

## CAN THE DEAD LIVE?

Acts 2:22-41

### INTRO

Last week we saw that there was both excitement and confusion stirred by the Spirit's coming at Pentecost. In our passage today, Peter takes advantage of this opportunity by preaching the first evangelistic sermon of the church. As we'll read, he pointed the spotlight away from the gift of the Spirit and to its Giver – the risen Christ.

[READ for now Acts 2:22-28; read the rest later]

This weekend at the breakfast table, Shepherd overheard Danielle and I talking about someone who had recently died. He jumped in on the conversation and asked, "Momma, can we ask God to raise that man again?" Danielle and I were speechless and teared up. Shepherd has wanted to read the stories of the crucifixion and resurrection lately in his children's Bible, so he knew God could do it. He had asked more than he knew.

All of us can relate – we are drawn to the idea of something dead coming back to life. Death isn't how things are supposed to be. Not just physical death, but dead hearts, dead situations. I invite you to think of something dead in your life – perhaps a loved one who is spiritually dead, a relationship that seems dead, a situation that seems like it will never change. Hold that in mind.

Jesus' final commission for the apostles was for them to be his witnesses, particularly witnesses to his resurrection (Acts 1:8, 22). In the wake of the coming of the Spirit, Peter shifts the spotlight to Jesus, zeroing in on his resurrection. What we see is the answer to this question: *can the dead live?*

Peter first narrates the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus as he answers the question, "Could Jesus Live?" Then we get to see the reaction of the crowds, as Peter answers, "Can We?".

### I. Can Jesus Live?

In vv. 22-32, Peter testifies to the reality of the resurrection. Why? Because if Jesus did not rise from the dead as he frequently predicted he would before his death, then he was not who he said he was. A dead Messiah is no Messiah. Christianity hinges on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Peter starts by narrating Jesus' life and ministry in v. 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—”

I love the simplicity – “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus had a hometown. In the person of Jesus, God literally dwelt among us.

And these people knew of him – “a man attested by mighty works, wonders, signs” – supernatural acts. But this was not enough. Some attributed Jesus’ miracles to Satanic activity or sorcery. The Jews needed something more to convince them that Jesus was God’s Son.<sup>1</sup>

(v 23) tells of his death. Notice the wording: “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.” – we see here the tension between God’s eternal plan and human plans. Why did Jesus have to die: was it God’s will or the peoples’? Both.

The “lawless men” refers to the Romans whom the Jews used to do their dirty work.<sup>2</sup> But it was all according to plan.

(v 24) tells of the resurrection. “God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”

Matthew Henry notes that “the same Father who delivered Jesus *to* death delivers him *from* death.”<sup>3</sup> This is the ultimate commendation: *the Father* raised his Son from the dead. This is Peter’s point – the Jews could explain away Jesus’ miracles during his earthly life, but, if they were being intellectually honest, they could not skirt around his resurrection.

Peter mixes two metaphors here:

- 1) “Loosing” – the picture is of death trying to wrap cords around Jesus, like the overpowering arms of a giant squid, but God loosed them.
- 2) “Pangs of death” – word used to describe the pains associated with giving birth – from this we see two things: **a)** the pain that led up the resurrection. Birth pangs, labor contractions are excruciating. Jesus endured the most comprehensive suffering ever experienced by any

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<sup>1</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Henry, Bible Commentary, BLB app

human – physical, social, spiritual, emotional, psychological. But “pangs of death” implies more than pain.

**b)** It tells us that for Jesus, death was sure to lead to new life. Just as a baby is sure to eventually come out of the womb, Jesus was sure to be raised. The womb of death could not hold him forever.

God loosed Jesus from the pangs of death, Peter says, “because it was not possible for him to be held by it.” Why was it not possible for death to hold Jesus?

Because David prophesied about it. In vv 25-28, Peter quotes Psalm 16 where David says: “you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.” This is a claim to not be left in the grave and experience decay. Was David still walking the streets of Jerusalem 1,000 years after his supposed death? Of course not, Peter says. So how could he write those words?

Let’s read Peter’s explanation starting in v. 29:

- <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.”* – that was true. The early church historian Josephus tells of a monument known as the tomb of David that was confirmed and well-known in 1<sup>st</sup> c. Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup>
- <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.* – Let’s define a few terms here:
  - “God swore with an oath” – what oath? God made a promise to David in II Sam 7: “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you...and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” David had this promise in mind.
  - “He foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ” – tells us that David, though he did not know the

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<sup>4</sup> Clinton Arnold, *Zondervan Bible Backgrounds: Acts*, p. 235.

details like when, who, or how, consciously prophesied about the resurrection of the Christ.<sup>5</sup>

- “The Christ” – technical title for the Anointed One, the Messiah,<sup>6</sup> the expected fulfiller of the hopes of Israel for a deliverer.<sup>7</sup>

