

# The First Christian Sermon

*And It's Application To Today*

Acts 2:22 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— <sup>23</sup> this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. <sup>24</sup> God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. <sup>25</sup> For David says concerning him,

“ ‘I saw the Lord always before me,  
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;  
<sup>26</sup> therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;  
my flesh also will dwell in hope.

<sup>27</sup> For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,  
or let your Holy One see corruption.

<sup>28</sup> You have made known to me the paths of life;  
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

<sup>29</sup> “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. <sup>30</sup> Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, <sup>31</sup> he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. <sup>32</sup> This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. <sup>33</sup> Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. <sup>34</sup> For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

“ ‘The Lord said to my Lord,  
“Sit at my right hand,  
<sup>35</sup> until I make your enemies your footstool.” ’

<sup>36</sup> Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

<sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” <sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”

### Acts 2:22-41

## Always Look on the Bright Side?

There have been few [movies as controversial](#) as the 1979 Monty Python release: *Life of Brian*. As the Wiki summarizes it, “[The film tells the story of Brian Cohen, a young Jewish-Roman man who is born on the same day as – and next door to – Jesus, and is subsequently mistaken for the Messiah.](#)” If you’ve not seen it, you can already tell why it was so controversial, a subject that I’ll get into in a moment. One particular part of this movie popped into my mind after reading a quote from the real way I wanted to begin this sermon.

Back in 1923, J. Gresham Machen wrote a seminal book called [Christianity and Liberalism](#). Machen was NT scholar at

Princeton between 1906-29, who along with John Murray, Oswald Allis, and Cornelius Van Til revolted against the encroaching liberalism of their day—not in politics but in the church, and founded Westminster Theological Seminary. At the inaugural address in 1929, Machen said,

We believe, first, that the Christian religion, as set forth in the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church, is true; we believe, second, that the Christian religion welcomes and is capable of scholarly defense; and we believe, third, that the Christian religion should be proclaimed without fear or favor, and in clear opposition to whatever opposes it, whether from within or without the church, as the only way of salvation for lost mankind. On that platform, brethren, we stand. Pray that we may be enabled by God's grace to stand firm. Pray that the students who go forth from Westminster Theological Seminary may know Christ as their own Savior and may proclaim to others the gospel of his love.<sup>1</sup>

You can hear in these words strong connections to his earlier book that described Liberalism, which is simply the religious

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<sup>1</sup> J. Gresham Machen, Appendix A: "Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Plan and Purpose," *What is Christianity? And Other Addresses*, ed. Ned Bernard Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 458.

arm of Modernism, and is the notion that Christianity must adjust itself to the contemporary mood. It is a religion of and for the times.

And in America, *we don't like hard times*, so a religion that reflects that is perfect! Of course, that wasn't the cultural milieu of Machen, who was coming out of WWI. And America was actually built on the strong backs of many who suffered greatly to see it grow. Americans were not averse to hard times like we are today, where we do nearly everything in our power to run from them.

But not liking hard times came from *something prior* which is only liking one side of the God of the Bible. Here's the quote that got me thinking about the *Life of Brian*. "*Religion cannot be made joyful simply by looking on the bright side of God. For a one-sided God is not a real God, and it is the real God alone who can satisfy the longing of the soul. God is love, but is He only love?*"<sup>2</sup> If your view of God is only rosy, that is, you only want one of his attributes (like "love," probably as you most likely totally misunderstand the word) rather than all of him, then you're outlook on the world and on your own life in it will only be able to

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<sup>2</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, New Edition (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 113.

tolerate roses. Soon, even the thorns on the rose will have no place in your world, because they prick and hurt.

The very last scene of the movie has made its way into popular culture even to those who've never seen it. It's a scene where Brian has been wrongly sentenced to die of crucifixion. It's not a mockery of the biblical story though; its more like the very end of *Spartacus* where the rebel slave who rebelled against Rome is hanging by a Roman cross on a street lined with dozens of others as his wife comes to him and shows him his child and that she will cause him to remember his name. Remember, crucifixion was a very common form of the death penalty in the Roman world.

At any rate, as he hangs there wondering how this all happened to him, suddenly, the criminal next to him starts to lyricize, “Some things in life are bad. They can really make you mad. Other things just make you swear and curse. When you're chewing on life's gristle, don't grumble, give a whistle. And this'll help things turn out for the best.” And breaking into song as he's hanging on the cross, “And, always look on the bright side of life.” Soon, all the criminals are joining in on the absurdity, whistling the perfect nihilistic ending to a movie that has mocked organized religion

and how people misunderstand the meaning of life (which, of course, is another Python movie), which of course the Python gives no answers to. Their job is to satirize.

