

THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION  
ACTS 2:22-36

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

We humans have a weakness for messiahs. We may not think of it quite in those terms. But we are often on the lookout for a deliverer, for someone who will rescue us from our present situation. In sports local fans are looking for a messiah for the Raiders. Maybe it will be Pete Carroll, the new coach. The Raiders also need a quarterback.

In politics many conservatives are viewing President Trump as a messiah. The hope is that he will deliver us from our foreign policy troubles and inflation and low education scores and criminal immigrants and an exploding national debt. Those among us who have dealt with cancer have looked for a messiah who will cure our cancer. Those among us who have been involved in music or the theater or art have looked for a messiah, perhaps an agent, who will rescue us from obscurity and bring light to the world about our talent.

Even in the realm of the Christian church we are on the lookout for little messiahs. We would like a healer who could cure our disease. We would like a prophet who would promise prosperity or at least tell us what the future holds for us. We would like a big giver who might rescue us financially, as an individual or as a church. We would like a charismatic preacher who might bring crowds to our church.

One of the biggest problems with our craving for deliverers, for messiahs, is that we fail to recognize our greatest need. The Bible says that our greatest need is deliverance from sin, from our sinful nature, from our waywardness, from our separation from God, and from the consequences of our wrongdoing.

When the real Messiah came along two thousand years ago to deal with this problem, people did not recognize Him. They saw His miracles. They had their stomachs filled on a couple of occasions. They saw His healings. But this Jesus did not seem to understand that the real problem of the day was those nasty Gentiles, those Romans who controlled the homeland of the Jews. The real messiah would focus on making Israel great again. He certainly would have to follow the rules of the rabbis, the religious elite.

Jesus was the Messiah. He fulfilled the prophecies which the Hebrew Scriptures made about Him. Today we will look at Jesus through the eyes of one who was closest to Him and understood why Jesus was the Messiah whom Israel and all humanity needed the most. This important information is delivered in what could be regarded as the first Christian sermon ever preached.

I.

We are going to begin by considering briefly THE LIFE OF JESUS, as summarized in one verse, v. 22 of #2. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE LIFE OF JESUS) The author Luke records the words of Peter, saying, **“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...”**

We have begun a study of this book, known as “The Acts of the Apostles.” We have seen that the Gentile physician Luke wrote this book as part of a two volume work which began with the Gospel of Luke. In this book Luke is writing to a Roman official and providing us with a history of the early church. Acts #1 describes how Jesus ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives just east of Jerusalem. Two angels told a group of these early Christians that Jesus would one day return to this place.

Jesus told the disciples in #1 before He ascended into heaven to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. So in #2 on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, which happened fifty days after Passover, the Holy Spirit came upon these early Christians. This miraculous incident was evidenced by the ability that these first Christians had to praise God in the languages native to these religious pilgrims who had come from throughout the Roman Empire to worship in Jerusalem. The religious pilgrims demanded an explanation for what was going on. So Paul in the first part of his sermon referred to the Old Testament prophet Joel to say that this work of the Holy Spirit was a partial fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. It indicated a new development in God’s program with mankind.

Now beginning in v. 22 the Apostle Peter switches from a focus on the work of the Holy Spirit to the meaning of the life and death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus. He is indeed the church’s one foundation.

In v. 22 Peter speaks briefly about His life. Jesus was a man from Nazareth. But His uniqueness and connection with the God of Israel was evidenced by His miracles and wonders and signs. Galilee was regarded as the sticks by the religious elite in Jerusalem. But Jesus had done miracles not only in Galilee but also in Judea and beyond the Jordan and in Jerusalem itself. The miracles were of various kinds. There were healings and exorcisms and calming of storms and multiplication of food. There were even a couple of incidents in which dead people returned to life.

The Apostle John notes what kind of impression this left on a religious leader, a great teacher who was a member of the Sanhedrin, the high council of Judaism. (JOHN 3:2) In John #3 v. 2 the author says this about Nicodemus: **“This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.’”**

The religious Jews in Peter’s audience at Pentecost should have recognized that these miracles fulfilled prophecies made by the prophets of the Old Testament. In Isaiah #35 vv. 4 & 5 (ISAIAH 35:4) this Jewish prophet 700 years before the time of Jesus wrote, **“Say to those who have an anxious heart,/ ‘Be strong; fear not!/ Behold, your God/ will come with vengeance,**

**with the recompense of God./ He will come and save you.’ (ISAIAH 35:5-6A) Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,/ and the ears of the deaf unstopped;/ then shall the lame man leap like a deer,/ and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.”**

These were the kinds of miracles that Jesus performed.

