

The Impossible Dream—Keep Jesus in the Grave

Acts 2:24-32

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Long before contemporary skeptics began attacking the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there were the religious skeptics of Israel. If ever there was a group of people who did not want a resurrected Christ, it was the Jewish Sanhedrin in Israel. Everything they had accomplished in wickedly conspiring with the Romans to put the sinless Son of God to death would be for nothing if Christ was gloriously raised from the dead. These ruthless leaders had everything to lose from a resurrected Messiah. A resurrected Messiah would be their worst possible nightmare. For it would demonstrate that He was who He claimed to be: the Messiah and anointed King sent by God.

Thus, it became the mission of the Jewish Sanhedrin after the crucifixion and burial of Christ to make sure He remained in the tomb. **However, their dream was the impossible dream.** For even the steps these unbelieving Jewish rulers took in order to keep Christ buried were actually overruled by God to provide an even greater proof that the Lord Jesus was certainly raised from the dead.

Oh, dear ones, how we must likewise understand by faith that the most determined efforts on the part of God's enemies to suppress the truth of Jesus Christ today will only bring God greater glory tomorrow when He raises His truth out of the dust to be embraced by all of mankind around the world. And this, God will do as certainly as He raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the grave. Let not your hearts be troubled at the apparent victory of the wicked today. For their victory today only spells their certain defeat tomorrow with even a greater demonstration of God's power and glory. God sets the wicked up in high places so that their fall is even greater and more conspicuous.

As we consider the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the sermon of Peter (Acts 2:24-32), let us consider the following main points: (1) It Was Impossible to Keep Jesus in the Grave because of the Power of God (Acts 2:24); (2) It Was Impossible to Keep Jesus in the Grave because of the Purpose of God (Acts 2:25-32).

I. It Was Impossible to Keep Jesus in the Grave because of the Power of God (Acts 2:24).

A. Peter's sermon to the Jewish men who came together on the Day of Pentecost continues in our text for today. These Jewish men listened intently to Peter's defense of the miraculous display of the Holy Spirit in granting the supernatural ability to speak in the many different foreign languages of those gathered there. Peter's sermon essentially proclaims that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they wickedly rejected and conspired with the Romans to put to death, is the anointed Messiah and King.

1. And yet all this was eternally planned by God to bring about the salvation of His elect, chosen in love and chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began. Likewise, dear ones, even in that which is wickedly perpetrated against us, God is sovereignly working out His eternal plan for His glory and our God as His own dear children (Genesis 50:20). And that which confirms that truth for us is that the most wicked act of men in human history (rejecting, beating, spitting upon, mocking, and crucifying the sinless Son of God) was turned by God's almighty power to become the greatest victory of God over sin, Satan, and the world that has ever been witnessed—the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ's resurrection is the guarantee for all of you who are trusting alone in Christ alone for your justification before God that you will be bodily raised in glory with Him and that there is no enemy within or without that has a legal right to any victory over you. You are more than conquerors through Christ who loved you.

2. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ loses its power to forgive sin and to justify the believing sinner without the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus becomes in Scripture the guarantee, not only of Jesus' deity, but of our salvation and our own resurrection from the dead. Dear ones, if Jesus was not raised from the dead, His death then becomes merely a martyr's death (a heroic death—yes! an just death—yes!). Without His bodily resurrection never to die again, Jesus was a mere man (a righteous man—yes!), but He was not the Son of God or the anointed Messianic King. And without the bodily resurrection of Christ, God was not satisfied with His death or payment of sin, and we are all lost and condemned to everlasting torment for our sin. This is the evaluation of the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 15:17). This is why skeptics have fought so hard to discredit the bodily resurrection of Christ—they realize that to do so destroys biblical Christianity and the entire Word of God. But to keep Jesus Christ in the grave is **the impossible dream** of all skeptics and unbelievers. The Jews at the time of Christ could not do so; Satan could not do so; and it's too late for skeptics since then to do so. The grave is empty and Jesus is risen from the dead. And this truth and reality we celebrate every Lord's Day.

B. Peter proclaims in Acts 2:24 that "it was not possible that he should be holden [held—GLP] of it [i.e. held by death]". Peter in seeking to demonstrate to these Jewish men that Jesus was the Messiah and anointed King, declared first the life of Christ (Acts 2:22), then he proclaimed the God ordained death of Christ (He was no victim, and yet the Jewish leaders had wickedly conspired with the Romans to put to death), but Peter makes it clear that it was impossible to keep Christ under the power of death. Why? Because the power of God is infinitely greater than the power of death, and it was God who raised Jesus from the dead ("Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death"). The God who spoke into existence the universe over the space of six days is the same all-powerful God who raised Jesus from the dead. No one or nothing could keep Jesus in the grave. The Jews certainly attempted to do so, **but it was the impossible dream**.

