

The Church's Soul Purpose

by Mark Jarvinen

²² *"People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. ²³ But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him. ²⁴ But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip. ²⁵ King David said this about him: 'I see that the LORD is always with me.*

I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me.

²⁶ *No wonder my heart is glad,
and my tongue shouts his praises!
My body rests in hope.*

²⁷ *For you will not leave my soul among the dead
or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave.*

²⁸ *You have shown me the way of life,
and you will fill me with the joy of your presence.'*

²⁹ *"Dear brothers, think about this! You can be sure that the patriarch David wasn't referring to himself, for he died and was buried, and his tomb is still here among us. ³⁰ But he was a prophet, and he knew God had promised with an oath that one of David's own descendants would sit on his throne. ³¹ David was looking into the future and speaking of the Messiah's resurrection. He was saying that God would not leave him among the dead or allow his body to rot in the grave.*

³² *"God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this.*

³³ *Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God's right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today. ³⁴ For David himself never ascended into heaven, yet he said, 'The LORD said to my Lord,*

"Sit in the place of honor at my right hand

³⁵ *until I humble your enemies,*

making them a footstool under your feet.'" ³⁶ "So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!" (Acts 2:22-36 - NLT).

Today's text is the middle section of Peter's Pentecost sermon, delivered 50 days after the resurrection of Christ, when the 120 believers, who had gathered in one place, received the Holy Spirit and began to declare the mighty works of God in the languages of the many God-fearing Jews gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. Skeptics made fun of them saying they had had too much wine to drink (**Acts 2:13**), but Peter and the others knew that God was at work in the Pentecost event, according to His promise.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter launched into a sermon to clarify what God was up to. Clearly, since the Holy Spirit had provided super-natural ability for the believers to speak in foreign languages, God's heart was to communicate broadly with the world – and not just the Jewish world. God's plan was for the Church to be witnesses for Christ, first in Jerusalem, but then in Judea, Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth (**Acts 1:8**). God had a **SOUL** purpose for the Church – i.e. to reach people everywhere with the good news of Jesus, who is both Lord [**Sovereign God**] and Messiah [**Savior**] (**Acts 2:36**). Needless to say, **introducing people to Jesus is still God's purpose for the Church today!** Peter preached about Christ on that first Pentecost, but what exactly did he say about him? **What do people in our day need to know about Jesus in order to believe in Him?** Let's analyze our text for clues.

I. THE MIRACLES & THE DEATH OF CHRIST (vv. 22-23).

²² "People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know."

In **v. 22**, Peter merely stated what his listeners already knew, i.e. that Jesus' earthly ministry had included numerous miracles, signs, and wonders. These mighty works had caused wide spread controversy on the human level, but had nonetheless served as God's endorsement of Jesus as not only a man from the lowly village of Nazareth, but also as the divine Son of God, thus providing credentials for his saving work among mankind.

In addition, **v.23** zeroes in on the **cross**. There can be no preaching of Christ that doesn't include the bold proclamation of His death by crucifixion.

“But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him.”

Christ's death on the cross wasn't accidental. He wasn't the victim of unfortunate circumstances. It was part of God's prearranged plan of salvation. Yet, the Jews who had brought accusations against Jesus, and the Romans who carried out his crucifixion were also held responsible – ***“you nailed him to a cross and killed him.”*** The wooden cross, the common instrument of Roman execution during that time, has great symbolic meaning for us. First, it is an illustration of human sin, for which all humans, as sinners, are held culpable. There's no turning over a new leaf or plea-bargaining to a lesser charge when it comes to sin – ***“the wages of sin is death” (Romans 3:23)***. Sin is something so tragic and devastating from God's point of view, that it took the shedding of a perfect Savior's blood to even the scales of justice in His eyes. In a nutshell, the message of the cross is first of all **“the Law,”** announcing that sin, which is mankind's rebellion against God, must be punished, in order

for justice to be served. That's the bad news for mankind, who are deserving only of God's judgment and wrath. However, there is also a flip side to the preaching of the cross, which is the good news of **the gospel**. The gospel teaches that rather than exacting judgment on the entire human race, God placed the sins of the world, past, present, and future, on the shoulders of his sinless Son, who served as the representative human being and died on the cross as an atonement for the sins of all mankind. Through the death of this one man, Jesus, the wrath of a just God was satisfied. Mankind's rebellion against God, which is the essence of sin, could now be forgiven by God, who is not only just, but loving. As **Romans 5:8** says:

“But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Furthermore, **I John 4:10** says;

“This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

The preaching of the cross was a **“stumbling block”** (**I Cor. 1:23**) to many of the Jews who heard Peter preach on that day of Pentecost – after all, how could the divine Messiah succumb to human death at the hands of the hated Gentiles? For them, it was a contradiction in terms. The preaching of the cross doesn't fare well among everyone in modern times either. For example, **Buddhists** find the idea of blood sacrifice to be repulsive and **Muslims** regard it as a sign of weakness. Many intellectual **sophisticates** think of it as a carryover from primitive times. Why, therefore, preach Christ crucified, a reality that smacks of defeat? The answer is simply that **the cross also spells victory!** According to Peter, Christ's death on

the cross was God's ***"prearranged plan"*** (v. 23), atoning for sin and leading to Satan's defeat. Similarly, consider Paul's words in **Colossians 2:15** –

"... And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

According to worldly wisdom, an enemy is vanquished by superior strength and brilliant leadership. Paradoxically, **in God's economy, victory is won through the humiliation and death of a suffering servant.** Who, but God, would prearrange such an unlikely and unique plan of salvation? Yet, that's precisely what the cross represents.

II. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST (vv. 24-32).

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is another key element of Peter's Pentecost proclamation. Although the resurrection defies natural law, it is stated by Peter as unequivocal truth in v. 32 of our text, which reads:

"God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact."

The testimony of multiple witnesses usually confirms an event as fact, in a court of law, or often, even in the court of public opinion. Furthermore, history records that many of these eyewitnesses died martyr's deaths because they stood by their belief in Christ's resurrection in the face of extreme persecution. Who would be willing to die for something they knew to be untrue?

Verse 24, asserts the same truth of the resurrection using extremely graphic language:

“But God released him [Jesus] from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip.”

Commentator, **George Bertram**, uses an apt analogy in describing Peter’s statement, saying:

“The abyss of death can no more hold the Redeemer than a pregnant woman can hold her child in her body when it’s time to give birth” (NIV Application Commentary, p. 103).

Clearly, Peter is using the resurrection of Jesus as further validation of his life and ministry. What other religious leader can claim to have overcome death? In modern times, some have chosen to soft-sell Christ’s resurrection in favor of peddling Jesus as someone who will meet people’s felt needs and whose teaching will promote sound humanitarian ethics. However, the gospel of Jesus Christ is so much more! Clearly, the resurrection was the centerpiece of the early church’s gospel preaching. Throughout Acts, we find it mentioned again and again, proclaimed with unflinching, uncompromising power and boldness, with the result that many came to faith. Is it true that the post-modern people of today can’t believe in the resurrection, or is it that they simply choose not to? It’s interesting that many people have an easier time believing that Elvis is still alive than believing that Jesus rose from the dead. The preaching of the resurrection, even though backed by historical eyewitness testimony is nonetheless where faith kicks in, made possible by a work of divine grace.

III. THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST (vv. 33-35).

This brief section of Peter’s sermon speaks of what we commonly call Christ’s ascension, which could be more accurately called his **exaltation**, since **v. 33a** refers to it that way:

“Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God’s right hand.”

Perhaps we don’t emphasize Christ’s exaltation to the right hand of God today as much as we should. However, Luke takes great pains to include it as part of Peter’s Pentecost message. Why? Because theologically, it reinforces the centrality of the resurrection by highlighting the fact that with his exaltation, 40 days after his resurrection, Jesus no longer appeared to his disciples, thus adding a note of completion and finality to his redemptive work. Furthermore, by citing Christ’s exaltation to God’s right hand, Peter’s listeners are given further validation that the dramatic phenomena of Pentecost, which they had just witnessed, were evidence that Jesus had gone to heaven to send the promised Holy Spirit as **v. 33b** states:

And the Father, as he had promised, gave him [Jesus] the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today.

We see here, the beginnings of the NT understanding of the Trinity – the Father giving the Holy Spirit to the ascended Christ to pour out upon the newly formed Church so that they might actualize their salvation in everyday life, living as witnesses for Christ.

Furthermore, as the exalted Christ, seated at God’s right hand, He is in position to share in the complete defeat of God’s enemies at the day of final judgment, as stated in **vv. 34-35**:

“For David himself never ascended into heaven, yet he said, ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit in the place of honor at my right hand until I humble your enemies, making them a footstool under your feet.”’

CONCLUSION:

Why is the preaching of Christ in his fullness so important in accomplishing the “**soul purpose**” of the church today, i.e. making disciples of all nations? **Verse 36** says,

“So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!”

The word for Lord in Greek is “***kurios,***” which is used interchangeably in the NT with reference to both God the Father and the exalted Jesus. Jesus wasn’t simply human – He was also divine – co-equal with the Father. But Jesus is also the **Messiah**, “***Christos***” in Greek, the anointed one, who, in NT thought, was the bringer of the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. In Jewish understanding, the Messiah was the bringer of political freedom, which was to be actualized in their lives as citizens of this earth. But in Christian thought, Jesus is the Messiah who is a spiritual liberator, freeing people from their captivity to sin, granting them right standing with God, and bestowing upon them a place in God’s eternal Kingdom.

Peter’s sermon revealed Jesus Christ in his person and work. Peter wasn’t peddling a spiritual high, even though the events of Pentecost were certainly dramatic and dynamic. But he was proclaiming the uniqueness of a real person in history, whose words and actions validated his claim to be God’s Son, both Lord and Messiah. Many people today, respect and admire Jesus – an honest, sincere man of integrity who taught and exemplified the right way to live. For example, **Mahatma Gandhi**, the leader of India’s independence movement in the early 20th century, held Jesus in high esteem, taking from his life the teachings and principles of an ethical

and wise teacher and example, but rejecting his uniqueness as the Son of God. Biblically, that's not an option. In today's text, Peter presents Jesus as the unique, Son of God, who through his death, resurrection, and exaltation secured salvation for all who by faith received Him. This is the Jesus in whom we have believed, whose gospel we are called upon to share with others. May God grant us in our time, the opportunities and the boldness to take part in this, the Church's Soul Purpose. **A-men.**