Perhaps the culmination of these miraculous deeds was the raising of Lazarus from the dead. This happened right outside of Jerusalem, and there were rabbis from the city who witnessed it. The Apostle John (JOHN 11:47) records the reaction of the religious leaders in #11 vv. 47 & 48: **“So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, ‘What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. (JOHN 11:48) If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’”** These religious leaders could not deny what happened to Lazarus. There were too many witnesses and too many miracles. They just did not want to accept the political implications of what Jesus was doing. He did not fit with what they were looking for in a messiah. He was a threat to their political and religious positions. So Jesus had to go.

II.

So it is that we come to THE DEATH OF JESUS in v. 23. (II. THE DEATH OF JESUS) Peter says, **“... this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”**

Here is the philosophical tension involved in the death of Jesus. On one hand we have human responsibility. This human responsibility is twofold. Lawless men were involved. This is a reference to people without the law, the Gentiles, the Romans. It was the Roman governor who gave the order to have Jesus crucified. It was Roman soldiers who nailed him to the cross and oversaw his execution.

But the greater responsibility for the death of Jesus lay with the religious leaders. It was the chief priests and elders, the members of the Sanhedrin, who paid off Judas and held a kangaroo court in the middle of the night to come up with charges to bring to Governor Pontius Pilate. Interestingly enough, Peter does not restrict the blame for what happened to the leaders. He blames the Jewish audience. They are guilty because they have not accepted Jesus as the Messiah, and they have not joined with the Christians, and they have tolerated and even supported their Jewish religious leaders. Perhaps a few in the audience were members of the 70 man Sanhedrin.

Human responsibility is not the only factor involved in the crucifixion of Jesus. This was also part of the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. The foreknowledge of God in the New Testament does not just involve seeing beforehand what is going to happen. A New Testament scholar by the name of Rudolf Bultmann says, **“[God’s] foreknowledge... is an election or foreordination of His people or Christ.”** (TDNT, Vol. 1, p. 715) In other words, God knows what is going to happen because it is part of His plan. That is, indeed, what Peter calls it here: “the definite plan of God.”

There were hints of this plan involving crucifixion in the Old Testament. Isaiah #53 and Psalm 22 spoke of a suffering messiah and a future figure who would suffer torments of

death which fit with a description of crucifixion. Isaiah 53 spoke of being “pierced for our transgressions.”

The early disciples of Jesus were slow to catch on to the necessity of the crucifixion of Jesus. In Luke #24 the same author Luke describes the appearance of Jesus to two disciples returning to their homes after the resurrection. According to v. 21 (LUKE 24:21) one of them told Jesus, whom he did not yet recognize, **“But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.”** This man did not realize that Jesus had just provided the basis for the redemption of Israel.

A bit later Jesus reveals Himself to these two disciples. (LUKE 24:25-26) According to vv. 25 & 26 of #24 He says, **“And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’”** God’s plan required His crucifixion.

So here is the tension between God’s predetermined plan and man’s responsibility. Predetermination does not deny human responsibility. The Jews and the Gentiles were both accountable to God for their sinful actions.

The crucifixion was a scandalous idea to both the Jews and the Romans. The Jews wanted a conquering Messiah who would kick the Romans out of Jerusalem and Judea. The Romans used crucifixion on rebels, on the enemies of Rome. There was no more humiliating death for them than crucifixion. But this is the heart of the gospel. The Son of God had to become a human and die on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for the sins of the world.

III.

In vv. 24-32 of our passage we come to THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS. (PROJECTOR ON--- THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS) It is the death of Jesus which satisfies the righteous wrath of God the Father against sin. It is the death of the God-man Jesus which pays the penalty for the sins of the world. The resurrection of Jesus demonstrates that He is God. As v. 24 says, **“God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”**

The original term for “pangs” was used in Greek literature to describe a woman’s pain in childbirth. The death of Jesus involved a high price. But physical death could not destroy Him. According to one scholar the resurrection is mentioned 104 times in the New Testament. This historical claim about Jesus provides evidence for the truth of the gospel.

