

Jesus: A Death Predicted

The Excellence of Jesus

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We're delighted once again to open God's word and return to our study of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ that we've been engaging in on this month of July. On Tuesday nights we have looked last week at the predictions about the life of Christ, on Sundays we are looking at the superior excellence of Christ here in the month of July. It's kind of a parenthesis in our normal preaching and the calendar of preaching that we've been doing, taking a little break here in July to focus simply on our Lord Jesus Christ, and I trust that it is a refreshment and an encouragement to you as it is to me.

You know, if you look at 1 Corinthians 1 as we talk about "Jesus: A Death Predicted" tonight, the centrality of the cross cannot be overestimated in the preaching of the Gospel and of biblical New Testament ministry. In 1 Corinthians 1:17 the Apostle Paul said that, "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void." Then in verse 18 he says, "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." If you are a Christian, the cross of Christ, the death of Christ, is infinitely precious to you, isn't it? That is the hope, that is your greatest treasure. Paul said also in Galatians 6:14, "God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ."

And in chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians, since you're still there, notice the manner in which he preached and notice the subject matter of what he said. He said in verse 1, "when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God." There is a legitimate aspect to genuine pulpit ministry where the man does everything he can to put himself and his personality out of the picture to make the message and the centrality of Christ as plain and clear as obvious to the audience as he possibly can do, and it's the opposite of what the general tenor of ministry is today where people have to have their own brands and their own logos and, you know, their own marketing schemes and all of that. Paul said, "I cast all of that stuff aside. I wasn't with you with superior speech, I simply wanted to do one thing and that was to make Christ central and to bring your focus and attention on him."

And notice what he says here. There was a ministry purpose to that in verse 5 when he says, "so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God." When a preacher tries to be clever and his audience depends on that, that only lasts as long until the next guy comes along who is a little more clever and a little bit more dynamic and then they are shifted off to something else. You have to preach Christ, you have to preach the cross. That is our mandate and it's not about packaging it in clever packaging, it's about being faithful to the text, being faithful to Christ so that your faith, your confidence in Christ, would rest not on any human element but simply on Christ as he is revealed in the word of God. That's the whole point and so that's what we're trying to do here in this little series in the month of July, studying the person of Jesus Christ.

Now, what we said last time was to develop a true and accurate understanding of Christ and to have a well-grounded faith in him, you need to understand that Christ was God's plan all along; that God had decreed from before the beginning of time the cross of Christ, the plan of salvation, and that this was something that God had established and was working out all along.

Look over at the book of Acts to a passage we looked at briefly last time. We're just resetting the context here. Chapter 2, verse 22 of the book of Acts. As you're turning there, let me just say something that has been on my mind over the past several days, not directed to anyone in this room, just as a principle of basic ministry. If you – let's put it this way, let's drop the second person – if someone is unwilling to receive teaching about Christ, if someone is unwilling to respond to Scripture and to trust Christ with their circumstances with their life, if someone is not willing to do that even if they sit in the audience under the sound of teaching, if they are unwilling to do that, unwilling to entrust themselves to Christ, unwilling to follow him and trust him no matter what, do you know what? There is nothing that we can do for them. We have nothing else to offer you except the Lord Jesus Christ and there is nothing that our counsel can do to help you if you are not willing to receive Christ. There is nothing that other kinds of external matters of ministry could do to help someone if they will not receive the preaching of the word of God, if they will not receive the message of Christ crucified. There is nothing else to have. There is nothing else to offer to anyone.

So ultimately, in one sense, it comes down to we preach Christ and then at that point it becomes up to you to decide whether you are going to trust Christ with your life or not; whether you are going to turn to him in repentance and faith for your salvation or whether you will walk away and bring judgment upon your own head. For those that name the name of Christ, when he is presented to you in all of his majesty and all of his providential ordering of every detail of your life, you either trust that or you walk away, but if you won't receive Christ, if you won't respond to Christ, beloved, as much as I might want to, there is nothing else that I have to offer you. We offer you Christ. We present Christ and there is nothing else by comparison. So we preach Christ.

Acts 2:22, Peter said,

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.

