

# **GOD'S SAVING PURPOSES PREVAIL THROUGH THE CRUCIFIED, RESURRECTED AND GLORIFIED CHRIST**

**Acts 2:22-36**

## INTRODUCTION

The financial crisis that currently grips our country is a crisis of faith. Individuals and banks and companies are all wondering who they can trust. People are pulling their money out of banks and mutual funds because they no longer trust those institutions to protect and grow their money. Banks are unwilling to lend money because they do not trust those to whom they lend the money to pay them back. The actions of our political leaders are designed to restore trust in our financial institutions but many of us are wondering if we can trust them. Are they acting out of concern for us or out of concern for those who contribute money to their political campaigns?

I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that one of the most fundamental decisions that every human being has to make is this: who are you going to trust? Our entire life is based upon who we trust. Whether at the interpersonal level or at the corporate/community level the degree of security and happiness you experience in life is directly related to who you are trusting in. If those you trust, whether they be friends or spouses or parents or whether they be anonymous fund managers or bank presidents or politicians—if they prove faithless and untrustworthy your security and happiness will be greatly diminished, if not crushed.

This is perhaps the most central question the Bible asks: who are you going to trust? Will you depend upon man made gods and religions? Will you depend upon money? Will you trust in your own strength and wisdom? Will you trust in kings and politicians and armies? Will you depend upon your family? Will you trust drugs and alcohol? Or, will you trust in the only true God who has made himself known in and through Jesus Christ? The central point of the Christian message is simply this: there is only one trustworthy person in the entire universe and that is Jesus Christ. If you trust in any other person or thing you are going to be more than disappointed, you will be ruined. From the beginning, God's word to the human race has been that we must turn away from every other allegiance and every other "savior" and we must trust in Jesus only. God does not call us to trust in Christ for no reason. Faith is not blind. Faith is not a leap into the dark. Every single human being places their faith in those persons and objects that they are persuaded are trustworthy. So God aims for you and I to see that Jesus is the most trustworthy of persons. There is no one like him. The preaching of the gospel as we will see in our examination of the first Christian sermon ever preached by the apostle Peter is a declaration of the glory and trustworthiness of Jesus. This is the point of our text today...

## MAIN POINT

**Jesus is the most glorious of all beings and the only one worthy of your trust because...**

### **I. God obviously sent Jesus (v. 22)**

If you will recall, this first Christian sermon is given 50 days after the crucifixion of Jesus in this same city, Jerusalem. During forty of those days Jesus appeared to his eleven disciples bearing witness to them that he was indeed resurrected. Ten days prior to this event these men had watched Jesus ascend into heaven. They had spent those 10 days since Christ's ascension with 120 other disciples of Jesus praying and getting ready for the coming of the HS which Jesus had told them would happen in not many days. Acts 2 begins, as we saw last week, with the coming of the HS upon all 120 men and women who were disciples of Jesus. The evidence that the HS had come and was filling all of them was the sound of a violent wind, tongues of fire that settled over each disciple's head and that all 120 began speaking in foreign languages. They went out into the streets and, most likely, made their way to the temple where they declared the wonders of God in foreign tongues so that all the people gathered in Jerusalem from the four corners of the Roman empire heard them speaking in their own native languages. In response to the crowds amazement and their inquiring as to what this all meant, Peter stood up and addressed the crowd.

As we saw last week the first thing he said was that the last days had now begun because the prophet Joel had said that the last days would be characterized by God pouring out his Holy Spirit on all of his people without distinction and that is what has clearly happened. He claimed that the days of Messiah's rule, which the OT prophets had prophesied, had begun with this coming of the Holy Spirit. He also, in quoting Joel has said that the only way that anyone could escape God's judgment on the final glorious day of the Lord was if they called upon the name of the Lord. In other words, the only way to safely pass through the judgment of God would be to trust in, adhere to, and rely upon the name, the character, the faithfulness of Yahweh. It is at this point that our text today begins. What Peter does now is to show who this Lord is that must be trusted and why he is trustworthy.