It's the *church's job to give meaning*. You can't expect a comedy troupe, much less one like Monty Python to do that. But somehow, I suspect, why *The Life of Brian* even exists is because *the church by and large has been failing to do its job* for a long time now. Here are a few more quotes from Machen to get us pondering.

- “The many varieties of modern liberal religion are rooted in naturalism—that is, in the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God (as distinguished from the ordinary course of nature) in connection with the origin of Christianity” (p. 2).
- “It is no wonder, then, that liberalism is totally different from Christianity, for the foundation is different. Christianity is founded upon the Bible. It bases upon the Bible both its thinking and its life. Liberalism on the other hand is founded upon the shifting emotions of sinful men” (p. 67).
- “Here is found the most fundamental difference between liberalism and Christianity—liberalism is altogether in the imperative mood, while Christianity begins with a triumphant indicative; liberalism appeals to man's will, while Christianity announces, first, a gracious act of God” (p. 39).

Every time I pick up Machen's masterpiece, I'm astonished at how his work was simultaneously telling conservative Christians of things they couldn't possibly think were actually going on in churches, and yet today are what define "conservative" Christians more than anything else. Sadly, he was both a prophet speaking the truth against the liberalism of his day and a prophet predicting how liberalism would become modern Evangelical, and in some places even Reformed Christianity.

I've been **struck by all three things** in "conservative" circles. First, I write a book on giants in the Bible and the few who attack it are Reformed people, those who say it is preposterous that anyone could believe that angels could do something like that. It's as if these people haven't looked at how preposterous it is that a man is born of a virgin or rises from the dead, which they say they believe.

Second, we've all seen how church after church after church claims to believe in the Bible, yet **they never manage to get the thing opened** up on Sunday morning when everyone comes to gather. Instead, you get the rock concert and the self-help seminar.



Third, that gets to **the content of so many messages**. Even at my conservative Evangelical seminary now over 20 years ago, in my preaching classes, I was one of only two students who dared to preaching a sermon that wasn't a "**how to**." And it didn't matter if you were preaching from the Ten Commandments, a proverb, Romans 2, or the life of Abraham. Everything was the imperative, the command: Here's what you must do to be a good little Christian. The indicative of what Christ did? It's like that was something only for non-Christians to hear. That's what Machen called Liberalism and it's what the people clamor for. For it is the religion of man. Show me how to be a better person (in whatever ways I think that should mean).

Machen came to the conclusion that Liberalism was not just a perversion of Christianity. They perverted every essential doctrine at the crucial point. Man's problem is **not sin**, but lack of education. **God is not** a God of holiness, but only "love" (whatever that means). Jesus **didn't die to save us** from the wrath of God. He died as a good example of what you should do with your life. The Bible **isn't where we learn about God**. Rather, we learn about him from personal experiences. It is here only to give you warm platitudes. The



rest, you can throw out as not actually being his word. The church is a community of any who profess Jesus **however they want** to define him. At one point he says, “**The Church of Rome may represent a perversion of the Christian religion; but naturalistic liberalism is not Christianity at all**” (p. 43).