Point being that the cross of Christ, the life, the ministry, the death, the resurrection of Christ, was a predetermined plan of God. As Christ went through these events in his earthly human life, he was simply carrying out a plan that God had already established for the beginning of time.

So what do we do with that? How do we respond to that? As we talk about these matters of the life and death of Christ predicted here on Tuesdays, as we talk about these matters of the greater excellence of the person and work of Christ on Sunday, there should be a sense of reverential fear that comes upon us that says these matters are sacred and greatly holy and that we come to them with a teachable spirit, first of all; with a trusting, believing spirit, second of all; and with a sense of giving ourselves over to understanding what Scripture has to say about it because, beloved, and why I'm so grateful that all of you are here and you are so faithful to be here time after time after time again, I know that as you continually give yourself over to the teaching of God's word, as you give yourself over to Christ and him crucified, this is where the sanctuary of your soul resides. This is where your safety is. This is where your strength in trial is. This is where your eternal well-being is. And when you are committed to receiving that over time, you are developing a strong foundation in your life. It's those who hit and miss and those who are indifferent that find that their lives come crumbling down around them when trials come.

So with that in mind, the last time we saw the prophecies of the life of Christ and there is more now as we come to tonight's emphasis. The prophets also spoke about the death of Jesus. They looked forward and they predicted many aspects of the death and of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. One writer said this, that no fewer than 29 prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus in the 24 hours leading up to his death. That gives us a sense of the prophetic emphasis on the death of Christ, it gives us a sense of the centrality of the importance of the death of Christ, of the cross of Christ, and this is at the very core and the heart of our faith. Were Jesus not crucified, we would all be lost in our sins. If he was not raised from the dead, 1 Corinthians 15 says, we would still be in our sins, we would be without hope.

So the centrality of this is worthy of our attention as we come to God's word tonight. Let's approach it from four different perspectives. First of all, looking at the death of Christ predicted. The death of Christ predicted, and in this we want to look at just four prophecies that were surrounding the death of Christ from the Old Testament, and then we'll look at how they were fulfilled.

Turn in your Bible, if you would, to Isaiah 53. Isaiah speaking prophetically said,

12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death [here it is], And was numbered with the transgressors;

He was numbered with the transgressors. One aspect of the predictions of the death of Christ is this: Jesus would be executed with common criminals. Jesus would be executed with common criminals. Isaiah was writing some 700 years before the time of Christ. Speaking about the Messiah, he said that in his death he would be numbered with the transgressors. That's all I want you to see from that. Israel's lofty Messiah would be ranked with thieves at his death. This is incomprehensible, isn't it, that the pure and holy Messiah would be numbered as one worthy of a death classified with a common robber, and yet this is what Scripture said would happen.

Now secondly, the prophets also predicted that Jesus would be pierced. He would be pierced. His bones would not be broken but his side would be pierced. The prophets foresaw this some centuries before it actually happened.

Look back at Psalm 34 with me, if you would. Psalm 34:19, a statement that is true of us but was especially true of our Lord Jesus.

19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all.

Christ went to the cross, it was a time of great affliction but the Lord delivered him out of it. In verse 20 it says,

20 He keeps all his bones, Not one of them is broken.

Not one of them is broken. Not one of the Messiah's bones would be broken yet if you look at the prophet Zechariah toward the end of your Old Testament, just before the book of Malachi in Zechariah 12:10, the prophecy that Jesus would be pierced. It says,

10 I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced;

This is a staggering prophecy where God is speaking in the first person and says, "The day will come when Israel will look on Me," look on Me, "the one whom they have pierced." So Jesus was going to be pierced, the Messiah would be pierced.

Thirdly, another aspect of the death of Christ predicted is that Jesus' garments would be gambled. They would be gambled. They would be gambled for, you might say, but everyone says you're not supposed to have a preposition at the end of a sentence so I'm trying to honor the linguists in our audience with the way that I phrase that point. Jesus' garments would be gambled.