In v. 23 he identifies the Lord who must be trusted as the man Jesus who lived in and came from the town of Nazareth in the region of Galilee. The first audacious claim that Peter makes is this: the Lord who is to be called upon, who in the prophet Joel is Yahweh, the creator of the universe and God of Israel is the man Jesus whose mother was Mary and who lived for most of his earthly life in the little town of Nazareth. This is one of the central points throughout this sermon, the man Jesus is God. It is one thing to make such an outlandish claim. It is another to prove it. Thus Peter begins by reminding these Jews of what they themselves know to be true. God himself gave convincing evidence of the uniqueness, of the divinity, of the trustworthiness of this man by means of the miracles, wonders and signs that he performed before their very eyes. Jesus performed acts of power that only God himself could perform. He cast out demons, healed diseases, commanded the wind and rain to stop, walked on water and raised the dead. All of these miracles and wonders were signs pointing to the fact of his identity and of his trustworthiness. The miracles were God's evidence that this Jesus was indeed his Son and the Savior of the world.

It would be easy to miss the significance of the last phrase of v. 22. Peter says that these people, to whom he is speaking, know for a fact that Jesus of Nazareth performed many miracles. When I was first considering the claims of Christ this is one of the things that helped me believe. If Peter's claim were false; if Jesus did not perform miracles that would have been the end of the sermon and of the Christian faith. The crowd would have simply said, "What are you talking about? All we know about this character Jesus is he was crucified by the Romans." The truthfulness of the gospel message is dependent upon the truthfulness of historical events that were witnessed not only by believers but by unbelievers, those hostile to the gospel. Ken Hendricks, the prominent Beloit businessman and philanthropist died last December. If I began speaking publically here in Rock county and claiming that he had performed many miracles, wonders and signs, what would happen? I would be mocked and ridiculed as a crackpot. People wouldn't put up with it. I wouldn't have an audience. It is significant that the claims of the first Christians that Jesus performed miracles and rose from the dead was not disputed by this crowd of unbelieving eyewitnesses. The miracles of Jesus were common knowledge.

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- *God obviously sent Jesus*
- *And because...*

## **II. God killed Jesus by the hands of lawless men (v. 23)**

Verse 23 is a shocking verse to most modern Christians. In it, Peter puts together two things that many, if not most Christians would say, cannot be put together. First, he says that God by his own decision and determination and in accord with his purposes and his exhaustive knowledge of all things past, present and future planned every detail of the betrayal, unjust trial and sentence, torture, and crucifixion of Jesus. Everything that was done to Jesus was done by means of the (literal translation) "having been determined purpose and having been determined foreknowledge of God." The death of Jesus was God the Father's idea and he determined how it would come about. The death of Jesus fulfills the purpose of God. It was necessary for Jesus to die in this way in order for God to accomplish his purpose to glorify himself in the salvation of his people. However, we also know, because Jesus is God that he himself planned out his own death. He willingly

submitted himself to the hands of wicked men. Not only did he submit himself but he, along with his Father, decisively determined that this is what would happen long before it happened.

The second thing that is directly connected to this first thing is that lawless men crucified Jesus by nailing him to the cross at the command of the Jewish nation. In other words, those who betrayed, tried, tortured and killed Jesus are guilty of a great crime. Both the Jews who called for his crucifixion and the Romans who carried out his crucifixion are guilty of willingly doing evil. They are culpable, liable to God's just anger against them for this act of treachery and wickedness. This is what many Christians refuse to put together. The Triune God determined that Jesus, the Son, should die in this manner. Those who killed Jesus did the will of God. Yet, those who killed Jesus did exactly what they wanted to do and in doing this, they disobeyed God's revealed will and sinned a great sin and thus are justly condemned by God. Therefore, while God's will was carried out in the death of Jesus, God did not do evil, only the humans who planned it and carried it out did evil.