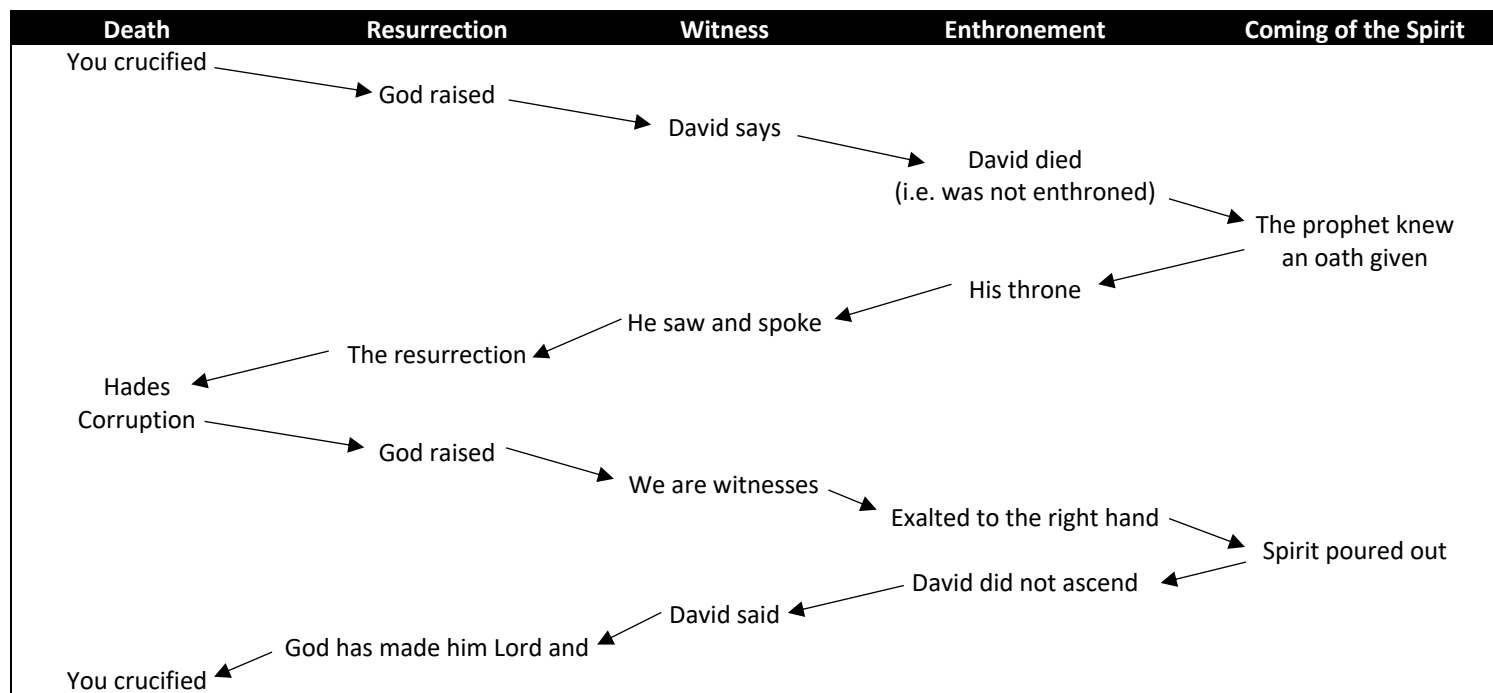
## Always Look on the Bright Side?

Today, we are going to see the sharp contrast between this modernist Christianity which so often passes for conservative bible-believing Christianity, and what took place on that first Christian Pentecost. Strictly speaking, our passage will be **Acts 2:22-36**. This is **the formal part of the first Christian sermon** ever preached—by Peter. However, Peter’s introduction, “**Men of Israel, listen to these words**” has an inclusio in **vs. 37**, “**Now when they heard this...**” And when you extend their reaction out to the end, you have a parallel with vs. 21 and the word “**call.**” “**Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved**” (**21**) and “**even as many as the Lord our God shall call**” (**39**).

- A** (21) And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall **call** on the name of the Lord shall be saved.
- B** 22 **“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—**
- C** 23 this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, **you nailed to a cross** by the hands of godless men and **put Him to death.**
- D** [*Jesus glorified and vindicated:*] 24 **“And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.**
- E** [*OT quote from David:*] 25 **“For David says** of Him, ‘I WAS ALWAYS BEHOLDING THE LORD IN MY PRESENCE; **FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND**, THAT I MAY NOT BE SHAKEN. 26 **‘THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED; MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL ABIDE IN HOPE; 27 BECAUSE THOU WILT NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW THY HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY. 28 ‘THOU HAST MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE; THOU WILT MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH THY PRESENCE.’ 29 “Brethren, I may **confidently say to you****
- F** regarding the patriarch **David** that he ***both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.***
- G** 30 **“And so, because he was a prophet,**
- H** and knew that **GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH**
- I** **TO SEAT** one OF HIS DESCENDANTS **UPON HIS THRONE,**
- J** 31 he **looked ahead and spoke**
- K** of the **resurrection**
- L** of the **Christ,**
- M** that **HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES,**
- M’** **NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY.**
- L’** 32 **“This Jesus**
- K’** God **raised up** again,
- J’** to which we are all **witnesses.**
- I’** 33 **“Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God,**
- H’** and having received from the Father **the promise** of the Holy Spirit,
- G’** **He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.**
- F’** 34 **“For *it was not / David / who ascended into heaven,***
- E’** [*OT quote from David:*] **but he himself says: ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, “SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, 35 UNTIL I MAKE THINE ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR THY FEET.”’ 36 “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain**
- D’** that **God has made Him both Lord and Christ—**
- C’** this Jesus **whom you crucified.”**
- B’** 37 Now **when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart,** and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brothers, what shall we do? (38) Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in **the name of Jesus** Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.
- A’** (39) For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall **call.** 40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> **L. J. Hooge**, [“Acts 2:22-36 – Peter Preaches Jesus’s Resurrection at Pentecost,”](#) *Biblical Chiasmus* (Nov 13, 2011). I’ve added the “A/A” lines from the chiasm at biblical chiasm exchange. Hooge is getting it from **Kenneth E. Bailey**, *Poet and Peasant* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 65-66.

