

God Raised Him Up: Acts 2:24-41
Ben Reaach, Three Rivers Grace Church
Easter Sunday, April 4, 2010

This morning we want to look at the remainder of this amazing sermon that Peter preached at Pentecost. Last Sunday we studied verse 22, where Peter speaks of Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God. In Jesus' life He received a clear endorsement from the Father. With mighty works and wonders and signs that God the Father did through Jesus, He publicly attested to the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Son, the Messiah. And then in verse 23, which we meditated on Friday evening, Peter moves from Jesus' life to Jesus' death and shows that this, too, was part of God's sovereign plan for Jesus. The cross does not contradict the truth that Jesus is a man attested by God. Rather, the cross was always part of the plan. It was according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. And yet that doesn't mean the perpetrators of His death are off the hook. Those who killed Jesus are as guilty as can be. And Peter forcefully emphasizes that point. He speaks directly at the end of verse 23 and says, you crucified and killed Him by the hands of lawless men. God's sovereignty doesn't cancel out human responsibility. The Jews and the Gentiles who played a role in Jesus' death were guilty of the most horrendous crime ever committed. They put to death the sinless Lamb of God. And by extension, all of us here bear that same guilt. We have all rejected Jesus, and in our rejection of Him we have done the same thing that Pilate and Herod and the religious leaders and the Roman soldiers did to Him. We have ignored the divine endorsement upon Jesus' life, and rather than giving Him the honor He deserves we have scorned Him and walked away from Him and have thus played a part in crucifying Him.

As we look at the rest of this sermon, now, let's keep that in mind. We are guilty. We are sinners in need of forgiveness. And therefore our response should be the same as those in verse 37 who were cut to the heart by this message of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and exaltation. We've already looked at the significance of His life (verse 22), and His death (verse 23). And now we'll see, in verses 24-32, what Peter says about the resurrection. And then, in verses 33-36, Jesus' exaltation. And then, in verses 37-41, the amazing response that occurred following this sermon.

Resurrection (verses 24-32)

Just as God was the One who attested to Jesus' identity, and it was according to God's definite plan and foreknowledge that Jesus died, it was also God who raised Jesus from the dead.

Peter builds his case for the resurrection first with an argument from Scripture. He makes the bold claim in verse 24 that God raised Jesus up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. And then Peter grounds that statement by quoting from Psalm 16. Verse 25 begins with the word, "for." He's building a foundation that supports the claim of verse 24, and he appeals to the Old Testament to show that all of this has happened according to plan. The very Scriptures that the Jews hold in such reverence points to the resurrection of the Messiah.

"For David says concerning him," that is, concerning the Messiah. And what Peter intends to show is that Psalm 16, a Psalm written by David, is not ultimately about David himself, but about David's greater Son, the Messiah. Remember the promise God made to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-13. "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." God promised to David that one of his descendants would have an eternal kingdom. And therefore Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, discerns in Psalm 16 a reference to the resurrection of the Messiah. Verse 27 is the key verse, "For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption." Hades and corruption both refer to the grave—death. David is expressing the hope that God will not abandon him to the grave. And then, in the reference to "your Holy One," David is looking beyond himself to that greater Son of his who will have an eternal kingdom. He will not see corruption.

So Peter takes that statement made by David, and puts that together with the obvious fact that David is dead. In fact, as he says in verse 29, "he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day." So what are we to make of this? David made this statement about not being abandoned to Hades, not seeing corruption. But then he died and was buried, and he's still in that tomb. Here's the conclusion we must draw from this. Verse 30, these words are prophetic. David was not only a king, but a prophet, and he was well aware of that great promise God had made to him. Verse 30 uses the wording of Psalm 132, which refers back to 2 Samuel 7, which I just quoted—God's covenant with David. And then verse 31, David "foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades,

nor did his flesh see corruption.” David, knowing the promise God had made to him, was able to make this prophetic statement about the indestructibility of the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ. And thus Psalm 16 points to the resurrection of the Christ.

Peter first gives this argument from Scripture to show the significance of Jesus’ resurrection, and then he gives an argument from experience in verse 32. “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.” The apostles were eye-witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection. They saw Him alive again. Acts 1:3 says that “[Jesus] presented himself to [the apostles] after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.” So Peter could point, not only to the authoritative witness of Scripture, but also to his own personal experience and the experience of the other apostles. There was plenty of evidence, then and now, that Jesus rose from the dead. John Stott writes, “Thus the spoken testimony of the apostles and the written prediction of the prophets converged. Or, as we would say, the Old and New Testament Scriptures coincided in their witness to the resurrection of Christ.”¹

The resurrection of Christ is what we celebrate on this resurrection Sunday, and every Lord’s Day. We serve a Lord who has died, but did not remain dead. The grave could not hold Him. It was not possible for Him to be held by death. He is not in a tomb. God raised Him from the dead! And as we share the wonderful news of our Lord, we must be sure to tell people that our Lord is a risen Lord. He is not in a grave like Buddha or Mohammed or Joseph Smith. He is alive! He was not just a moral teacher. He was not just a charismatic leader. He did not merely live an extraordinary life. He died, and He rose from the dead. And His resurrection shows that He was not lying about His identity. Nor was He disillusioned about His identity.