Why does Peter put these two things together in this verse when he is seeking to explain why it is that Jesus is trustworthy? First, the glory of God in the death of Jesus is seen in this. Jesus' death was no accident but the result of God's direct determination. Just as surely as God did the miracles of Jesus and God raised him from the dead, God also killed Jesus. What appears to be the greatest failure of God's plan, the Messiah is killed, turns out to be the critical event in God's plan. Second, the death of Jesus is necessary to the fulfillment of God's purpose in the world which is the salvation of his people. Jesus can and should be trusted because his death is critical to the salvation of God's people. Third, notice that Peter accuses every person listening to him of killing Jesus (see v. 36). What do you think, did every person listening to Peter actually have a hand in his death? Peter includes his whole audience in the guilt of killing Jesus, even though not all directly participated. Peter is out to demonstrate the guilt and thus the need for a Savior that every person in his audience has because they share in the same wickedness that motivated those who killed Jesus. We as readers of this account ought to see ourselves in this indictment as well as we share in common with these people the same sinful nature. This fact has been long acknowledged in the music of the church. We sing a song here at River Hills that confesses this fact quite clearly. Listen to this portion of the song by Stuart Townsend entitled, "How deep the Father's Love for us:" "Behold the man upon the cross, my sin upon His shoulder. Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers. It was my sin that held Him there until it was accomplished."

I recently finished reading Elie Weisel's account of the Jewish holocaust. It is a first person account of what happened to him and his family when the Nazi's herded them aboard trains along with their entire Jewish community from Romania and took them to the concentration camps in Germany. The book is called "Night." It was very difficult to read. I often wept as I read it. The overwhelming sense I got as I read was terror of God. I wondered aloud to the Lord why it was that humans were still permitted to live after we had done such horrible things. The power of this book is that the author makes it crystal clear that those who did these things were men just like him, just like me and thus I could be just like them. When we see the great evil that is done by humans we should not be smug or condemning or self-righteous. We should mourn over the evil that is in us. What was done to the Jews by the Nazis or to the Russians by Stalin or to the Moslems in Kosovo by the Serbs or to the Tutsi's by the Hutu's in Rwanda, while unspeakable evil, is nothing compared to what we did to the perfectly holy and loving Son of God who became man. We can and must trust Jesus because not only are we guilty of his crucifixion and subject to God's just anger but also because he died according to God's set purpose so we could be forgiven of the horrors we have committed.

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### **III. God raised Jesus from the dead (vv. 24-32)**

After God executed Jesus by the hands of lawless men he then raised him from the dead. Notice that God raised him from the agonies of death. Thus we see that Jesus did suffer all the horror of death as God's curse against human sin. However, God released him from those agonies by raising him from the dead. But notice he also says that it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. Why was it impossible for Jesus to remain dead? Death could not hold him because of who he is. Death cannot hold the author of life in its grip. However, Peter doesn't just come right out and say who he is but rather he goes to the OT Scripture and demonstrates who Jesus is through it.

First, Peter quotes the last half of Psalm 16, which is a Psalm written by King David. The Psalm is a confident assertion of his security due to God's presence and promises. He knows he cannot be shaken because God is at his right hand. Nothing and no one can harm him because God is his refuge. This knowledge gives him great joy and fills him with hope for the future. Ultimately this joy and hope comes from his knowledge that God will not abandon him to the grave, nor will he let his "holy one" experience bodily decay. Rather God has made known the path to life and has promised to fill him with joy at his right hand forever. In other words, David says that he is full of joy and hope because he knows that not even death can harm him.

Notice however, how Peter reads this Psalm in view of Jesus' death and resurrection. First he points out that David died and was buried. That fact can be easily confirmed because David's tomb was a landmark in Jerusalem at that time. The point is that David did go to the grave and his body did decay. Therefore, he cannot be talking about himself. As Peter says in v. 30, David was a prophet and he knew that God had promised to set one of his sons on his throne forever. David knew this because that is what God promised him through Nathan the prophet as recorded in 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17 and repeated throughout the OT. Thus when he describes God's not abandoning him to the grave and God's not letting his holy one see decay he knew that he was not writing about himself but about his son. As God's prophet and the Messiah's ancestor he was describing how the Messiah was going to willingly and joyfully face death because he knew that God would raise him from the dead. The joy, hope and confidence in the psalm are an expression of Jesus' confidence. It is a description of what the author to the Hebrews says in 12:2, "For the joy set before him Jesus endured the cross, despising its shame..."