Peter had more to say than this three minute sermon as we have it here. But Luke is, of course, writing history not a homiletics book. Whether Luke or Peter or both, it is a **brilliantly crafted** sermon, with matching pairs going all the way to the formal center of Jesus not being abandoned to Hades and his flesh not seeing corruption, a quote from **Psalm 16:10**. But the genius of the speech is double what a chiastic picture can show. For it actually unfolds on itself *twice* as it dances between five subjects back and forth between them.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Chart duplicated from Bailey, 67.

What Peter does in this sermon shows you **the way forward**, or backward as it were, to figuring out again the incredible power of God that only goes missing because **the church fails to proclaim** the only message capable of changing the world. He takes **five basic doctrines**, all dealing with historical verifiable facts witnessed by these very hearers—for he is in Jerusalem after all and these things were only fifty days earlier when he preached to them. Each of these doctrines is mocked or ignored or pushed aside for more “important” things in too much of the church and the sermons out there in our day. But they are vital. They are essential. They are at the creedal level. In fact, they are the basis of our creeds. They are the core of everything that it means to be a Christian. And it’s no wonder that it elicited such a question from the crowds, “**Brothers, what shall we do?**” (37). The five are Christ’s **death**, **resurrection**, the **witnesses** to it, Christ’s **enthronement**, and the coming of the **Holy Spirit** that they are now witnessing. Let’s turn to them.

## Gospel as the Only Hope

He addresses the crowds. “**Men of Israel, hear these words**” (Acts 2:22). He’s in Jerusalem. There are many visitors present. But he addresses the **men of Israel**. It’s interesting to me

that he does this, because even though that is who he addresses, it is everyone present who will wonder in the end what they should do. But for now, he goes after these men. Why?

Because he's going to start talking about what has happened. This is **the foundation** of all Christian proclamation. If you do not have this, then whatever else you may call yourself, you can't call yourself Christian. All preaching of our faith is rooted in real, actual, history. It isn't a fable. It isn't a fairytale. It isn't even a myth—though myths do have basis in history. It is history.

**“Jesus of Nazareth.”** This is the person Luke wrote an entire Gospel about, so that you who were not there would know exactly who and what this sermon is going to address. It's all been leading us to this moment. That little baby born in a manger to Mary and Joseph, who grew up in Nazareth, a city just a few miles to the west of the Sea of Galilee, **he is the object** of the words of this sermon. For all of these strange signs and prophecies and tongues they are seeing at the moment have their origin in him.

Peter says that he was **“a man attested to you by God.”** In other words, you knew him. You followed him. You

watched him. You talked to him. You knew his family. His mother and brothers are right here in our midst as I'm speaking to you (**Acts 1:14**). This makes you **witnesses** to before the very court of heaven that what I'm about to tell you is the truth. That's powerful and it's something today's church has lost. How many who preach or who sit and listen to preaching really even believe it happened anymore? How can you, unless someone tells you?

But it's more. God attested to them who this Jesus was “**with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.**” This links the **present wonders and signs** back to Jesus and his ministry. All they are seeing on this Pentecost day is but the continuation of the ministry that he began. They probably all knew someone who had been healed by him, someone who he had rebuked, someone who he had taught. Some of them may have even been among those.

“**This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God...**” (**Acts 2:23**). Peter wants them to know that **nothing** they have witnessed is an **accident**. Indeed, nothing with God ever is. All the things he is about to tell them were Gods plan. He couldn't use stronger

language. It's strange to me that people talk about this kind of language as being "Calvinistic." No, it's Petrine. Peter lived 1,500 years before Calvin.

A word about "foreknowledge" here. It is placed in conjunction with the definite plan. The word in Greek is *prognōskō*. It is made up of two words: *pro-* (before) and *gignōskein* (from PIE *gno-*; "to know"). One might think that this is simply looking into the future, but beware the butterfly fallacy. What's that? A butterfly is a compound word, but it isn't talking about a stick of butter that flies.