If you would look at Psalm 22:18, I would be most appreciative as you follow along. Psalm 22:18, remember, understanding all we're doing is we're kind of surveying, we're taking a sampling of things to just get a sense of the magnificence of the predetermined plan of God in the death of Christ. We'll look at the New Testament fulfillment of these in just a moment. Psalm 22 in verse 17, David speaking prophetically said,

17 I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me;

That was certainly true of Christ on the cross. And then in verse 18 it says,

18 They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots.

This was 1,000 years before the crucifixion when this was written, that Jesus' garments would be gambled.

Now, step back and think about it, if you would, or you can stay in your seat and sit back and think about it. That's okay too, whatever you prefer. Does this not show us that the infinite indifference that there was at the time of the crucifixion of Christ as the Roman soldiers gambled for the garments of Jesus, what greater measure of indifference could it be as the eternal Son of God was being crucified for the sins of men, that so oblivious and so indifferent were they to the moment in which they were engaged that they were, in essence, tossing dice to see who could win his threads. And you say that's shocking that someone could be so indifferent to the eternal redemption that was being accomplished on the cross at that moment in time. It's true. Shocking indifference.

Do you know what my perspective is as a preacher? It is shocking to me that people are likewise indifferent when Christ is presented to them when they are dead in their trespasses and sins; when they know that they are guilty before God; when their conscience cries out against them of their guilt and the means of forgiveness is presented to them, Christ crucified, Christ resurrected, and they brush it off like they've got some kind of lint on their shirt and say, "That doesn't matter to me." Soldiers gambled for his garments, "That doesn't matter to me." We present Christ to men and some of them say, "That doesn't matter to me." It's the same level of indifference. It's the same kind of guilt that comes for rejecting, for not recognizing the great infinite value of what is being presented to you when the Lord Jesus Christ is laid before you is what I would say to any sinner who would listen to me. There is no excuse for being indifferent to Christ in such a way, but the Spirit that animates that today is the Spirit that was animating the soldiers at the time: complete, utter ignorance and indifference to the magnificence of what was around them.

Fourthly, prophecies of the death of Jesus predicted. We have talked about he would be executed with common criminals, he would be pierced, his garments would be gambled, finally for this segment: Jesus would be buried by a rich man. He would be buried by a rich man.

Go back to Isaiah 53 with me, if you would, and in verse 9, you'll see that Isaiah prophetically said,

9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

So Jesus was going to be buried by a rich man. Stated differently, despite his humiliation of being crucified with common criminals, he would still receive an honorable burial because he was worthy of that. There was no deceit in his mouth. He had done no violence. He had done no wrong. He was worthy of an honorable burial. So Jesus' death was predicted in different elements and we've surveyed those ever so briefly in what we've said.

Now, that brings us to our second major point this evening, and having said the death of Christ predicted, let's look at the death of Christ fulfilled as it is given to us in the Gospel writers who were conscious of these Old Testament prophecies as they wrote their accounts of the life and death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. The death of Christ fulfilled. First of all, just going in perfect parallel to what we have already said: Jesus was executed with common criminals. As predicted, he was numbered with the transgressors.

Look at Mark 15 in the Gospels. Mark 15, and we'll gather two of these up at the same time. We'll keep our finger in Mark 15 for the moment. In Mark 15:27, it says,

27 They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left. 28 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors."

The Romans, the Jews, put Jesus and classified him with two guilty robbers, two common criminals in his death. Can you imagine that the eternal Son of God was identified like that in his death? There it was just as the prophets said it would be.

Keep your finger in Mark 15 and look over at John 19 now, if you would. John 19 as we see that Jesus was indeed pierced. Jesus was pierced as the prophet said that he would be and in verse 31, John 19:31, and hopefully we can read this with a measure of sympathy and love for what our Lord endured on our behalf, right? The fact that Christ underwent all of this suffering, all of this humiliation, all of this shame projected upon him, bearing the wrath of God for us on the cross, did it to save our souls, I trust that we can read this with a new measure of affection and sympathy for our Lord, being grateful for everything that he has done on our behalf. This should move your heart toward a greater love for Christ as we consider these things. John 19:31,

31 Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be

taken away. 32 So the soldiers came, and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Him;

They did that so as to accelerate death. Once the legs were broken, there was no basis upon which the crucified victim could press himself up in order to get a breath. He just collapsed under his weight and it hastened suffocation. It hastened suffocation as a result of having the broken legs, he couldn't push up in order to relieve the pressure on his lungs in order to get a breath. So this was a common way Roman soldiers would often do this to hasten the death of a crucified victim and so they knew how to do this. But look at what happens in verse 33,

33 but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.

