

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

The Church Alive – An Awakening (Part 3b) **Acts 2:22-36**

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 — 23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 But 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."

It is told of Leonardo da Vinci, that, when he was about to depict the face of Christ in his fresco of the Last Supper, he prepared himself by prayer and meditation. Yet when he raised his brush to give expression to his devout thoughts, his hand trembled. Who is this who causes the hand of the painter to tremble, who causes the poet to grasp for right words, who causes the even the wisest of men to confess he knows so little, who makes even the simple to be wise? Who is this who, having spent all eternity in the glorious, pristine and blissful presence of the Godhead in heaven, belittled Himself, taking on the finite form of humanity to walk the dusty and difficult roads of life? Who is this, who although the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth itself, allowed Himself to be captured and cruelly crucified upon that cross of wood? And who is this who, after His enemies thought they had won, seeing Him buried in a tomb, yet rose again on the third day, never to die again and who gloriously ascended into heaven where He now sits at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven? You know who this is! His name is Jesus! And there is none like Him! With whom would you compare Him? As the hymn writer penned,

***No mortal can with Him compare
Among the sons of men,
Fairer is He than all the fair
That fill the heavenly train.***

Oh for a refreshed, revived and renewed vision of our glorious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Most of you are familiar with A.W. Tozer's statement: *"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."* I think we can be even more specific and say that what comes into our minds when we think about Jesus is the most important thing about us. What thoughts of Jesus do you entertain? Do you dwell on Jesus? Do you know Him, I mean really know Him; in the depth of His character, in His manifestations of grace and love, and in His revealing the wonder of God? Do you strive to have the highest thoughts of Jesus? Or are you content with the lowest of thoughts? Do you think about Jesus enough? Do you think about Jesus at all? For what comes into our minds when we think about Jesus is the most important thing about us.

It is not too much of a stretch to say to you that Peter was both entertaining and communicating the highest thoughts concerning the Person and work of Jesus Christ in the first sermon preached in the newly inaugurated church. And what was the theme of Peter's sermon? Of course we would say the theme is Jesus! But let remind you that as Peter began this sermon, it started as a defense concerning the extraordinary events that were taking place in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Some 120 disciples were filling the temple area, having been filled with the Holy Spirit and were speaking of the mighty deeds of God through Jesus Christ in the native languages of all the Jews there who had gathered from every corner of the world.

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Some of the Jews challenged the source of these extraordinary events, relegating them the effects of being drunk. And so, Peter, taking his stand, reminds the Jews that the proclamations of God's mighty deeds were not the effects of alcohol, but was the effect of the promised coming of the Spirit of God, who would cause the people to prophesize, or speak forth the message of God. And in quoting from Joel 2, Peter reminded these Jews that to reject the message being proclaimed only ends in devastating judgment. This was the theme of Acts 2:14-21.

Then, as we began last week, we see Peter turning to answer the most important question that could be asked as he begins to unfold for this crowd of some 100,000 people exactly who Jesus is. Peter wants these people to know Jesus, to know the power of His resurrection, and to know the bliss of salvation in His name. And so, beginning with His life on earth in verse 22, Peter moves to speak of His death on the cross in verse 23, His resurrection from the dead in verses 24-32 and finally His exaltation into heaven in verses 33-36.

I. Christ's Life on the Earth (2:22)

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...

If you are seeking to outline verses 22-36, then point number one is "Christ Life on the earth" (2:22). I know we looked at this last week, but I desire to be purposely repetitive. Just as the Jews needed to know who Jesus was, we too need to know the answer to the question, "who is Jesus?" The point here was that the people had ample evidence and testimony to know what kind of extraordinary life Jesus lived on this earth, a life filled with miracles, wonders, and signs that all revealed the truth that Jesus was both Messiah and God come in the flesh. We are reminded that by the testimony of the Word of God, we have ample evidenced to believe that Jesus is who He says He is, the Son of God. What Peter says in verse 22, is summarized well by the apostle John in his Gospel, John 20:30-31 declares:

30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

Peter wants this audience to know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing they may have life in His name. The life of Jesus pointed to the reality of this truth. Do you stand in awe and wonder of all that Jesus did while He walked this earth? Do you think about it? For what comes into our minds when we think about Jesus is the most important thing about us. Refresh yourself; reacquaint yourself with the life and works of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels. Know who Jesus is.