The point here isn't simply that Jesus is alive but that because Jesus is alive by resurrection he is the promised Messiah of Israel. He is the Son of David who will sit on David's throne forever. He is the shoot that will come up from the stump of Jesse in whom all the nations will hope. He is God's shepherd who will replace all the unfaithful shepherds of Israel and directly care for God's sheep. He is the seed of Abraham through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed. He is God's firstborn son, Israel. He is God's servant who will be a light to the Gentiles. In other words, what Peter does here is open the door to all of the OT descriptions of that "seed of the woman whose heel will be bruised by Satan but who will crush Satan's head." You can trust Jesus because not only is he alive by resurrection but because he is the one whom God promised to send as the Savior of the world. He is the fulfillment of God's eternal plan and the one who fulfills every promise God made.

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#### **IV. God crowned Jesus king of the universe and the church (vv. 33-36)**

This same Jesus of Nazareth whom God attested by miracles, whom he killed, whom he raised is now seated at his right hand in the position of honor and authority. In other words, this same Jesus has been crowned king of the entire universe and of his church. The point here isn't that Jesus wasn't the king and only has now become the king but rather that he has now, after his humiliation been given the glory that was his before he became a

man. As the reward of his obedient life and death he has received the right to pour out the Holy Spirit upon his church. So the evidence of the 120 Christians speaking in foreign languages bears witness to the fact that Jesus is dwelling in God's very presence and shares in God's very authority. He exercises rights and powers that only God himself can exercise as evidenced by this pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

Notice again that Peter is not content to merely say that they should trust Jesus because they see the evidence of the HS being poured out in their speaking in foreign languages. Rather he returns to the OT Scriptures. This is such an important thing to see. So many people believe what they believe because of some experience they have had or have witnessed. Peter's entire sermon is rooted in the fact that your faith should not rest in experiences but in the word of God. The only reason to pay any attention to the phenomenon of these disciples speaking in foreign languages is because the Scriptures verify the experience.

Peter, in v. 34, makes the point that David did not ascend to heaven in a resurrected body. Again, he is in the grave. We can go see his bones if we want. Yet David said in Psalm 110:1, "Yahweh said to my Adoni, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" The coming of the HS proves that Jesus is David's Lord whom God has exalted to his right hand where he now shares in the glory and power of God. David's son who is also David's Lord, at a point in time shares in the glory and authority of God and the presence of the HS is proof that this has happened. He is now waiting for a day when God the Father will subject all of his enemies under his feet. While he waits at God's right hand, he pours out the HS upon his church so that we can know who he is, rejoice in who he is and bear witness to who he is.

God and his Messiah have enemies. There is a day coming when he is going to conquer and judge those enemies. These people, who crucified Jesus, obviously are among those enemies, as is every sinner who has not yet called on the name of the Lord. My friends, you might lose all your savings. You might lose your job and so you might lose your house. Your children or your spouse might betray you. You might get cancer. Your child might be injured or killed. You might experience severe mental anguish. But these dangers are as nothing compared to that day when Jesus Christ will return and God the Father will put all of his enemies under his feet. The Jesus that we crucified is the Lord and Messiah who will exercise perfect justice in the future. But Peter naming Jesus Lord also returns us to the last verse from Joel's prophecy that Peter quotes in v. 21, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." So who are you going to trust? If your biggest problem is that your retirement account is going to evaporate, then you will trust the politicians and bankers. If your biggest problem is your health, then you will trust your doctors. But if your biggest problem is that you crucified the one whom God has named Lord and Christ, then you will trust in the name of this crucified and resurrected Lord. The reason to trust in Jesus is that he is the judge and he is also the Lord who will rescue from his judgment everyone who calls upon him, everyone who trusts in him.

Show picture from Jared's room.

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