Just as Psalm 22 had said 1,000 years earlier. These Roman soldiers knowing nothing about the prophecies of Christ, caring nothing about any fulfillment of prophecy, just doing a job which they did repeatedly throughout their military career said, "Oh, this is different. He's already dead. We don't need to break his legs." But what did they do in verse 34?

34 But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. 35 And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. 36 For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture,

This was the reason it happened exactly this way, it was so that the Scriptures that had been written in the past would be fulfilled in the events of the death of Christ. Look at it there at the end of verse 36,

"NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN." 37 And again another Scripture says, "THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED."

So the writer of Scripture knowing the Old Testament, having seen the crucifixion of Christ, says, "This is what happened. This was in fulfillment of what was written previously."

So as we see these things, let's look at one final aspect of it, that Jesus was buried by a rich man. No, I skipped one, sorry. Jesus' garments were gambled. Jesus' garments were gambled and for that we can go back to Mark 15:22 where it says,

22 Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. 23 They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it. 24 And they crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take.

Look also over at Matthew 27, if you would. Matthew 27. Matthew reports this in a parallel account in verse 35,

35 And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots. 36 And sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there. 37 And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS."

So we see from the Gospel accounts that Christ was executed with common criminals, he was pierced, his garments were gambled, and also in Matthew 27, look at verse 57 where we will see that he was buried by a rich man. He was buried by a rich man. Matthew 27:57, where it says,

57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. 58 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. 59 And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away.

A rich man came, a disciple of Jesus it says, and took custody of the body of Jesus and gave him an honorable burial in a grave that he owned.

So we see Jesus' death predicted in the Old Testament passages that we looked at, we see Jesus' death fulfilled in the Gospel passages that we looked at. And so we are very impressed by, we are very much strengthened by the prophetic nature of Scripture, that these aren't allegories that we are reading, these aren't mythological accounts, this isn't abstract philosophy, this is time and space events in true history taking place where actual writings were made centuries in advance and then time elapses and in time and space history, the events that took place fulfilled what was written. That's very significant, beloved. It means that your faith in Christ is grounded in truth. It is grounded in actual history, not speculations, not things that people made up in their minds. We do not follow old wives' tales, we follow that which is true, that which is accurate, that whose truth is shown by the fulfillment of prophecy which – watch it – the truth of fulfilled prophecy shows that it was the fulfillment of a plan that God had all along. History and the career of Christ were working out exactly as God planned, not in some kind of random manner without a guiding force, a guiding purpose being at work in the midst of it. So the question is: have you believed in Christ in response to this truth of the Gospel? This is absolute truth. This is certain. There is no doubt to any of these things. Have you believed in Christ?

Well, as you know, Jesus wasn't simply crucified, he didn't simply die but he was resurrected as well and let's look at the resurrection of Christ predicted, point 3: the resurrection of Christ predicted. And in that we see that it was said that Jesus would not

undergo decay, that he would not undergo the decaying process of death as ordinary humans who died do.

Look at Psalm 16 with me, Psalm 16:10. Back in Psalms again, Psalm 16:10, David writing some 1,000 years before the time of Christ, saying things that were true in his time but that spoke beyond his time in the things that he said in the fullness of everything that they signified. So in Psalm 16:7 David says,

7 I will bless the LORD who has counseled me; Indeed, my mind instructs me in the night. 8 I have set the LORD continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. 9 Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will dwell securely.

Now watch this, David says, "I am praising God as I'm writing right now. My heart is glad and my glory rejoices and I dwell in security." Why was David so joyful and why was there such security in his heart? Why is it that you as a Christian can sit here today in that same position of blessing in confidence in Christ saying, "I will not be shaken and my heart will be glad"? Is that, beloved, is that your present spiritual experience no matter what your present circumstances of life are? Is there something inside your heart that says, "I will not be shaken"? Is there something inside you that says, "I have an overriding confidence despite the circumstances around me"? Is there something in your heart that says, "I rejoice and I am glad even though there are dark circumstances pressing upon me"? Well, for the true Christian, that's their testimony of life. That's the mark of a true Christian, that there is something of that being animated in your heart. That's what's true. That's the nature of faith. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the confidence of things not seen.