The word has a deep OT heritage. "To know" (*yada*) means to set your love upon someone. Even the English cognate for knowledge could refer to "sexual intercourse." In other words, it is intimate love for someone. It is not looking into the future. That isn't what the word means. You can hear how it was used in the LXX. "*Yea, what things thou didst determine were ready at hand, and said, Lo, we are here: for all thy ways are prepared, and thy judgments are in thy foreknowledge*" (Judith 9:6). The decree and foreknowledge go hand in hand. But how? God decreed what he set his love upon. That is, it pleased God to send Jesus to us. But more, for look at what Peter says next.



“... You crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23). It wasn't just that God predestined *to send* Jesus. It's that *the crucifixion was predestined* by his definite plan, because it pleased God to do it. There's **two vital points** here. The first is about **God's will in suffering**. Whatever suffering you are going through, it cannot compare to Jesus'. I don't say that to minimize your suffering, but to show you that God enters into our suffering by not withholding his only begotten Son from it! God does not sit aloof outside of time and space like some clockmaker who set things in motion and then just watches it. He enters into our condition and does not spare himself. It pleased God to do this, because of his great love for us. “**God so loved the world,**” John tells us. This is his foreknowledge, his setting of love upon. For Jesus' death and suffering had a purpose, as you will see soon enough.

Second, **God is not the responsible or culpable cause** of Jesus' death. Even though he planned it and it pleased him to do it, God was not the agent that carried out the crimes. Rather, lawless men did. So, somehow, we have two things happening simultaneously. **God predestines and lawless men carry it out**. Both are true.

Some people want to get out of this dilemma, because their rationalistic minds can't handle the paradox. There are two opposite ways this occurs. Some say things like, **God only predestined what he looked into the future to see** what people would do. But not only does that make no sense, for if he saw that they were going to do it, why would he need to predestine it, but that isn't the meaning of "foreknowledge," as we have seen. Their goal here is to essentially say that God did not plan to do it, since evil men carried out the plot, or if he did, he was only working with what we gave him. But while I think they often mean well, this ends up **doing great harm** to the deity, for in its attempt to deny predestination, it both denies the words on the page that this was his definite plan, and makes it so that God is only a reactor, he's just doing the best with what we give him. That isn't the God of the Bible.

Others, however, want to **deny that wicked men did anything** of their own free volition. The first view puts human freewill above the sovereignty of God. This view, strangely, presupposes the very same wrongheaded definition of freewill and then they turn around and say that men don't actually do anything freely at all. Freewill, rightly defined,

is not the ability to do anything, but the ability to act according to your nature. No one, not even God has the first ability (God does not have the ability to sin for example). All morally responsible agents have the second. And so that's what they did. They freely chose to sin, because that was their nature. And amazingly, that's precisely why God predestined the cross, so that he might overcome our sin nature and save us from it! **If he doesn't do that, sin is never conquered.**

It seems to me that at some level both are a confusion of the creature with the Creator. For what these people do not seem to understand is that God is not man. God has one purpose for a thing and it is good. We have another purpose for the same thing and it is evil. This is exactly what Joseph told his brothers. **“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today”** (**Gen 50:20**). There is **no problem here**, rightly understood, because there are two agents involved. But it sure is one of those doctrines that a lot of people have a problem with. Would that they only understood why God did this to his Son and then grasped that they did it for them!

We must continue on. Although Peter gives the entire crowd a body slam, telling them that they crucified and killed Jesus through the agents of men like Herod and Pilate, Peter does not leave them here. Although, he will return to it!

“God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it” (Acts 2:24). This is the great proclamation of our faith, and it took Peter all of two verses to get there! *You put him to death, but God raised him up.* Down. Up. He’s no longer dead. Death has no hold on him. Why? Because it was not possible for him to be held by it? Why?

He isn’t guessing. He turns to the OT Scripture to tell them. He quotes Psalm 16:8-11. “For David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me.’” In the Hebrew, the “Lord” here is Yahweh. “... for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.”

At first glance, this doesn't seem like a very good argument for the resurrection. After all, David is the Psalmist and he seems to be speaking about God not abandoning *his* soul to Hades-Sheol or letting *him* see corruption. But Peter knows someone will think this. So he gives the interpretation. “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day” (Acts 2:29). He tells them the obvious. All you need do is walk over to the tomb of David and see that he died and was buried and that you stand there at the foot of that tomb with a body still in it. Therefore, if Scripture is true, and God cannot lie, David cannot have been talking about himself. The argument is sound.