Understanding his Jewish audience Peter appeals to the Hebrew Scriptures to prove that the resurrection of Jesus involves a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. He proceeds to quote Psalm 16. In vv. 25-28 he quotes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, produced some 300 years earlier.

Verse 27 is the key verse. David originally said in Psalm 16, **“For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, / or let your Holy One see corruption.”** Hades here is the realm of the dead. It is where people went when they died. The psalmist here was not talking about himself or the future Messiah having a spiritual salvation. He was talking about deliverance from physical death.

This psalm finds the fulfillment of prophecy in the resurrection from the dead of Jesus. Thus in v. 29 of our passage Peter declares, **“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.”** In the immediate situation in which David was writing this psalm he probably had in mind an circumstances in which his life was threatened. In Psalm 16 he was indicating his confidence that God was going to get him out of this life-threatening situation.

But Peter finds in this verse a deeper meaning. He says that these words are prophetic and that they have fulfillment in a descendant of David, in Jesus. He cites the common understanding of his Jewish audience that David had died. He perhaps pointed over to the place where David was buried. The first century Jewish historian says that Herod the Great at one point tried to enter David’s tomb to steal gold thought to be there. According to Josephus the two soldiers sent on this mission were struck dead. Herod out of fear and respect built a white marble entrance to the tomb. (*Antiquities*, 16, VII)

The claim about the physical resurrection of Jesus has great apologetic value. It provides a significant piece of evidence that the claim of Jesus to be the Son of God is true. We know that the laws of science say that once people are dead and in the grave for three days, physical life is over. The resurrection of Jesus is a claim to an incredible supernatural event. How can anyone believe that it is true?

All of the early historical evidence indicates that this Jesus movement began right in Jerusalem in the city where Jesus was crucified. The evidence also indicates that the Jesus followers right from the beginning claimed that Jesus had risen from the dead. All that was necessary to refute that was to produce the body of Jesus.

That could not be done. So the evidence is that some of the early critics claimed that the disciples of Jesus had stolen the body. Yet the testimony of these first disciples is that they were afraid and confused and incapable of planning a mission to assault the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb of Jesus. More importantly, all of the twelve apostles except for Judas and John died as martyrs, claiming that Jesus had risen from the dead. Why would people stake their lives on something which they knew was not true?

In vv. 30 & 31 Peter says that David was a prophet and foresaw in Psalm 16 that the future Messiah would rise from the dead. Now I do not know if David actually understood much about how this was going to work out with the coming Messiah. But Peter understands the words of this Psalm to have a fulfillment in the resurrection of Christ.

The Lord did give David some understanding that he would have a future descendant who would establish an eternal kingdom. In 2 Samuel #7 (2 SAMUEL 7:12) Nathan the prophet told him this: **“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. (2 SAMUEL 7:13) He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”**

The prophecy of a resurrection from the dead of a Messiah in Psalm 16 obviously required a death. This was hard for the Jews to understand. It was hard even for the apostles to understand. For they were all looking for a conquering, victorious king. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In v. 32 in our passage Peter adds, **“This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.”** It is not only the Hebrew Scriptures which bear witness to this resurrection of the Messiah, it is us, too. We saw Him alive after He was killed. According to 1 Corinthians #15 v. 6 Jesus appeared to more than 500 people after He had been killed and buried.

Messiahs have this tendency to think that they are invincible. Such was the case with Adolf Hitler. Historian James Lacey says, **“Hitler's seemingly unerring political, military, and diplomatic judgment fed a messianic conviction of his invincibility.”** (*World War II Magazine*, Dec. 16, 2016) Such was the attitude of the other dictators of the Twentieth Century, like Joseph Stalin and Mao tse-Tung. Such is the attitude of the North Korean family of dictators who have wanted to be treated as gods. Such was the attitude of Mohamed Ali, who declared, **“I'm not the greatest. I'm the double greatest. Not only do I knock 'em out, I pick the round. I'm the boldest, the prettiest, the most superior, most scientific, most skillfullest fighter in the ring today.”** But Jesus is the only Messiah who has risen from the dead.