So it's a worthwhile question to say is that my present experience or do I just collapse in darkness and abandon all hope? Well, David is saying, "I'm not shaken. I rejoice. I am dwelling in security." All that to say what was the basis of that, why was he rejoicing like that? Look at verse 10 and he states it clearly, looking forward to the future Redeemer, looking forward to the triumph of the future Redeemer he says,

10 For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.

He says, "I am confident that you are not going to simply abandon my soul to death. Why? Because you are Yahweh. Because you are a God of lovingkindness, of loyal love, of great faithfulness. I can take refuge in you and know that it will be well with my soul. Because of who you are, God, I trust you to be like that and one aspect, one great surpassing aspect of your faithfulness is you're not going to abandon me and leave me alone in death." And along with that he says at the end of verse 10, "You won't allow Your Holy One to undergo decay," speaking beyond himself, looking forward to its fulfillment in Christ.

Now along with that, not only would Jesus not undergo decay, Scripture in the Old Testament points us to the fact that he would ascend to God's right hand. He would ascend to God's right hand. Look at Psalm 68 with me. I realize we're doing a survey of several different scriptures here and that's okay. Psalm 68:18 says,

18 You have ascended on high, You have led captive Your captives; You have received gifts among men, Even among the rebellious also, that the LORD God may dwell there.

He says, "You have ascended on high."

Now, what we want to do, having set forth these prophecies of the resurrection of Christ, is look to the New Testament to see how the New Testament testifies to their fulfillment. So point 4: the resurrection of Christ fulfilled. The resurrection of Christ fulfilled.

Now, turn first of all to Luke 24 just by way of kind of an introduction to this part of the message. Luke 24 after his resurrection. After his resurrection, Jesus stated plainly that the things of the Old Testament pointed to him for their fulfillment. In Luke 24:25, let's say, something that is true of people still today that I trust will not be true of any of you as I read these words. Jesus said to the men on the road to Emmaus,

25 And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!"

They were struggling to understand. They didn't get it and Jesus said, "You foolish men, you are so slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!" At his resurrection, he makes a point of pointing back to the prophets saying, "The prophets said this would happen. Why are you struggling to believe it?" And in verse 26 we see his summary of everything that we've tried to so feebly point out here this evening. Verse 26, he says,

26 "Was it not necessary [was it not a divine appointment] for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

Beloved, mark it, beloved, believe it, beloved, pay attention. I say this reverently, for the sake of Christ, pay attention to what Scripture is saying on these points. Jesus was predicted to die, Jesus was predicted to rise again. These are things that are considered basic matters that we are to know and to understand. Jesus said all of these things were necessary to happen because the prophets had said that they would be so.

Now look over at verse 44 of Luke 24. In verse 44 of Luke 24,

44 Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

And so Jesus points them back to the Old Testament to the threefold division of the Old Testament, Moses, the prophets and the Psalms, and says, "Everything that was written about me back there had to be fulfilled." We've only sampled it here this evening. Let's see how these two aspects that we highlighted that we chose were fulfilled. First of all, Jesus' body, it did not decay. It did not decay.

Look at Acts 13, beginning in verse 32, and notice how it calls attention to the Scriptures that we have read and speaks to their fulfillment. Let's start in verse 26,

26 Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. 27 For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him.

Do you see how the early apostolic preaching was pointing to prophecy and saying it was fulfilled in the events of the life and death of Christ? That's all we're doing tonight. That's all we're saying. We are following an apostolic pattern in the things that we are saying here this evening. Verse 28,

28 And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. 29 When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. 30 But God raised Him from the dead; 31 and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people.

What does Paul draw from that? Paul says in verse 32,

32 And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.' 34 As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY and SURE blessings OF DAVID.' 35 Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.'