So he continues, “Being therefore a prophet...” (30a). That David was a prophet was happily admitted by the Jews. B. Sukkah 52a, bar. claims that David already prophesied the Messiah's eternal life from Psalm 2:7-8.<sup>5</sup> Peter continues with the prophecy, “... and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did

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<sup>5</sup> See Keener, 1:945. See also 11Q5 XXVII, 11; Philo, *Agriculture* 50.

his flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:2:30b-31). Importantly, even here a later Midrash on this Psalm would say, “My glory rejoices over the Lord Messiah, who will rise from me,” that is, from David (*Midrash tehillim* on Ps. 16:9).<sup>6</sup> So even they saw Messianic prophecies here in this passage. Peter isn’t telling them anything they don’t already have speculations about.

But his logic is impeccable. David had been given a covenant promise by God that one of his descendants would sit on his throne. He may be thinking of Psalm 131:11 (132:11 LXX) here. “The LORD swore truth to David and will not revoke it, ‘I shall place [someone] from the fruit of your body on your throne.’” But, David began to prophecy about this person that he would live forever.

This is found in two senses. The first is his soul. The second is his body. The soul is made explicit in the psalm. In the Psalm quotation when it says, “You will not abandon my soul to Sheol.” Hades (what we translate as “hell”) is Sheol. Same thing. It’s the place of the dead where everyone went in the OT. To not be abandoned there means that he went there. Why would he go there? Because Jesus died and

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<sup>6</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 65.



everyone went there when they died. Some say there is no statement that Jesus descended into hell. This Psalm and quote from it bury that in its skeptical tomb. Of course he did. But it was not the part of Sheol that was punishment. Believers in Christ didn't go to that part in the OT. **They went to Paradise.** The promise here is that his soul would not be *abandoned* to this place. To be abandoned in a place means that you *were* in it. And now he is not.

The flesh is made explicit in Peter's explanation. "**Nor did his flesh see corruption.**" Jesus did not go to Hades *in the flesh*. Rather, **his flesh stayed in the tomb.** But that flesh was not allowed to perish and turn into a skeleton. Instead, it was transformed in the twinkling of an eye to a resurrected body that would never decay or rot away. So, Peter is explaining the two senses in which Jesus was raised, which is what he says next—his full Person: body and soul.

**"This Jesus God raised up"** (**Acts 2:32**). Peter speaks now of **the resurrection** of Jesus Christ. He was crucified. He died. He went to Hades. He was raised up. If that sounds like the creeds, that's because it is. The creeds didn't make it up. They got it from the very first sermon ever preached. Jesus is not dead. Jesus is alive.



But how can we be sure? He says, “Of that we are all witnesses” (32b). He isn’t talking about everyone present hearing his sermon that were witnesses. But he is talking about at least the 120 that were in that upper room upon whom the Spirit fell. They all saw Jesus alive after his crucifixion. This is unheard of in history, for a man to raise himself from the dead and then to appear to so many people. It is so unheard of that skeptics think the story must be faked. But how do you fake something that public? Others think they were seeing an hallucination. But there is no such thing as mass hallucination where everyone sees the same fake thing. And think again about how bold Peter has suddenly become. He is an utterly changed man. That doesn’t happen because you are trying to pull a fast one on the world. Besides, as we will soon see, he had nothing to gain, worldly speaking, from telling them this. All it would lead to is imprisonment and ultimately his own death. Though many people die because of a lie they believe, *no one dies for knowingly* for a lie, let alone so many millions that have been martyred over the centuries. They are not deceiving anyone. They all saw him and now his power has come upon them and the huge crowd at the temple is seeing one of the great

miracles in human history unfold before their eyes. So, Peter is telling them why.

But he's not finished. The resurrection is not the end of the story. "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God..." (Acts 2:33a). This refers to the ascension that they all saw happen just days or even hours earlier on the Mt. of Olives when Jesus was taken up into a cloud before their eyes and the angels came and told them to stop staring into the heavenly temple, but to go back and await the promise. The ascension is the most neglected of all the aspects of Christ's First Coming and that's a shame, because it may be the most important. It is proof to the world that Jesus now has all authority in heaven and on earth to do whatever he wants as the God-man. He has won that right through his perfect life, sacrificial death, and vindicated resurrection.

The right hand of God is an expression you find throughout the OT of the military commander of the armies of heaven. It has always referred to Jesus, but back then it was in his preincarnate form as the Angel of the LORD. Now, Jesus has taken this seat of power back, but as one of us—*Theanthropos*—God-Man.

Meanwhile, on earth, “having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing” (33b). Jesus had told them that precisely this was coming and now it was upon them all. Some were receiving the Spirit and others were being told about what they were seeing unfold before their eyes. But this receiving is tied to Jesus’ exaltation, for it is in Jesus’ *ascending* into heaven that his Spirit could then *descend* to earth and fill the disciples. Jesus had told them, “If I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7).