And one final reminder before we move on to our second point. We noted that most of the crowd that heard Peter's sermon did not respond positively. We will learn that of some 100,000 people, only three thousand responded. And we noted Jesus' words from John 15:24-25, that most people will respond to the works and wonders of Jesus not with enthusiastic awe, but rather with enraged anger. Jesus said that those who reject Him actually hate Him without cause. This word hatred used by Jesus in John 15:25 simply means to make anyone or anything a priority over someone or something else. So, in comparison to my love for Jesus, for my devotion to Jesus, and for my commitment to Jesus, the world may look up that and think that in comparison, because I have made Jesus my priority, that I hate my wife and hate my children.

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Sometimes I think we get our testimony to the world messed up. We tend to think that if the world looks upon us and says, "Wow, look at how much he loves his wife, and loves his kids and is so devoted to being an exemplary worker," that this is a great Christian testimony. Beloved, there are non-Christians of whom these things can be said. But now hear the great paradox. The great Christian testimony ought to be, "Wow, look at how much he loves Jesus. He is always talking about Jesus. Jesus is truly first in his life, in fact so much so, it would seem that he hates his wife and children...And yet...even with this intense devotion to Jesus, he fully demonstrates love to his wife and children and shows such commitment to being a faithful worker." This is the grand Christian testimony; the life that fully puts Jesus first and from that fully exemplifies that love of Christ toward others.

The men of Israel had not put God first, they loved their understanding of the law, or they loved their patriotism, or they loved their own unbiblical visions of what Messiah ought to be. Therefore, when Jesus came and did everything as predicted by prophecy, they did not see it; they did not understand the life of Christ on earth, which would lead them to do the most heinous crime ever committed and leads us to our second point.

II. Christ Death (2:23)

23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

So, after calling attention to Christ' life on earth, Peter next moves to pointing out Christ's death on the cross. We read [read text].

Peter says, **"this Man"** in reference to Jesus, and then uses the verb, a word of action, as an adjective; to described **"this Man"** – who is this man? He is the one **"delivered"**. The word **"delivered"** is a military term that spoke of those who have surrendered to or been captured by the enemy. The Greek, *ekdotos*, means to be given up, or delivered up (to enemies, or to the power or will of someone). The question is, who gave Jesus up? The Jews to the Romans; or God to fallen humanity? It is interesting to note that in the case of Jesus, those who should have been His protectors, those who should have been the first to die for Him, those who should have hated the idea of seeing a Jew in the hands of the Romans; these Israelites handed Him over, delivered as a captive, the Lord of Life, into the hands of **"godless"** or "lawless" men; men who did not know God's law or God's ways. This is a reference to the Romans who put Christ to death. While the Jewish leaders had employed the Romans to put Christ to death for them, they were still seen as the root cause for His death. It was the Jewish leaders who plotted, arrested, and demanded the death of Jesus and were therefore just as guilty for having put Christ to death as were the Romans who physically carried it out. Can you imagine the intensity of Peter's words when he said in piercing fashion, **"You nailed to a cross"** this Man attested to you, approved to you, confirmed to you by many infallible proofs, by God Himself to be the very promised Coming One that you [Israel] had been longing for.

But notice that neither the Jews or the Romans were all who were involved in this horrific death. For everything that was done, was done under the watchful eye of God. We are told that everything the Jews and the Romans did was all part of God's predetermined, preordained, pre-established, previously planned purpose. Do not think for a moment that had God wanted, He could have stopped the actions of these Jewish and Roman leaders. And yet He allowed them to do what they did; to do what they wanted to do – and all of this was thought out and planned for in eternity past. For because of God's predetermined plan and foreknowledge, because He both plans out and therefore knows their sinful nature, their own sin will simply accomplished the goals and objectives of God's eternal plan.