There is the fulfillment of it. Verse 36,

36 For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; 37 but He whom God raised did not undergo decay.

Paul makes a long point out of emphasizing that the resurrection of Christ fulfilled and vindicated that prophecy that was made by David some 1,000 years earlier. That prophecy couldn't have been talking about David because he died and he was buried and he was still in his grave therefore it had to be speaking to someone greater than David, the one greater than David was the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, Scripture also makes a point that Jesus ascended to God's right hand. You're in Acts, let's glance back at Acts 1:9. It says, Acts 1:9,

9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. 11 They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

He ascended to God's right hand.

Now look at Ephesians 4:7. It says,

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."

That is a quotation of Psalm 68:18 which we read earlier. Psalm 68:18 spoke of the ascension of Christ, Acts records the historical event, Ephesians declares the ascension of Christ to have fulfilled that prophecy.

So, beloved, we see the death of Christ predicted, we see it fulfilled. We see the resurrection of Christ predicted, we see the resurrection of Christ fulfilled. Centuries beforehand, centuries later it comes to pass in history in a way that was utterly beyond the control of the prophets to bring to pass and which also, if you think about it, the aspects of this were things that Christ was not controlling to make happen in the sense that he manipulated his earthly circumstances to make it happen. He had already expired on the cross when the Roman soldiers pierced him. This is a mark of the work of God working providentially through the unforced actions of men in order to bring to pass what he had prophesied.

What shall we say? What shall we say? The prophets pointed to Christ ahead of time and the life and the death and the resurrection of Christ centuries later fulfilled them and

Scripture declares it to be so. This aspect of fulfilled prophecy is one sign among many about the truth of the Gospel. Fulfilled prophecy is a proof positive of the truth of the Gospel that when it is declared to you that Jesus Christ is the only name by which you can be saved from your sin, you should believe it because there is fulfilled prophecy that undergirds the truth of that statement.

Now, the prophets also help us understand why all of this matters. They help us understand why Jesus came. You don't need to turn there, the verse is familiar, Isaiah 53:6 says this, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way." You have gone astray. You have sinned against God. You have fallen short of his glory. By nature in your natural state, you are perverse, you are wicked, your heart is desperately sick, it is evil, it is wicked, and all sorts of sinful things come out of your mind and your imagination as shown by the testimony of your own conscience. You fall short of the glory of God and that is simply a recognition of what the prophet is saying, "All of us like sheep have gone astray." We do not have the ability to find our way back. If you are to be saved, if you are to go to heaven, if you are to have your sins forgiven, it must be because God acts from outside of you upon you in order to save you because you cannot save yourself. You are not good enough to go to heaven. In fact, the only thing that you are good enough for is good enough for judgment in hell. That's what we're good enough for because, "Each of us has turned to his own way." In the words of Romans 1, we see the testimony of God, we see him displayed, and yet we do not give thanks. We turn to our own ways.

But the prophet goes on and says, "But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him." At the death of Christ, the Lord placed and imputed the sins of men upon Christ and then slew him and then punished him and Christ suffered for sins on the cross. That's why he came. That's why he died in the manner that he did that he might be the Lamb of God offered up as a sacrifice to pay the price for the sins of those who would believe in him. The only question at that point is: have you believed in him? Have you turned to Christ? Because God inflicted the punishment for sin on his own Son at the cross and here's the point: how is it that you can go to heaven? It's not by anything that you do. It couldn't be that because all of your righteousness, Scripture says, is like a filthy rag. No, God doesn't show mercy on people who are good enough because no one is good enough. Do you understand that, my friends? Is that clear in your mind? Is that anchored in your heart? God shows mercy, God grants forgiveness, God bestows grace on one condition, it's on those who believe in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is God's appointed means to approach him, not by what you do but by believing in this Christ whose death and resurrection was predicted by the prophets. He accepts the death of Christ as payment for your sin when you believe in him. He accepts the righteousness of Christ on your behalf. He accepts you in his Son. Rather than punishing you, he punished Christ. Rather than requiring new righteousness from you, he accepts the righteousness of Christ on your behalf. You come to heaven, you come to God based on the righteousness and the punishment that another one provided on your behalf. That's the Gospel.