Peter seems to change the subject by returning to David. “For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool”’” (34). You can hear that the *ascension* is still on Peter’s breath, but he *returns to David*. Why? It’s part of the brilliant structure of his sermon. He’s just quoted David, so now he returns to David to bookend the explanation of what is happening, saturating it all in the prophetic Scriptures. We are sure of what we believe because prophecy was fulfilled.

He quotes what will become perhaps the most quoted of all OT texts: [Psalm 110](#). We find it quoted or alluded to twice in Matthew, three times in Mark, twice in Luke, here in Acts, once in Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians, and six times in Hebrews (well, actually more if you count the Melchizedek references). It's a fascinating verse that talks about what the Rabbis referred to as Two-Powers in heaven.

The verse has [two Lords](#) in it. *The Lord said to my Lord*. In Greek, this is one word (Kurios), but in Hebrew it is two words: [Yahweh](#) and [Adonai](#). David is the speaker. David says that he has a lord (the second—Adonai) and that this second Lord, his direct Lord, is spoken to by the Lord (Yahweh). What we have then is David, the highest man in all the world—king of Israel, himself recognizing that [he has two Lords, not one](#). In NT terms, this is the Father and the Son. In OT terms, it is Yahweh and Adonai or God and the Angel of the LORD or simply, God and God. One God, but more than one person.

The Father is swearing to David's Lord, "*Sit at my right hand*." This refers to the [seat of power](#) to which Jesus will ascend after his resurrection, and so therefore the verse is

predicting the ascension and implies the resurrection! The Father is beckoning the Son to come back to heaven, the place which he left to descend here to become one of us in the womb of the Virgin. And the point is that he will stay at the right hand of all power “**until I make your enemies your footstool.**” Jesus will have all power until every last foe is defeated, the last of which is Death itself.

I can't help but already tell you that this is the most relevant of all things I could ever proclaim to you, because in a day when all is madness, when the world seems upside down because of treachery and treason, because of plots to kill all of humanity and the taking and killing of our children for unspeakable purposes, all of which are now being exposed to an ever awakening public, **just as** all seems hopeless and lost, **Jesus is King.** Jesus rules. Now. In the midst of it all.

One should go back to the predestining language from earlier in the sermon, because nothing happens apart from God's will. Yes, men have evil in mind, but God's purposes are always for the good, for his glory, for salvation, for righteousness, for vindication, for grace, for redemption, for judgment, for the proving to the world that he alone is worthy of all worship. Even what's happening now. And Jesus

being king, now, is proof. He is allowing evil to continue, but for his own good purposes, which may very well be **for the saving of one of you** this very hour, and certainly is for the sanctifying of all who hear this word today.

That's really the climax of the sermon, but Peter is not quite finished. He concludes by returning to the beginning. **“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ”** (36). This is what I've just proclaimed to you. I've done it because that's what Peter proclaimed to them. Everyone must now know, across the globe, of what God has done in Christ. The world must hear this message. And nothing has changed regarding this truth from Peter's day until our own. Israel must know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Messiah. Gentiles must know. **You must know**. It is what it is and no amount of unbelief or skepticism can ever change what reality is.

But his last words are brutal. **“This Jesus whom you crucified.”** Wait a minute. I thought he was killed by the hands of *lawless men*. I can hear someone says, **“I wasn't even here. I just got into town. What do you mean that I crucified him? How offensive. We need to force you to take a DEI class,**

Peter, until you get your head on straight.” Yet, this is the key to it all.

Why did Jesus die? I’m not speaking about God’s glory here, that’s certainly the ultimate reason. But more practically for you, **why did he die?** He died as a sin-substitute, a sacrifice that would appease God’s wrath. Against what? Against merely the sin of putting him to death? No. But against sin. How much sin? All sin. Everywhere. Don’t confuse this with God being reconciled to his elect. That’s the subjective death of Jesus which is only for those who believe, and those who believe are his elect.

I’m speaking *objectively* here. I’m talking about what does Christ’s death do as it regards the legal consequences of sin. That is, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Jesus’ death must be able to atone for all sin, not just certain sins. Little sins or big sins. Intentional sins or unintentional sins. Sins of commission and sins of omission—that is not doing what we are supposed to do. Sins at the beginning of a life and the last sin you will ever commit in it. If even one sin is not covered, then all hope is lost.