IV.

The natural question which Peter's audience would have is this: If Jesus has risen from the dead, where is He now? Thus vv. 33-36 of Acts #2 describe THE EXALTATION OF JESUS. (PROJECTOR ON--- THE EXALTATION OF JESUS) Verse 33 speaks of **“Being therefore 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.”** Verse 34 also makes a brief reference to the ascension into the heavens. So the audience seems to have some awareness of this claim that Jesus ascended into heaven. News about this had to have been spread around Jerusalem. We should also keep in mind that what we have in this chapter is probably not the entirety of Peter's sermon. They didn't have digital recordings yet, and probably not even secretaries who took dictation. So Peter may have said a little more in his message about the ascension of Jesus. But the proof which he cites here is this Holy Spirit phenomenon. Jesus had told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit. You Jews have now seen this supernatural speaking in tongues which you can understand in your native languages.

How do we know that David did not fulfill the promise made in Psalm 16? Peter continues in v. 34 in our passage: **“For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand,/ until I make your enemies your footstool.’”**” Peter is quoting from another Psalm, Psalm 110. This is the most commonly quoted verse in the New Testament from the Old Testament.

Using the Hebrew terms David is quoted as saying YHWH says to my Adonai, “Sit at my right hand...” Both of those terms are words for God. So this is confusing to Jewish people, who are convinced that there is but one God. The answer which Paul is pointing toward is that there is diversity within the Godhead. There is the Father and there is the Son.

So how did Peter learn about this interpretation of Psalm 110? The week before His crucifixion Jesus was teaching in the temple. According to Mark #12 vv. 35-37 (MARK 12:35) this is what happened: **“And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, ‘How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? (MARK 12:36) David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared, “‘The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand,**

**until I put your enemies under your feet.’”**

(MARK 12:37) **David himself calls him Lord. So how is he his son?’ And the great throng heard him gladly.”** So Peter learned this interpretation from Jesus. Jesus was speaking of the Holy Spirit and God the Father and Himself, the Son of God.

So what responsibility does Peter’s Jewish audience have in all of this? According to v. 36 in our passage, **“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”** He doesn’t pull any punches, does he?

According to Mark #14 vv. 61-64 (MARK 14:61) this is how it played out when Jesus appeared before the religious leaders: **“But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ (MARK 14:62) And Jesus said, ‘I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.’ (MARK 14:63) And the high priest tore his garments and said, ‘What further witnesses do we need? (MARK 14:64) You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?’ And they all condemned him as deserving death.”** Jesus was accused of blasphemy and condemned. But a higher court overruled.

In Jewish thought no one had a right to claim the title “Messiah” until He had done the works of the Messiah, as described in the Old Testament. Having ascended to heaven, Jesus’ work was complete. The Apostle Paul describes this work (PHILIPPIANS 2:8) in Philippians #2 vv. 8-11. He writes, **“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (PHILIPPIANS 2:9) Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, (PHILIPPIANS 2:10) so that at the name of Jesus**

**every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. (PHILIPPIANS 2:11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”**

To the Jews YHWH was Lord. Jesus claimed to be Lord. That was seen as blasphemy. That was the theological reason that they saw to it that Jesus was killed. Paul recognizes that Jesus is Lord. But also there is God the Father. So there is plurality within the Godhead. You Jews have had this Jesus killed. You are in trouble. You need to repent. (PROJECTOR OFF)

This is the heart of the gospel. This is the church's one foundation. The Son of God became a human being. He was sinless. He died on the cross at the hands of the Romans and the Jews. But this was according to the plan of God. Jesus rose from the dead. Then He ascended into heaven. According to v. 33 He was exalted to the right hand of God. In the thinking of the Ancient Near East to be at the right hand of the king was a position of great power and glory. It was from this position that He sent the Holy Spirit, who manifested Himself with the sound of the wind and with tongues of fire and this supernatural ability to speak in these various languages.

So Jesus Christ is not just a historical figure. He is not just a memory. He is the all-powerful Son of God who is alive and is active at the right hand of the sovereign God of the universe. It is from this position of power that He is leading His church and interceding for us Christians as He hears our prayers. He is available to us today as individuals if we have placed our trust in Him. He is the church's one foundation.