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These things were no accidents but were rather just how God determined them to come to pass. Yet in all this neither the Jews or the Romans were absolved of their sin of putting Christ to death – they hated Him and all that He stood for. God does indeed determine all things whatsoever will come to pass for He knows all and plans all; yet in His wisdom and wonder, He does not coerce people to do anything that they do not already want to do. The Jews and the Romans wanted to put Jesus to death, truly out of their hatred for **"this man."** And it can be rightly said that God wanted to put Jesus to death truly out of His love for all men. Without their realizing it, these men who put Jesus to death were actually accomplishing the will of God.

I know these are "difficult" concepts to accept, but the truth of Scripture, seen even here in our text, is clear, God predetermines not only good actions that are freely performed by Christians, things like repentance, belief, and seeking the will of God, but He also predetermines evil actions that are freely performed by the wicked. Every free action of man is also predestined by God. And so every free action of a person is committed because that person wants to do it. The Jews and the Romans wanted Jesus dead in order to have salvation from God's presence. But as we have said, God the Father also wanted Jesus dead for another reason, to provide salvation from God's wrath against sin. In another sermon, Peter states the same thing. We read of it in over in Acts 4:25-28 -

25 who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS? 26 'THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.' 27 "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

So we have seen in both our text in Acts 2 and others, that hatred of God can be anything or anyone we make more important than God and that God's purposes are never thwarted by man's hatred of Him.

We might ask ourselves, "Why did Peter include these words, ***'this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death,'*** in his sermon?" I say to you that Peter was seeking to convince the Jews that Jesus was not delivered up because of any weakness on His part. Nor was Jesus unable to rescue Himself. As God, Jesus could have stopped the events at any time, but for our sakes, for our benefit; for our salvation, so that we might have forgiveness of sin and the hope of eternal life, He chose not to.

Why would some not respond in faith and surrender to such a gracious One as this? Hatred – hatred; there is something or someone more important to you than God. It may be yourself; it may be another person; it may be materialism or power; but know this, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus as Lord. I beg of you and plead with you, bow down now in love and gratitude for so great a Savior as Jesus; for later may be too late and rather than sweet surrender, you will bow to Jesus as the just Judge who pushes you for your having hated Him. Ask God for a heart that loves Him and knows Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.

I know that I always run the risk of belaboring the points of any given text. In two weeks we have looked at just two verses of Scripture, covering just two points of Peter's sermon. But let me remind you that what we have of Peter's sermon would appear to be only a synopsis, just a detailed outline at best of what he preached to the people. When we seek to unfold the meaning

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of Christ's life on the earth and Christ's death on the cross, we know that Peter is referring back to the events that he witnessed and are recorded for us in the Gospel accounts. We are not reading these things into the text but rather are allowing the text to guide our hearts and minds to remember and reflect back upon the life and death of Christ. Sometimes we are in such a hurry to get to the end of something, that we end up getting nothing of lasting value. Peter is answering the question, "Who is Jesus?" He is the one attested to by God and He is the one that we helped nail to the cross. Would you entertain high thoughts about Jesus? Would you know more and more about Jesus? Would you desire to know Him and the power of His resurrection to a deeper extent than yesterday? Then meditate on His life, His miracles, His wonders, His signs... Then meditate on His death, a death you deserved, and still deserve; a death that promises freedom from sin's penalty (God's eternal wrath), from sin's power (God's enabling grace), and one day even from sin's presence (God's presence).

Our greatest need is to come to know more deeply the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who is Jesus? He is the One in whom all the glories of the old covenant under the Mosaic law fade into utter insignificance. In the life and death of Jesus, the superiority of Christianity over Judaism and all other religions is revealed. To whom will you liken Jesus? Hold before Him any person or any thing and they all fade away. The extraordinary figures of history like the glories of Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration fade from view as Jesus was transfigured in an infinitely greater glory.