C. What steps did the Jewish Sanhedrin (and Satan who inspired them) take to keep the Lord Jesus in the grave and under the power of death (Matthew 27:62-66)?

1. First, we see that the Jewish Sanhedrin knew the truth, but acted contrary to it. They knew Jesus had prophesied publicly that He would be raised from the dead on the third day (Matthew 12:38-40). These Jewish leaders broke the Sabbath in going to Pilate out of the fear that they had of Christ's resurrection. This was no deed of necessity or of mercy. It was fear that motivated them. They taught Sabbath-keeping when it was convenient, but practiced Sabbath-breaking when they judged it was necessary to do so in order to keep Christ in the grave. These Jewish leaders had no problem with double-standards.

a. Dear ones, do we practice such double standards of hypocrisy by condemning others for activities we ourselves practice? Do we condemn gossip in others, but practice it ourselves (and even justify it)? Do we condemn sex outside of marriage, but watch movies and listen to music which promote it? Do we condemn idolatry, but cherish our own idols before the One True Living God in our hearts (idols such as our family/ friends, our degrees/accomplishments, our money/possessions, our movies stars/music stars/sports stars etc.)?

b. Dear ones, it is hypocrisy to hate and despise sin when it is practiced by others, but somehow to justify it when it is practiced by ourselves. All such hypocrisy will lead to a deadness of the soul (because hypocrisy is the substance of playing games with God). Our faith in Christ and communion with Christ will become cold and indifferent. It is easy to see the hypocrisy of the chief priests and Pharisees, but do you see your own hypocrisy? May we have the eyes to see and the faith to flee to Christ in humility for His forgiveness of our hypocrisy in applying such double standards.

2. Second, we see in Matthew 27 that the Jewish leaders request and receive permission from Pilate to make the tomb in which Jesus was placed as secure as they possibly could. They believed that some of Christ's disciples might sneak in by night, take the body of Christ from the tomb, and then proclaim

His resurrection. They feared the empty tomb. Remember that a “great stone” had already been rolled in front of the entrance to the tomb to prevent anyone from removing the body (Matthew 27:60). These Jewish leaders took two steps more steps to prevent an empty tomb.

a. First, they sealed the tomb with the Roman seal, which was likely a cord stretched across the stone and embedded in wax at each end with the stamp of the Roman Governor impressed into the wax (which to tamper with was equivalent to a death sentence).

b. Second, a Roman guard (with the best trained soldiers in the world at that time) was stationed around the tomb. How many were in a “watch” or guard? We are not told, but Pilate did tell the Jewish leaders to “make it as sure as ye can” (Matthew 27:65). And this they did.

D. But God raised up the Lord Jesus, sent angels that scared the soldiers to death in rolling the stone away (not so Jesus could get out, but so that they could see that He was not there), and the soldiers lay paralyzed as if dead before the almighty power of God. The soldiers did report to the Jewish leaders what happened, and the Jewish leaders knowing the truth then fabricated a lie, saying that while the soldiers slept (a capital crime) the disciples of Jesus were able to sneak in without disturbing the soldiers, move the heavy stone without disturbing the soldiers, and carry the body of Christ off.

1. You see, unbelief is not a matter of not having enough of the truth; it is a matter of sinful unwillingness to believe the truth revealed—to trust Christ and to bow the knee to the Lord and Creator of all. Men will not have Christ to rule over them.

2. Dear friend, whether you will in faith submit yourself to Jesus right now or not, it doesn’t change the fact that He does rule over all things (and rules over you). And if you will not come to Him now trusting Him, seeking His forgiveness, and surrendering your life to Him before you die, you will face Him after death (but then it will be too late). He will not become the Savior of any after death (a second chance), but only the Judge after death of all those who would not trust in Him as Savior and Lord while yet alive.

3. Dear ones, do not be like the Jewish leaders who rejected the truth and made up a lie in their own minds to justify their unbelief, come to Jesus Christ, who was raised by the power of God because it was impossible for the power of death to hold Him under its grip.

II. It Was Impossible to Keep Jesus in the Grave because of the Purpose of God (Acts 2:25-32).

A. In the remaining portion of our text this Lord’s Day, Peter proves from Scripture that not only Christ’s death was purposed by God according to His eternal decree and will, but that Christ’s resurrection as well was purposed by God according to His eternal decree and will. Peter goes to Psalm 16:8-11 to prove to these Jews (who had been schooled from their childhood in the Old Testament Scriptures) that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was foretold from ancient times in Holy Scripture.

