

God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility in the Death of Jesus Christ

Acts 2:22-23

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To hear some Christians at times, you would think you were listening to someone apologize for God's absolute sovereign control over His own world.

Dear ones, God is not impressed by the efforts of professing Christians to tone down His sovereign control over all of His creation (including man) and to make Him less than who He is in the eyes of a world that hates Him. I am not interested in justifying God before the judgment seat of finite, sinful worldlings, or in making God more acceptable in the eyes of man or more palatable to the tastes and sensitivities of men that hate and despise our great God and Savior. Our sovereign and good God needs not the justification of any puny, impotent, sinner (Romans 3:4; Romans 9:20).

This Lord's Day we shall look with the eye of faith into the wonders of God's sovereignty as we consider the life and death of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Nothing that happened to Christ was an accident (**not the betrayal** by Judas, **not the beating** of our Lord, **not the mocking and spitting** upon Jesus, **not the crown of long thorns** that was pounded into His holy head, **not the cruelest form of torture and death** invented by sinful man—crucifixion, **not even the wrath of God** that was poured out upon Him as He bore all the sins of His people)—nothing was an accident. It was all planned from eternity as were all the sinful acts of those who put him to death. God did not turn His head or step down from His almighty throne as these events occurred. Everything proceeded exactly according to God's eternal plan, and yet the sins of men were their own sins that they wanted to commit against the Lord of glory.

Amazing! Breath-taking! But all true. And the Apostle Peter does not seek to make excuses for His infinite greatness or tone down His eternal plan, but simply proclaims the truth and reality of God's unfathomable power in order that you may be humbled this day before that great and mighty God and call upon Him to save you from your sin, and call upon Him to sanctify you by that same almighty power.

The main points for the sermon this Lord's Day are the following: (1) God's Sovereign Power Revealed in the Life of Christ (Acts 2:22); (2) God's Sovereign Power Revealed in the Death of Christ (Acts 2:23).

I. God's Sovereign Power Revealed in the Life of Christ (Acts 2:22).

A. As we continue in Acts 2, Peter began his sermon by denying the accusation that the apostles and other believers who spoke in languages they had never learned were drunk, and then Peter demonstrated from Scripture that this was the same Spirit of God foretold by Joel (Joel 2:28-32), which Peter says would be manifested in the last days in prophecy, dreams, and visions among God's people of different genders, different ages, and different social status. And Peter ends the quote by Joel with the free offer: "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21).

1. But who is this Lord upon whom the men of Israel gathered on the Day of Pentecost were to call? He is Jesus of Nazareth, Peter declares in Acts 2:22.

2. Peter now proclaims to these Jewish men the life of Christ (Acts 2:22), the death of Christ (Acts 2:23), the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:24-32), the exaltation of Christ to God's right hand (Acts 2:33-36), and finally the necessity in turning in faith and repentance to Christ for the forgiveness of sin and blessing of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37-40).

B. Just 50 days earlier Peter was ashamed and afraid to stand for Christ, and he denied the Lord Jesus 3 times, but now he is filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaims with power and conviction that the Jesus they (the Jews) had conspired to put to death is the very one God sent to be the salvation of all who will call upon Him alone by faith alone.

1. Dear ones, this is the transformation that God will likewise work in your life and mine as we look to the death and resurrection of Christ to overcome sin in our lives by the power of His Holy Spirit—a transformation from coward to brave-heart.

2. This sermon is addressed to “Ye men (or males) of Israel”.

a. It would appear that the vast majority of those gathered to hear this sermon were men (the word is not men in the generic sense, but men in the gender sense—Acts 2:29). It was the men (males) who were specifically required to come to this feast once a year (Deuteronomy 16:16).

b. This is a remarkable evidence of God’s amazing grace, for it was likely some if not many of these very men of Israel who just 50 days earlier had consented to the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus by crying out, “Crucify him, crucify him” (Luke 23:21) and “His blood be on us, and on our children” (Matthew 27:25). And now the gospel offer goes out to them, “Call upon the name of the Lord, Jesus of Nazareth, whom you rejected and conspired in putting Him to death, and thou shalt be saved.” If the gospel is preached to even those who hated and killed him and if they called upon the Lord Jesus they would be saved, then what sin have you committed that the Lord will not forgive when you call upon Him in faith. This is the very outworking of John 1:11-12. Three thousand souls responded to the gospel call on that day (Acts 2:41). You will not be refused, if you will call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. Who is this Jesus concerning whom Peter preaches?