Listen to how Albert Schweitzer tried to put a positive spin on Jesus’ life while at the same time denying the resurrection. Schweitzer was a famous scholar, medical doctor, humanitarian. He died in 1965. This is what he wrote in his book, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*: “Jesus . . . in the knowledge that he is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and he throws himself upon it. Then it does turn, and crushes him. Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, he has destroyed them. The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great man, who was strong enough to think of himself as the supernatural ruler of mankind and to bend history to his purpose, is hanging

¹ John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, BST (Leicester, England: IVP, 1990), page 77.

upon it still. That is his victory and his reign.”² In Schweitzer’s assessment, Jesus died for a noble cause. And even though His cause failed, we should still seek to emulate the spirit of Jesus’ life.

Friends, beware of so-called Christianity that denies the resurrection. There is not Christianity without the resurrection. Jesus’ life and death are meaningless apart from the resurrection. We have no hope if He did not rise from the dead. What does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 15? He says, “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. . . [I]f Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. . . If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.” (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17, 19)

This is our hope, brothers and sisters, that Jesus not only died, but rose again, showing that His death served the purpose for which it was intended. He successfully bore our sins on the cross. He satisfied God’s wrath against sin. And the fact that He rose again proves that. If we were gathered here today to honor and worship the Jesus of Albert Schweitzer, we would be fools. But we are here to praise and glorify the Jesus of Scripture, the true Son of God, a man attested by God, who died according to God’s plan, and who was then raised up from the dead. He is a living Savior. He is our risen Lord.

Exaltation (verses 33-36)

Peter has spoken of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, and now in verse 33 he turns to the exaltation of Jesus. And here he begins with an argument from experience and then moves to an argument from Scripture. In verse 33 he points to the marvelous things that are happening at that very moment—“this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.” This is the argument from experience. Look around you. Listen. The first part of Acts 2 described the coming of the Holy Spirit and the amazing things that happened as a result. It was Pentecost, and so Jerusalem was packed with Jews from all over the place, from different nations, different languages. And the Christians who had just been filled with the Holy Spirit began speaking in other tongues. And verse 6 says that these Jews “were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?” (Acts 2:6-8). And Peter is now telling them how this has come about. Here’s what has happened. Jesus was not only resurrected from the dead. He then ascended to the Father. He

² *Quest*, page 370-1. Quoted in Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1861-1986* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), page 214.

was exalted, lifted high, and seated at the right hand of the Father. And as part of His exalted position Jesus received the promise of the Holy Spirit and poured out the Holy Spirit upon the church.

This gives us an insight into the inner workings of the Trinity. God the Son exalted at the right hand of God the Father. The Father bestowing on the Son the promised Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. And the Son pouring out the Spirit on the church. What Peter wants his audience to see is that the pouring out of the Spirit is yet another pointer to who Jesus is. God raised Jesus from the dead, and then exalted Jesus, bestowed on Him the promise of the Holy Spirit. And now Jesus has poured out the Spirit, which is what you yourselves are seeing and hearing right now.

And then Peter backs this up with another argument from Scripture. It's another Psalm. It's another Psalm written by David. This time it's Psalm 110, and the argument is similar to the way he used Psalm 16 earlier. In Psalm 110 David's words tell of the Messiah's exaltation. "The Lord said to my Lord." In the Hebrew it reads, "*Yahweh* said to my *Adonai*." And *Yahweh* is promising to exalt David's Lord by giving Him victory over all of His enemies. And who is David's Lord? The Messiah, David's descendant who will reign forever. David spoke these things, but as Peter points out in verse 34, "David did not ascend into the heavens." So the point here is similar to the point about the resurrection, only here it's the exaltation. David foretold these things about One being exalted over His enemies. However, David himself was not exalted in this way. Therefore, we are to understand the Psalm as foretelling the Messiah's exaltation.

Verse 36 is the great climax and conclusion of the sermon up to this point. Based on the arguments from Scripture and the arguments from experience that Peter has made, this should be the conclusion reached by everyone. "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." God's endorsement of Jesus should be clear in Jesus' life, death, resurrection and exaltation, and everyone should realize the profound guilt they bear for rejecting the One attested by God.

