then he jubilantly shouts the answer to his own question: “Nowhere. I can’t depart from God’s Spirit; I can’t flee from God’s presence. And isn’t it wonderful that I can’t.” The psalmist reflects on the geometry of grace: “If I ascend to heaven (up, God’s abode, where all is life and light and love); if I make my bed in Sheol (down, the abode of the dead, where all is dark and dismal); if I take the wings of the morning (a common Hebrew

expression meaning the east); if I dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea (the sea symbolized many things in Israel, and here it symbolizes the west, since the Mediterranean Sea was always west of Palestine) – up, down, east, west — THOU ART THERE”.

In other words, the living God who knows us (which is to say, the loving God who prospers us) is the sphere, the atmosphere, the environment in which my life unfolds. The God who is the atmosphere of our entire life is none other than the God whose love is as wide as the outstretched arms of his Son, whose patience is attested by his centuries-long faithfulness to Israel, whose truth is as constant as the constancy of his promises to us even in the face of our inconstancy before him. To call on the name of the Lord is to call on the presence of the Lord who loves beyond measure.

(3) To call on the ‘name’ of the Lord is also to call upon God’s power. When we think of God’s power the word ‘almighty’ comes to mind and we typically equate that to mean that God can do anything he wants. God’s power, biblically speaking, is always God’s effectiveness in achieving purpose. The Holy Spirit, biblically, is spoken of as God’s ‘*dunamis*’, from which we get our word ‘*dynamite*’. This is the word Jesus used when he said the disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. God’s power is God’s effectiveness, which effectiveness is always the power by which he binds us to Jesus Christ and conforms us to Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is not a power evidenced in the unusual or self-aggrandizement; the power of the Spirit is always that great spotlight on Jesus.

This power of the Spirit that conforms us to Jesus Christ is power to obey him. We are to do what is “right”. “Right” pertains to “righteous(ness)”, a two-fold meaning in scripture: right(ed) relationship to God, born of faith (the power of the Spirit to bind us to Jesus) and right conduct arising from this righted relationship, born of obedience to Jesus Christ. And our Lord’s commands are blessing for life.

Scripture nowhere suggests we are to pursue or have the right to pursue happiness or self-fulfilment. These are by-products of the one right and duty we have: to glorify God through our obedience to Jesus. As John Wesley tirelessly proclaimed, “None but the holy are finally happy.” People find happiness elusive because they pursue something that can only be experience as a by-product of something else. Many things are this way in life. For example, the satisfaction of a job well done is not found in looking for this satisfaction; it is a by-product of doing the job well.

(4) The 'name' of also means the purpose of God. Only as the Spirit is bestowed at Pentecost do the disciples stop huddling in Jerusalem, and recognize/instantiate the church's purpose: mission to the world. This mission is to make known God's purpose to save. "Everyone who calls on the name (purpose) of the Lord shall be saved.

We must be sure to give the word 'salvation' its full weight. It doesn't mean that people have been made to feel better or helped a bit. It means that we have been delivered from real peril. If we are not delivered from real danger, then the word 'salvation' is a silly exaggeration. If a non-swimmer overturns a canoe in twelve inches of water and is helped to her feet by a kind friend, we would never say that her friend saved her. But if a non-swimmer overturns a canoe in one hundred feet of water, the vocabulary of being saved is no exaggeration.

Let us not deceive ourselves. Ultimate loss is possible. If it weren't, then dozens of our Lord's parables would have no point. The name "Jesus" is a Greek form of the Hebrew name "Yehoshuah", and "Yehoshuah" means "God-to-the-rescue". Jesus is friend of sinners only because he is first saviour of sinners. In clinging to him I shall be spared a condemnation which both he and his Father endorse. Because of the provision made for me in the cross I can be spared it. And because I entrust myself to the crucified One I am spared it. As a believer who knows he has been spared final loss I shall surely find myself moved to heart-felt gratitude and glad obedience for as long as there is breath in me

(5) Finally, 'name' of the Lord is 'deserved reputation' or we could say, 'God's 'nature.'" No amount of study of the universe or the world around us or human life within the world will lead to the conclusion that there is a God who loves us.

Scripture teaches that means of the Holy Spirit we are bound to the Son and introduced to the Father. God's name, name meaning God's nature, is love. By means of the Spirit we are convincingly acquainted with LOVE. We read today the Apostle Paul's teaching on the gifts of the Spirit given us for the common good. But the gifts aren't ends in themselves. Paul goes on to write of 'a still more excellent way'; this is when the Apostle Paul penned that wonderful definition of love declaring that 'love never fails.' Paul can say that 'love never fails' because he is talking about the love of God manifest in the cross of Christ. In his mind is the oft repeated scriptural phrase, 'the steadfast love of God endures forever.' God's love will never fail to achieve its purposes to save.

As the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, we have glorious news to share because of Jesus; everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.