1. He is Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 2:22). This is the one who

was mocked that He was from the lowly town of Nazareth (“Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” John 1:46). He did not have the pedigree or academic degrees that many of the Jews were looking for in the Messiah. He was not approved of men, but rather mocked by men (and so shall we be when we stand with the Lord Jesus).

2. However, He was approved by God as demonstrated by the miracles, wonders, and signs which He performed. These three words occur together in various places in the New Testament as words that emphasize the greatness of God’s power in human history (**miracles**=mighty acts of God’s power; **wonders**=the amazement that is worked in man; **signs**=point to their need of God who wrought these miracles). Jesus of Nazareth healed the blind, the deaf, and the lame. He created wine out of water, and created bread and fish to feed thousands. He delivered those enslaved to Satan from their demonic possession. He walked on the water and calmed a raging storm in an instant. And He raised the dead to life by the word of His power.

a. Many like Thomas claim they will not believe unless they see such miracles for themselves (John 20:25). But Jesus declares, “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

b. Many will not believe that God sent a flood that covered the whole world at the time of Noah. Many will not believe that God opened the Red Sea and caused Israel to walk across it on dry land and brought the Red Sea upon the pursuing Egyptian army to destroy them. Many will not believe that God fed millions of Israelites in the wilderness by means of manna that fell from heaven. And many will not believe that God worked mighty miracles by Jesus Christ.

c. Why? Because it means they must submit to His absolute authority as the Lord and Master over all things and especially over their own lives. For this One is Creator of all things (John 1:1,3). And He is the One who was raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:1-8). You

see, dear ones, if Jesus Christ can create this vast universe, and if He can raise the dead, why would anyone question whether He could send a flood to cover the whole world. The most basic question is this: Is Jesus who He said He is? If so, He can do all His holy pleasure as the Son of God.

3. Note that Peter declares to these Jewish men that these miracles of Christ were worked **in their midst** (i.e. throughout Judah, Galilee, and across the Jordan River and Sea of Galilee). Christ's ministry of preaching and miracle-working were not hidden or performed in secret, but rather "in the midst of you" (Acts 2:22). Therefore, you are without excuse—your sin is even aggravated because you are not ignorant of God's mighty work in the ministry of Jesus Christ ("as ye yourselves also know" Acts 2:22).

a. Dear ones, it is a grave and serious aggravation of sin when we have heard the truth of Jesus Christ declared from Scripture and when we have seen or heard it lived out in the lives of God's people (faithful witnesses and martyrs of Christ who have given their lives for Christ's truth). To reject the truth and the life that bears witness to that truth is spurning the light that God has given to us; it is to prefer our darkness and our error and our sin over the light that God has shown us.

b. Dear ones, those who turn their backs upon such light, God will turn them over to self-deception and delusion so that they believe what is a lie (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). Let us not play games with the Lord or with the truth revealed in His Word. Let us not find ways in our own minds to justify our sin. But let us also know that even when we have fallen into some form of self-deception or self-justification for our sin, when we call upon the name of the Lord (like these Israelites to whom Peter preached), God will show mercy.

II. God's Sovereign Power Revealed in the Death of Christ (Acts 2:23).

A. Peter now turns away **from the life of Jesus of Nazareth** and the miracles that demonstrate He was approved of God **to the death of Jesus of Nazareth**. How do we know that Jesus is the appointed Savior and Messiah who was prophesied to come in the Old Testament? First, God confirmed who Jesus was by His sinless life and miracles. And second God confirmed who Jesus was by His death. There are two truths about the death of Christ that Peter emphasizes: (1) Jesus (this One approved by God) was delivered to be crucified by the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”; (2) You men of Israel are guilty of having delivered Jesus to be crucified by the Romans.

1. **Jesus (this One approved by God) was delivered to be crucified by the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”.**

a. Verse 23 begins with the word “whom” in the KJV, but it is literally and emphatically, “this one”—this one who was approved of God by performing miracles in your midst which you cannot deny—this one is the very one who was delivered to death by the God’s determined will and foreknowledge.

b. The point Peter is driving home is that the Jews may have thought the death of Jesus meant He was disapproved by God, that his death meant He was a blasphemer and a false teacher. To the contrary, the death of Jesus of Nazareth confirms that He was the prophesied Messiah and that it was God’s immutable plan that He die by the hands of sinful men. This was no accident. This was no surprise to God. Every detail of Christ’s life and death was determined from all eternity by God—He was “the lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8).