- Do you see Peter’s argument? David spoke of one who would not be left in the grave and whose body would not decay. It clearly can’t be David because his tomb is occupied. David must have been seeing forward to the Messiah. No wonder Matthew begins his Gospel: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David” (Mt 1:1).
- We see Peter’s conclusion in verse 32: “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.” In the words of one writer: “The OT prophesied that the Messiah would rise from the dead. Jesus has risen from the dead...- [therefore] he must be the promised Messiah.”<sup>8</sup>
- In vv 33-35, Peter finishes his sermon by moving from Jesus’ resurrection to his ascension. He comes full circle, saying in effect: “This Jesus, being 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.”
- Then he shows how David again pointed forward to Christ, this time to his Lordship as ascended King, by quoting Psalm 110. The right hand of God is a place of divine authority. Jesus is not only Messiah but also reigning Lord over all things.<sup>9</sup>
- Then comes Peter’s mic drop moment: (v 36) “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

We see the gravity of this statement by the reaction of the crowd: (v 37) “Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘What shall we do?’”

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<sup>5</sup> Marshall, p. 78.

<sup>6</sup> Zerwick, *Grammatical Analysis of the Greek NT*, p. 355.

<sup>7</sup> William Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 384-5.

<sup>8</sup> Marshall, p. 77.

<sup>9</sup> Marshall, p. 79.

“Cut to the heart” is a fitting translation – lit. means “pierced” or “stabbed.”<sup>10</sup>

It was a way of saying that Peter’s words made a deep inward impression on them.<sup>11</sup> They cut through them, producing profound conviction.<sup>12</sup>

Why? As Peter spoke, it hit them that Jesus was the one they had been waiting for. He was the Christ. They killed their own Messiah. But not only that, they killed the Lord, Ruler of the universe. “What shall we do?” they cried.

Peter said, “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.”

Two calls:

- 1) Repent – most simply, a change in direction.<sup>13</sup> “Involves a radical change in a person’s central affections, convictions, and life course.”<sup>14</sup> A shift from life being about self to life being consumed with Jesus and his kingdom. A shift of loyalty. You have a new king, and it’s no longer you.
- 2) Be baptized – sacrament of enfolding into the community of believers.<sup>15</sup> Also tangible expression of faith in God’s promises. Peter says, (v 39) “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.”  
“all who are far off” foreshadows the rest of Acts, where believing Gentiles are welcomed into the covenant community, so that Paul can say in Ephesians: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (2:13).

What was the result of Peter’s sermon? (41) “Those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” The power of the newly-arrived Spirit on display.

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<sup>10</sup> Danker, p. 192.

<sup>11</sup> Danker, p. 192.

<sup>12</sup> Arnold, p. 236.

<sup>13</sup> Marshall, p. 80.

<sup>14</sup> Arnold, p. 236.

<sup>15</sup> Arnold, p. 236.

So we come back to our question: Can the Dead Live?

Peter says yes. Jesus was raised from the dead. Then three thousand were raised from spiritual death to life.

Earlier this week I got to hear the stories of two members of a sister church in Birmingham. Let's call them Jen and Lance.

Jen grew up in a family that went to church because it was what good people did. As an athlete, she was taught they if she went to church, God would bless her with athletic success. But freshman year of college when she didn't play as much as she expected, she was devastated. Her perfect plan for her life began to crumble.

For Lance's family, church was not a high priority. He went to college to play football and when freshmen year didn't go well, he transferred to another school hoping it would make things better. It didn't, and all the reckless ways he was living and running from God left him empty.

In each case, some friends invited them to a campus ministry where they heard the gospel of the resurrected Christ with new ears. Both were cut to the heart – convicted of their sin, received Christ, were disciplined, and are now co-leading a ministry for young adults at their church. They are not who they once were.

**TAKEAWAY:**

**The resurrection of Jesus opened the door to resurrection for all of us.**

Let's call it the kangaroo effect. For a kangaroo, what happens to the mom happens to the baby in her pouch. If the mom jumps in a puddle, they both get wet. If the mom outthops a predator, the baby is safe too.

Romans 6 reflects this same truth: Paul says, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might *walk in newness of life*. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."

Just like the kangaroo mom and baby, for those who are united to Christ through repentance and faith, **what happens to Jesus happens to us.**

**Because it was not possible for death to hold Jesus, it is not possible for death to hold us.**

As Christ died, we die – I die to sin (Ro 6:2), it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me (Gal 2:20), I have died and my life is hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3). Conversion is a death to our old self and a new birth in Christ.

Think of that dead situation that you thought of earlier. One of our church's core values is a healing community. There is nothing mystical or magical about our church. Every church should be a healing community – a community shaped by the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, where the spiritually dead come to life and where Jesus revives dead places in our lives so that we might walk in newness of life, so that we can be changed from the inside out, so that we can go from being dead inside to being alive with joy in Christ.

If that is not true of you, may it be this day.

**Benediction:** Hebrews 13:20