Response (verses 37-41)

Let's look, finally, at the response that this sermon evoked. And in the response to this sermon we see amazing evidence of God's supernatural work. No man can produce results like this. People can certainly get a crowd excited and can get folks to do all kinds of crazy things. But no man can effect the deep, authentic, heart-felt, eternal changes that occurred in the souls of 3,000 people on this day. Peter has been preaching with passion and

clarity. He has impressed upon his audience that they are guilty of crucifying the Messiah. And the Holy Spirit worked through this to do something miraculous.

Verse 37 says that in response to this “they were cut to the heart.” In other words, they were deeply convicted. This was just what Peter hoped would happen. His sermon was designed to bring people exactly to this point. They realized the truth of what Peter had been saying, and they felt guilty. They felt shameful for what they had done. And the weight of their guilt produced a kind of panic. “Brothers, what shall we do?” Is there any hope? Is there any way to escape the wrath of God that is against us due to our rejection of His Son? Is there any way out? Is there any way for us to be saved?

This is the conviction of the Holy Spirit. It is not the result of Peter’s dynamic personality or his superb speaking skills or his engaging story-telling techniques. It was the work of the Spirit applying truth to these souls and allowing them to see their guilt so that they were cut to the heart. This is what we should pray for in our preaching and evangelism. We should pray that the Spirit will move in such a way that people will respond like this, that people will ask, What shall we do?

Peter answers their question by giving two commands and then listing two gifts. The commands are repent and be baptized. The gifts are forgiveness and the Spirit. First, he says repent. To repent is to turn away from sin. In Acts 3:19 Peter is preaching again, and he says, “Repent therefore, and turn again [or turn around], that your sins may be blotted out.” To repent is to turn away from sin, and faith is turning to Christ. Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. They are two aspects of the same turning. Turning away from sin toward Christ. It is orienting one’s life in a totally new direction. I’ve explained it to my kids by picking up our kitchen trash can and looking down into it and using that to illustrate what our lives are like before conversion. The trash can is filled with all kinds of things that we foolishly think are so precious. Things like self, vanity, pride, sensuality, worldly amusements, worldly ambition, greed, gossip, materialism. We embrace these things and admire them. We orient our lives in the direction of these worldly things. We position ourselves to get as much pleasure from these things as possible, without realizing that they are empty and fleeting pleasures.

Repentance, then, is dropping the trash can and turning our back on it. Repentance is seeing the trash for what it is and realizing that it stinks. It’s not beautiful and precious and wonderful like we thought it was. It’s awful. It’s gross. It’s repelling. And while our flesh will continue to lie to us and try to entice us back to the dumpster of sin, a truly repentant heart will

fight against those enticements. And the way we will resist the lure of sin is by embracing Christ and relishing the pleasure of knowing Him. Because that pleasure is neither empty nor fleeting. It is true pleasure, deep and abiding pleasure, and it will never fade or diminish in any way but only increase and intensify forever and ever in heaven. This is what conversion entails: repentance (turning away from sin), and faith (turning to Christ and embracing Him as our only hope of salvation and enjoying Him forever).

These two facets of conversion are so closely connected that sometimes the Bible speaks of one, sometimes of the other, sometimes of both. For instance, in Acts 16:31 Paul tells the Philippian jailer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” So he mentions faith, but not repentance. But then in Acts 20:21 Paul mentions both. He is speaking to the Ephesian elders and says that “you yourselves know how . . . [I have been] testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here in our passage for this morning, Peter only mentions repentance. But we understand that repentance implies faith, and vice versa.

One more thing to point out about repentance is that it is another evidence of God’s supernatural work. We are commanded to repent, and it is our responsibility to repent. But it is only possible by God’s grace. In Acts 11:18 the church heard Peter’s report about the Gentiles, and they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.” And Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2:25 that “God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.”³ We must repent. But in order to repent it must be granted to us by God. He must do a work in our hearts to bring us to repentance. So we pray like Augustine did: God, give what you command, and command what you will. We must repent, and we desperately need God to change our desires so that we see sin as it is and see Christ for who He is. And as our desires change we will more and more despise sin and cherish Christ, which is to say we will repent and believe.

The second thing Peter commands here is baptism, which is an outward symbol of what happens in a person’s heart at conversion. Baptism, itself, does not save. But it provides a picture of death to the old self and resurrection to new life in Christ (see Romans 6:3-4). Being immersed in water symbolizes the death and burial of the old self, and coming up out of the water symbolizes the new life we have in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). And the fact that about 3,000 people were baptized on this occasion shows that these converts were for real. Because they were not in a place where it would have been cool to get baptized. By taking this step they would have been publicly identifying

³ See also Acts 3:26; 5:31.

themselves as Christ-followers. And that's what you should do, too, if you have not been baptized as a believer. You should be baptized as a public testimony of what has happened in your heart.