So my friends, do you believe in Christ? Do you know Christ? It's only his shed blood that can reconcile you to a holy God. Only his blood can do that but, my friend, those of

you that have dwelt in darkness, those of you that wonder if there is any purpose in life, oh my friend, I am presenting Christ to you now and telling you this is what you've been missing, this is what you're looking for, that in Christ, in Christ you can find your reconciliation to God. In Christ you find the forgiveness of your sins. In Christ he offers you the full blessing of God if you would come and believe in him. Christ is sufficient to save you to the uttermost.

And for those of us that have believed in him, what a sweet remembrance that is, that in Christ not just your sins before your salvation are forgiven and washed away, but that all of your iniquity is laid upon him. The sins of this day were laid upon him; that there is not a new working up of righteousness that you have to do, Christ has already satisfied it all on your behalf.

Acts 13, if you would look at that with me, please. Acts 13:38. After Paul had rehearsed the way that Christ fulfilled the prophecies in his resurrection, he pronounces these great and inspired words of hope and, my unsaved friend, I read these words with a prayer that God would impart them with power to your heart that you might turn to Christ and be saved right here, right now, because Christ is able and willing to do that. Scripture says in verse 38, "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him," that is through Christ, "forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes," not who works, "everyone who believes is freed from all things," freed from all guilt, free from all condemnation, free from all future expectations, freed from all things from which you could not be freed, "through the Law of Moses." Paul is saying you could not obey Moses into heaven, but what you could not do on your own through Moses, Christ has done and you can receive all of these things through believing in Christ.

That is why Christ came. That's why his predicted death is so crucial. That's why his predicted resurrection is so vital, it's because that is the one and only appointed means by which any man can be saved from his sins. For those of us that know him, we are brought once again to wonder, love and praise, are we not, that God has done such a gracious act on our behalf.

And for those of you that are here in the chains and in the darkness of sin, here is your hope. Here is your only hope. Christ invites you to come. Christ calls you to come. Nay, Christ commands you to come as he says, "Repent and believe in the Gospel." He will save you this moment if you come to him in repentance and faith. Will you do that?

Let's pray together.

Our God, we thank you for the glory of the Gospel. We thank you for the glory of Christ. We thank you for the sure forgiveness of our sins rooted in divine certainties, planned before the beginning of time, carried out in history and now made real in our hearts by the application of the work of Christ by the Holy Spirit to our hearts. Thank you that the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ is full payment for our sins. We have no other offering that is required. It has already been done. Jesus has paid it all. And when we

survey the wondrous cross, our pride is broken but our hearts are full as we realize that a loving Savior has interceded and intervened on our behalf to reconcile us to God. Lord Jesus, we thank you for that and that the wrath of God was satisfied in you and in you alone and so you get all of the glory.

We pray for, again Lord, we ask this so often from you and, Lord, we're just going to keep asking until we see you pouring it out in abundant measure upon those that we know do not know Christ. Father, we ask you to pour out your Spirit upon their hearts to convict them of sin, righteousness and judgment, to free them from the bonds of Satan and to turn their hearts so that they would believe in Christ and be saved. O God, O God, O God, have mercy on us. Have mercy on the preached word. Have mercy on those hearts that do not know you and awaken them. Shine the light of Christ into their darkened hearts that they might come forth out of their grave of sin and into resurrected glory, the full salvation that is found in Christ alone.

O God, we do not want to simply go through motions here week after week. O God, we do not simply want to be a social gathering and have little bits of fun with one another a couple of times a week. O God, the death of Christ was far too precious, it was far too serious to be treated in such a cavalier manner. So, O God, we ask you even as Paul prayed for the salvation of his fellow Jews, Father, we ask you for the salvation of those that are in our midst, those that are in our sphere of influence, those that identify with this church but are just spiritually dead and in dark foolish ways.

O God, O God, honor your word. Honor your Son as he is preached. Bring forth the spiritual fruit that is totally outside of our power but is fully within yours to save a soul and to bring them into your heavenly kingdom. O God, we ask because we have no power in our own hands to do it and so we ask, O God, for you to do that which you alone can do and to do it to your glory and to the glory of your wonderful Son the Lord Jesus Christ alone. O God, in our weakness, our fear and our trembling, in our utter inadequacy, we look to you and ask, O God, in Christ's name. Amen.

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