Since you are a sinner, and since Jesus died for sin, this means that **Jesus died because of your sins**. And this means



that you put Jesus to death by your sins. Peter doesn't exclude anyone in the death of Christ. He doesn't look out and say, "You didn't put him to death." People these days talk much about how racist it is to blame the Jews for Jesus' death. Hogwash. They were guilty. But so were Romans. And so were other Gentiles. We all are guilty for putting the Lord to death. Not just Herod and Pilate, but also the crowds. Not just Judas, but also Peter. Not just Jews, but also Gentiles. Not just Cain, but also Abel. Not just you, but also me. As the old song says,

*Who was the guilty? who brought this upon thee?  
Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee.  
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee:  
I crucified thee.*

That's how the first sermon cut to the heart and cut to the quick. And **it's what's lacking in so much modern preaching today**. We no longer talk about this Gospel, because we don't want to admit that we are the ones who put Jesus to death. That's not very seeker friendly. You don't go to a rock concert to be blasted by the singer's politics. And

since church has become mostly a concert these days, who wants to go to church to hear that? So most American Christians busy themselves with any-thing but this message that alone has the power to transform.

But **look at what happened** and believe in the power of God. So few today actually believe that if they told people this that there would actually be any kind of response other than laughter or skepticism or anger or outrage. But not here. How did the people take Peter's words?

“Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (37). They got it. They **heard** the message **and were undone**. Peter had proven to them that all he was saying was true and God was attesting to its power before their very eyes and ears as they each heard him say it in their own tongues! How incredible.

They ask the right question. And what is Peter's response? “Go be better people?” No. “Go say 100 Hail Marys?” No. “You must have your good works outweigh your bad works?” No. “Go live on a mountain-top and do yoga and eat oatmeal?” No. He said the only thing that can be said when there is no hope.

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins” (38). Repentance means “turning.” It is a double turning. It is turning *from* sin and turning *to* God. It is going one direction, stopping, and going the opposite direction. That direction is into the merciful arms of a loving God who would send Jesus to do this for you.

Baptism in Acts will have different nuances of meaning. Here, it refers to water baptism. Notice, he doesn’t tell them to wait until they reach the age of accountability. He doesn’t tell them they have to be able to pass a theology exam first. If they believe, they are to be baptized. Baptism is a symbol of repentance and a symbol of the grace that God gives when he calls a person to himself. It is a sacrament that God has made you clean and given you the right to enter into his NT temple as his priest.

The calling comes in the next verse. “For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (39). We will deal with this much more next time, but here it is

enough to say that the point is that **the Gospel is not exclusive**. It's not like its only for some and not for others. It is for everyone, everywhere.

However, there **is a condition**. That condition is **the call of God**. There's a play here on **vs. 21** and the prophecy with Joel. Joel said, "**Whosoever shall call on the Name of the Lord shall be saved.**" Now, *whoever the Lord calls* shall be saved. This is **a relationship** that is being discussed. God calls you now, **through the Gospel** to obey him; now, to repent and be baptized. He genuinely offers this to all of you, never blame him if you don't heed that call. But there is **an internal call** that comes from him that is like the call of Lazarus who was dead when Jesus said, "Lazarus, come out" of the tomb. This call is so powerful that one cannot resist it forever. Is God speaking to your heart now? Are you listening to his voice? Hear in this good news all he has done for you, come to life by the power of the call, repent, and be baptized. By the power of God, forgiveness it that simple.

**Two more points are made**. The first is that they would **receive the gift of the Holy Ghost**. This is something we will see more in Acts. It is not referring, in my opinion, to salva-

tion, for if you repent, then you are already saved. Repentance is the first fruit of salvation. Rather, it is referring to the special outpouring of the Spirit there *on the day of Pentecost*. If you believe, God has given you his Holy Spirit, even if you don't speak in a language where everyone understands you in their own head. But this was a special day to prove God's power to the newly birthed church.

And we read that 3,000 that day were saved and baptized and added to their number (41). “And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation” (40).

Who wants to go to church to hear a message like this? **I do.** I need to be reminded of it every day. That Jesus would do that for me given what I've done to him? I strongly believe that until Jesus returns, there is one hope in this world that will transform on the level of the very nature of a human being. God's been doing it for 2,000 years and he will until Christ returns. If we are faithful to proclaim his Gospel and believe in the power of God for salvation. That is our job as the church. To carry this Christian Message to any who will hear.

This isn't creating a religion in our own image. This isn't turning God into something we want him to be. And it isn't looking only at one attribute. But it is looking on [the bright side](#), in in the sense that Philip Bliss sang of it.

*Guilty, vile, and helpless we;  
Spotless Lamb of God was He;  
"Full atonement!" can it be?  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

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