The two gifts, then, that come with conversion are forgiveness of your sins and receiving the Holy Spirit. The mention of forgiveness would have been such a great relief to those who had been cut to the heart with the weight of their guilt. They were grieving over their wickedness and foolishness in crucifying the Messiah, and they were crying out for help. And Peter tells them the wonderful news of God's grace. There is forgiveness. Jesus Christ, the One we rejected and crucified, died in order that we can be forgiven. Our sins are washed away, erased, forgiven, no longer held against us. And not only that, but we also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit dwells in us and produces fruit in us. The Spirit empowers us in the fight of faith. These are the two gifts that Peter mentions that are given to every believer. Our sins are forgiven, and we receive the Holy Spirit.

And then Peter makes this very personal. Just as he had accused them very directly in order to make them feel their guilt, he now appeals to them directly and personally to make them see the hope that is being held out to them. He tells them in verse 39, "For the promise is for you . . ." In other words, this forgiveness of sin and receiving the Holy Spirit can happen to you. The promise is for you and for your children. It's not limited to the apostles or to the 120 disciples. In fact, it's not even limited to the Jews. It's even for all who are far off—the Gentiles. This Good News will go to the ends of the earth.

And notice again God's work and God's sovereignty in all of this, at the end of verse 39—"everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." Look back to verse 21, at the end of this passage that Peter quotes from Joel 2. It says, "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." And now in verse 39 Peter is saying, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself shall be saved. And someone might ask, which is it? Will everyone who calls on the name of the Lord be saved, or will everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself be saved? And the answer is yes! Both statements are true, because those who call on the name of the Lord are the same ones whom the Lord our God is calling to himself. It's the same thing we were considering Friday evening from verse 23. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Both are at work in sin and evil, even the heinous evil of Christ's crucifixion. God planned it, and those who put Jesus to death are guilty for their actions. And similarly in salvation, we are responsible to call upon the name of the Lord, and those who do so are those whom the Lord our God is calling to himself. Don't try

to squeeze God into a box. Don't try to limit His sovereignty in order to exalt human free will. The Bible will not allow it. We have to uphold human responsibility and God's absolute control over all things. And when we do so, we can see what a beautiful thing it is that God is sovereign. We need not begrudge His sovereignty, but celebrate it. Even when we don't understand it, even when life hurts, we should be able to see the beauty of resting in the arms of a sovereign and good God.

I want to close with a quote about revival and an exhortation to us to pray for revival. What the early church experienced on this occasion was a tremendous outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In one day about 3,000 souls received this word and were baptized. And as we've seen, it was not something that Peter mustered up in his own strength, but something that God did. The Holy Spirit convicted hearts, and brought these individuals to a place of true repentance and faith, and gave them the boldness to proclaim their faith openly in the ordinance of baptism.

This is revival. This is an outpouring of the Spirit that should encourage us in our prayers and our evangelism and our longing to see God pour out His Spirit in our day, in our own lives, in our church, in our city. So what should we be seeking? What should we be praying for? Let me read you this quote from Iain Murray's book, *Revival and Revivalism* that clarifies for us how we should think of revival. He writes, "what happens in revivals is not to be seen as something miraculously different from the regular experience of the church. The difference lies in degree, not in kind. In an 'outpouring of the Spirit' spiritual influence is more widespread, convictions are deeper, and feelings more intense, but all this is only a heightening of normal Christianity. True revivals are 'extraordinary,' yet what is experienced at such times is not different in essence from the spiritual experience that belongs to Christians at other times. It is the larger 'earnest' of the same Spirit who abides with all those who believe."⁴ Here's how I want to encourage us. We don't know what God's plans are for us—in this church, in this city. We don't know if we'll ever see 3,000 converted in one day. Maybe we will see something like that happen, which would be glorious. But maybe God will choose to do something very different. Maybe He will convert 3,000 over the course of 30 years, or less or more. We don't know what God's plans are in terms of quantity, and that's not something we are to be concerned about. But what we should hope for and pray and fast for and yearn for and labor toward is genuine spiritual revival. We should long to see ourselves and others cut to the heart by the truth of God's Word. We should long to hear people say, "What shall we do?" We should long to see people truly

⁴ Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, page 23.

repent of their sins and trust in Christ and be baptized as a sign of their new life in Christ. So let's rejoice in the life and death and resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ, and let's proclaim this Good News to the hurting world around us. And let's pray that God will use our meager efforts and do something glorious to praise of His Name.