1. Peter appeals to the words of David, who certainly would have been an authoritative forefather and prophet to these Jews. Peter seeks to demonstrate that in Psalm 16:8-11, David was not referring to himself, but was referring to the Messiah. The person speaking in Psalm 16:8-11 was not David (in the first person), but was the greater Son of David—the perpetual anointed and divine King—the Messiah.

a. The one speaking in Psalm 16 was prophesied to die, but death and the grave could not hold Him under its power (Acts 2:25-27).

b. The one speaking in Psalm 16 would be gloriously raised from the dead (Acts 2:28). Just a side note before going on—when we sing the Psalms of David, let us not forget that these are the Psalms of Jesus Christ to His Church and that we sing with the resurrected Christ when we sing His Psalms.

2. The question that must have been churning in the minds of these Jewish men was this: If this was not David who was speaking, then who was it? David died and his grave is still with us. Who then is

this speaking in Psalm 16? Peter answers this supposed question with an arrow directed straight at the heart and conscience of these Jewish men (Acts 2:29-31).

a. Peter says in effect that we who have received the gift of the Holy Spirit and who have miraculously been speaking in your varied native languages (languages we never learned), we are eye-witnesses to the One who was speaking in Psalm 16, and we are eye-witnesses to the fact that God raised this Jesus whom ye crucified from the dead—He is the promised Messiah, Savior, and Lord (Acts 2:32).

b. These very men who fled in fear when Jesus was unjustly arrested and who were not even mentioned as being present at His crucifixion (except the Apostle John)—women followers were there, but not the apostles (except John)—Peter with the apostles now boldly declare, “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses” (Acts 2:32).

3. Dear ones, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is our victory over all our enemies within and without—united to Christ in His death and in His resurrection. The resurrection power that raised Jesus from the dead is that same resurrection power that is yours to overcome your fears, those wicked thoughts and desires, that profane tongue, that worldly eye, ear, hands, and feet that lead us daily into temptation and sin. Beloved, we have a certain hope that we will overcome and not be overcome because we are united by faith to the resurrected Christ.

B. In closing, let it be noted that the empty tomb of Christ is the greatest fear of those who want to live their lives without Christ and live as they please. For that empty tomb declares that Christ is not dead, but is alive and will one day be their judge before whom they will stand. The fear of the empty tomb drives people to make up ridiculous stories of their own vain imagination as to why they do not need to submit themselves to Jesus the resurrected Christ.

1. The fear of the empty tomb drives people to live their lives drowning themselves in their own pleasures as if Christ were still dead and buried within the dark confines of that tomb. For if they truly believed in a resurrected Christ, they would have to face up to the truth that they cannot live their lives for their own pleasure without everlasting peril to their own souls.

2. Those who fear the empty tomb will be like these religious leaders thinking of ways to keep Christ in that tomb. Is that true of you today? Does the empty tomb frighten you? Would you rather ignore the empty tomb and immerse yourself in the pleasures of this life because the reality of that empty tomb condemns you as one who is trying to run and hide from Christ?

C. But at same time the empty tomb is the greatest joy to those who trust alone in Christ alone for their eternal salvation and apply the power of that resurrected Christ to their lives as a living reality rather than as mere profession.

1. For that empty tomb speaks of a resurrected Christ who died for their sin and gives absolute proof that all of the holy wrath of God against their sin was satisfied and borne away by Christ.

2. That empty tomb brings the greatest comfort to those who lay hold of Christ and His perfect righteousness as their own righteousness against the condemnation of the devil.

3. That empty tomb brings the greatest hope that all of the suffering and trials endured in this life will one day fade away into a glorious resurrection of these bodies where there will be no more sin or temptation to sin—no more pain, sickness, or death—no more weeping, grief, or sorrow—but only perfect joy and delight as we commune with Christ, learn of Christ, and serve Christ with hearts filled with love forever and ever.

4. That is what the empty tomb means to all of you who trust alone in Christ alone for your justification before God’s holy throne .

5. Dear Christian, are you enjoying the benefits from the empty tomb? Have you forgotten or become too busy to delight yourself in the blessedness of Christ’s resurrection? Let us fall before Christ

today and confess such sins in order that we might be renewed in our faith to not only profess His resurrection, but to daily trust in and rejoice in His resurrection and all the blessings that are ours as the result of His glorious bodily resurrection.

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