c. The word “counsel,” means design, purpose, will. However, it’s not just God’s counsel or God’s plan. It’s God’s determined plan—God’s appointed, designed, and decreed plan from eternity. Jesus of Nazareth was delivered to death because God planned it, and God ordained it (Acts 4:27-28). Man was not in charge and governing the

events surrounding the birth, life, death, resurrection, or ascension of Jesus Christ. God was absolutely ruling and overruling in all that happened to Jesus Christ (even His cruel death).

d. There are those who look at the word “foreknowledge” and believe they have an escape hatch for God in regard to His eternal plan. It goes something like this: God only planned from eternity what He foreknew would occur in history. In other words, God’s eternal plan is not that which is being worked out in history, but rather God’s eternal plan is only that which He saw would occur in history. This heresy simply makes man the lord and master of all that occurs in history and specifically in the life and death of Christ.

(1) However, notice that it is the determined counsel of God that precedes the foreknowledge of God (“the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”—one Greek article governs both nouns, so that the “and” might be translated “even”). God knows what is to happen in history because He has already determined that plan in eternity. To make God subject to the plans of man is to make God impotent (rather than almighty). It is to make God simply a prophet who looks into the future to see what will happen, but cannot and does not control what will happen in the future.

(2) If that were the case, our hope would rest entirely in man rather than in God (and it would be purely “luck” that Christ was crucified, or that Christ was and shall be victorious over Satan).

(3) God’s foreknowledge is his predetermined plan Jesus was not a victim. There was a divine plan encompassing all that happened to the Lord Jesus. God was working out His eternal plan to bring salvation to all those who would receive Christ alone by faith alone.

e. This truth is not only necessary in regard to the death of Christ, but is necessary in regard to all of life. Why does the Christian have hope that God wins over Satan, or that Christians are more than conquerors, or that everything in life works together for the good of

those who love God and are called according to His purpose?

(1) We only have assurance and know with certainty that these truths will never fail (come what may in our lives) because God is sovereign and works all things out in your life and mine according to the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God for His own most holy and most wise purposes.

(2) There is no meaning and purpose in life and there is no hope for the future without the divine Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and Judge who has an eternal plan which He is accomplishing in history (Ecclesiastes 3:1-11; Isaiah 46:9-11). Oh, how I fought this truth at one time in my life because I wanted control over my own life and decisions. There is nothing that will so humble and abase the sinful pride of man more than the Sovereign God.

2. You men of Israel are guilty of having delivered Christ to be crucified by the Romans.

a. Now Peter proclaims that though Christ was not a victim, but was delivered by the determined and immutable will of God, nevertheless, he declares that the Jews were responsible for their sin (“ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” Acts 2:23). God’s sovereignty over all that occurred in delivering the Lord Jesus to be crucified did not excuse the wicked intent and actions of the Jews who conspired to destroy Christ because they hated Him and did not believe Him (God delivered Him, but you conspired to kill Him).

(1) God does not specifically detail for us how He foreordains that which is evil and yet how that evil is voluntarily thought, spoken, and acted by the representatives of the Jewish people. But even though there is not a detailed explanation, it doesn’t change the truthfulness of what is stated. God is sovereign, and yet people are responsible for their own sin and will be judged for their own sin (unless they are granted faith, forgiveness, and the righteousness of Christ). Our place is not to doubt or question these truths, but to bow humbly before

the Lord in submission to His revealed will (Romans 9:20).

(2) The same truth is declared in Luke 22:21-22. This truth does not make God the author of sin in forcing man to sin against his desire and will, but man sins because he wants to sin and wants to break God's commandments, and wants to please himself (James 1:13-15).

b. Peter shows the Jews their guilt so that they might see their need of Jesus Christ, who alone can forgive them through His death. Without conviction of our guilt, dear ones, there is no salvation. Without the work of God's Spirit in convicting us of our sin, we will walk in sin and disobedience to the Lord (conviction is like pain in the body—it tells us there is something wrong with us and that we need Christ). Conviction is a blessed work of the Holy Spirit in our lives (conviction—not condemnation).

B. May the words of Joseph to us brothers who had hated him and despised him and had sold him into slavery ring always in our ears (Genesis 50:20).

1. Whatever the trial or the affliction or the betrayal or the heartache, regardless of what others may intend, God intends good for you who belong to Him.

2. Dear ones, it was not only the Jews, but was ultimately the sin of God's elect that sent the Lord Jesus to the cross. Does that not humble you? Jesus was not a victim, but willingly went to the cross for each of you by name, who were chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began. What amazing, indescribable love for us who are so deserving of death and condemnation. If that does not humble you, nothing will.

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