Who is Jesus? Put all the prophets, all the angels, the great men of the Bible like Moses, Joshua, the Levitical priesthood, the patriarchs, and the like and each one is utterly washed out in light of the glory of Jesus Christ alone. There is no one to compare with Christ. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews gives seven wondrous glories of Jesus in the opening verses of chapter one. Turn with me to Hebrews 1 and let us see Jesus even as men like Peter and the author of Hebrews saw Jesus.

First, Jesus is the very Son of God; the One of the very order of God. What is more gloriously wonderful than that? Three times we are told in the Gospels of God the Father breaking through all time and space to utter with words, "This is My beloved Son." The Father never said such a thing to any angel. It is through the living Son that God, sent from God the Father who has spoken to us.

In Hebrews 1:2, Jesus Christ is called the **"appointed heir of all things"**. This is a testimony of His "dignity and dominion." By this title **"heir of all things"** Jesus is the possessor and disposer of all things in His creation, including you and me.

Who is Jesus? He is the Creator for it is Jesus **"through whom also [God] made the world"** (1:2). Only God can create. Christ is the **"appointed heir of all things"** from the beginning because He was the One who created it all. Paul said it this way in Colossians 1:16, **"All things were created by Him and for Him."**

Who is Jesus? In verse 3, He is the **"radiance"** of God's glory because He is God. In His character and ability, Jesus is in every way, equal to the Father. The **"radiance of His glory"** pictures for us the Shekinah glory of God that engulfed the tabernacle and the temple (Exodus 40:34-38; 1 Kings 8:10). Whatever greatness, whatever splendor, whatever majesty is in the Father, the same is found in the Son, and that in the most transparent manner. Jesus Christ is the visible, physical manifestation of God's glory. And may I remind you that apart from Christ, sinful man could not perceive the wonder of God's glory. Apart from Jesus, we grope in the dark and are without understanding of the glorious nature of God. Who is Jesus? He is the manifestation, the revelation, and the realization of who God really is (John 17:5).

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Looking further at Hebrews 1:3, we find that Jesus is the **"exact representation"** of all that God is in His being. The **"exact representation"** pictures something engraved, like the stamp on a coin that is minted. Jesus being perfect God in the flesh, perfectly expresses the nature of God. Who is Jesus? He is "is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 2:9); and Jesus is the One who has explained or made the Father known (John 1:18). In Jesus the Invisible became visible. If you want to know what God is like, then gaze intently at Jesus. For when you really see Jesus, you really see the glory of God.

Next in verse 3, we find that Jesus is the Sustainer, for He, **"upholds all things by the word of His power."** This is the divine work of providence and sovereignty. The Greek word **"uphold"** means "to carry or support." Everything we see, everything we depend upon, everything around us, including ourselves, owes its existence to the upholding, sustaining power of Jesus. The Lord Jesus, **"by the word of His power,"** sustains the universe and maintains its coherence in all its parts.

Who is Jesus? He is the one who alone **"made purification of sins"** according to verse 3. Only God can rightly deal with our sins. While we marvel at His work as Creator and Sustainer, this is yet an even greater work, to have our sins atoned for; paid for, purged and eliminated. Notice this work is finished as Jesus **"made purification"** – the work was finished on the cross that Peter spoke about to the men of Israel in Acts 2.

Who is Jesus? He is the one prophet and priest who has **"sat down at the right hand of Majesty on high."** And the Father gave Him the name that is above every name. Jesus, sits in the place of highest honor in heaven. He sat down because His work of atonement was finished on the cross. The evidence that all the sins of the believer have been put away permanently is that Jesus is seated in glory. This is the position of the highest honor and glory and it belongs to Jesus Christ forever and ever. This is the greatest proof that He finished the work of redemption and "purification of sins." This is who Jesus is! Let us exalt Him in our hearts to the praise of His glory. This is who Jesus is! These are the thoughts we are to entertain! This is the life and death of Jesus that Peter exposed his audience to. Will this be the Jesus you expose yourself and others to as well? It is then that we draw with confidence upon Him to do a divine and supernatural work in and through us. Let us not be careless and guilty of having an a small view of Christ, let us entertain and then make known the wonder of Jesus is to the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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