

We as Americans love the ability to choose. We choose what car to drive. We choose where to live. We choose our clothing and our furniture. We choose our favorite foods at the grocery store and at our favorite restaurants. We like the ability to control the things in our lives and have the ability to direct our lives in the manner we would like to live.

Our First Reading from the book of Acts sets the scene: **“And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.”**

If choice is king, 1. (oops!) It might appear that Peter and John made a bad choice preaching the Gospel. If you’re in a jail, your options are limited. Perhaps they should have done something else that would have left their options open, so to speak... Preaching the truth of the resurrection about Jesus was a risky decision.

The religious leaders of Jerusalem summon Peter and John and they ask Peter and John to give an account by what power they healed a crippled man. Peter eventually goes on to say, **“This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”**”

2. (ugh!) Declaring Jesus as the only road to heaven seems to be an even worse choice! Peter and John just don’t seem to get it. The leaders of Jerusalem didn’t like to hear that. They told Peter and John to stop preaching the name of Jesus.

To make matters worse, Peter and John tell them, **“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”** Essentially saying, “Thanks, but, no, thanks, we’re going to keep preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Peter and John would suffer for that choice. They would be beaten. They would experience hardships. Peter would eventually be crucified. John would be sentenced to exile on the island of Patmos. Where was their legal representation? Why weren’t they afforded their religious liberties? No Alliance for Defending Freedom lawyers showed up to their court appearances.

“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Today this is an unpopular sentiment. In a 2020 survey of Evangelical Christians, almost half agreed that God accepts worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. We live in a pluralistic society that teaches there are many ways to heaven.

It's easy to keep our heads down, keep quiet, and go along to get along. If the religious types of Peter's day were "...**greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.**" Why can't we expect a similar reaction today in our workplaces, in our classrooms, and in our friend circles?

If choice is king, then isn't it a bad idea to proclaim something so close-minded, bigoted, and anti-choice? We could maybe even say it's un-American! Some might say declaring Jesus as the only road to heaven is hateful!

A missionary couple was just returning from many years in rural Africa. Much of their ministry was spent in the bush ministering to tribal villages. When they went to grocery stores or other marketplaces, their choices were limited as to what they could buy. One day, the husband and the wife went to the grocery store back in America. The wife was going to run into the store just to grab a box of cereal. The husband sat in the car and listened to the radio. After twenty minutes, he went inside the store to find his wife frozen at the cereal aisle.

You see, she had a panic attack because for the first time in decades, she had a plethora of options. Previously in Africa they had the choice between maybe two or three different cereals, but now with an entire aisle devoted to various kinds of cereal, she had decision paralysis.

Choice may be king, but choice can be an idol. Choice can be paralyzing. We can make poor choices. We want more roads to heaven, but 3. (aha!) Having too many roads makes it easy to get lost.

A lady once lamented to me about the limited number of choices she was allotted as she aged. I replied that choice isn't all it's cracked up to be. In fact, the best thing that ever happened to me was something I had no say in. The day I was baptized, I didn't choose what clothing to wear. I didn't choose to get baptized, my parents decided for me. Yet in that washing flood, the Lord claimed me as His son. In that washing flood I was given the one name under heaven by which man can be saved. In that washing flood I was set on the road that leads to heaven.

"Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus is the one road to heaven. We don't need to guess if there's someone better. We don't need to check out the newest spiritual fad. We don't need to brew our own spirituality using the best ingredients from all the different religions. Everything we have is right here in the person of Jesus Christ. **BECAUSE CHRIST IS THE ONE ROAD TO HEAVEN, WE CAN STICK WITH HIM IN GOOD TIMES AND BAD.**

4. (whee!) Knowing Christ is the one road means we know where we're going. Peter explains the important parts of the salvation story in our first reading, **"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a**

crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well.”

Jesus’ road led from heaven to Earth to the cross to the open tomb. Jesus came to Earth to live a perfect life on your behalf. He made the right decision every time, even when you make poor choices every day. He bore the weight of your poor decisions, suffering for them on the cross. He rose again showing you a better way and showing that even if your path might lead to death—even death for being a Christian, death is not the end.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions, and it is also paved with the choices of those who sincerely intended to earn their way to salvation. Jesus tells us that the gate is narrow that leads to eternal life. Many will be sent to hell for their false belief and sinful decisions. That’s the sad news of Peter’s message: **“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”**”

But the other side of the same coin is this statement from Peter in John’s Gospel, **“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”** It’s almost as if Peter is saying, “Lord to whom *else* shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life!” This promise of Jesus as the sole way to heaven gives us assurance, when tribulations come, we can endure them because the eternal bliss of communion with Jesus is worth any worldly suffering: even embarrassment, even prison, even death!

Finally, 5. (yeah!) Knowing Christ is the one road makes it easy to give directions. Despite the opposition from the Sadducees, we hear this little word of encouragement: **“But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.”** This good news of Jesus bears fruit. In Peter and John’s case, the result was five thousand men coming to believe in the saving truth of Jesus reconciling sinners to Himself.

Thus, we can model Peter and John’s boldness in sharing our faith with others. And in many ways, it’s easy. It’s easy because we know the one name by which mankind can be saved. We can tell them of our Lord Jesus who has forgiven us, saved us, and has renewed us by the Holy Spirit and the working of His mighty Word.

Some may call us bigoted or close-minded, but many close-minded individuals were later heralded as heroes. In the midst of the Cold-War, tensions were high between the United States and the USSR. Constant threat of nuclear war meant that both sides had to be alert and ready to retaliate if the other side launched a nuclear strike.

In the wee hours of the morning of September 26, 1983, Stanislav Petrov was stationed as the supervisor for an early defense missile warning system outside of Moscow. The warning system alerted him of five incoming missiles with a high degree of certainty. It was his job to alert the high command to then launch a counterstrike on the United States, but he didn't. Based on his training, it had to be a false alarm because the Americans would have launched everything in their arsenal if they were going to attack Russia. Stanislav Petrov may have singlehandedly saved the world from nuclear war.

Rather than being praised for his actions, he was later questioned intensely by his superiors, and he received a reprimand for not keeping up his logbook properly. It was only in the late 90s, after the fall of the USSR, that his actions that night were made public knowledge. Who knows if we would be here today if he chose to inform his superiors of a potential nuclear strike?

It took guts for Petrov to go against the computer's warning system and make the right decision. So too, the Holy Spirit gives us the guts and the courage to share the saving message of the Gospel that there is no other name by which man can be saved but the name of Jesus. There may be people who are greatly annoyed by this message, but in the life to come, all who come to believe in Jesus will be thankful that we did. Lord, we thank you that you have set us on this one path to life, and we pray you would give us the words to say to others to invite them along this path also. Amen!