

BONDS WHICH COULD NOT HOLD

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A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death:
because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.”*

Acts 2:24

PETER is here speaking of the risen Christ, whom God had raised up, “having loosed the pains of death.” So it is clear that, whatever those pains were, our blessed Lord Jesus Christ felt them—He felt them much more than His followers do, for in His death-agony, He was left without the sustaining help of God and the light of His Father’s countenance was hidden from Him. His death was a bitter one indeed, He took the deepest draughts of wormwood and gall, for He had to “taste death for every man,” whatever that mysterious expression may mean.

We must never imagine that there was about Christ’s death anything which took away from its bitterness. There was much that increased it, but nothing that diminished it. He was bound, as with strong cords, by the pains of death. All His powers were, for a time, fettered, He was held captive, and He did really die.

After death, He was buried. But there was this remarkable fact about His dead body—it saw no corruption. In the case of ordinary corpses, corruption begins very speedily. In a climate like that of Jerusalem, it is very quick in doing its work of dissolving the mortal fabric. But although our Lord did truly die, no taint of corruption came upon His precious body.

The reason for that was, first, because it was not necessary. Corruption is not a part of the sentence which Christ had to bear. The penalty of sin is death and that He bore to the utmost, but there was no necessity that He should also endure the usual consequences of death, and therefore, although He died, His flesh was not permitted to see corruption.

Again, as it was not necessary, so it would not have been seemly that our Lord Jesus Christ’s body should ever be tainted by decay as all other bodies are. It was not right that One who was so pure and holy as He was, One who stood in what theologians call hypostatical union with the Godhead—it is not easy to explain exactly what is meant by that term, but it refers to our Lord’s intimate and complete union with the Godhead—it would not have been comely that such a body as His should see corruption and therefore it was preserved from the defilement which death usually brings in its train.

And further, it was not even natural that the body of Christ should see corruption, for albeit that it was like our bodies in many respects, yet we must never forget that there was a vast difference even in His birth. Through the immaculate conception of our Lord, no taint of sin was in His nature—by a mysterious overshadowing which we must not attempt to understand—“that holy thing” which was born of the virgin was truly “the Son of God”—“holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” And as there was no original taint about that sacred body, so there was never afterwards a single action, or even thought, by which its chaste and perfect purity could have been defiled.

If our first parents had never sinned, it would not have been necessary for these bodies of ours to die and to become corrupt. And in taking our place and suffering in our stead, there did come upon Christ the necessity that He should die, but there was no natural necessity that His dead body should become

corrupt, and it did not pass into a state of decay, for it was not the will of God that His soul should be left in Hades or that His holy body should see corruption.

While it is quite true that Christ is made in all things like unto His brethren, yet there is always some point of distinction to indicate that, although He is our Brother, He is “the first-born among many brethren,” “the chiefest among ten thousand,” and if others are lovely, “He is altogether lovely.” So, although He really died and His body was laid in the tomb as the dead usually are, yet, inasmuch as it was preserved from corruption, it is marked out as being above and different from all the rest.

I. I am going now to speak upon the fact mentioned in the text, that IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE THAT THE BONDS OF DEATH SHOULD HOLD OUR LORD.

God raised Him up, “having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.”

Why was it impossible that the bonds of death should hold Christ? There are several reasons. The first is that *Christ had in Himself the inherent power to die and to live again*. I will not enlarge upon this truth, but simply give you our Lord’s own words concerning it, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”

Now, in the realms of the dead, before that time, there had never been seen any person who had the inherent power to take up his life again. Neither had there ever been one there who had possessed the inherent power to lay down his life when he pleased, for no mere man has ever been the absolute master of his own life—so that our Lord Jesus was the first who ever entered the portals of the tomb bearing within Himself the power to rise again whenever He pleased.

Next, *the dignity of His person* rendered it impossible that He should be held by the cords of death, apart from the consent of His own will, for though Jesus Christ was truly human—and let that blessed fact never be forgotten—yet His humanity was in so close an alliance with the Godhead that, though we do not say that the humanity did really become divine, yet, “Jesus Christ himself” altogether is divine, and is to be worshipped and adored in the completeness of His blessed person.

And therefore, that flesh, which He took upon Himself for our sake, was lifted up, exalted, ennobled, by being taken into mysterious unity with His Deity. It could not be that a body in which dwelt the fullness of the Godhead could be held by the bonds of death—He who slept in Joseph’s tomb was the Son of God. It was He who is without beginning of days or end of years, He with whom JEHOVAH took counsel when He laid the foundations of the heavens and built all worlds, for “without him was not anything made that was made.”

It was not, therefore, possible that He should be held by the bonds of death. Marvelous condescension, not human weakness, brought Him into the sepulcher—it was by His own free will that He was laid in the tomb, and consequently, He had but to exert His royal prerogative and He could rise again from the dead whenever He pleased.

Those two reasons might be sufficient to prove the assertion I made concerning our Lord, but I want you to notice, with delight, a third one. It was not possible that the dead Christ should be held by the bonds of death any longer than the third morning *because His redeeming work was done*. Remember—and oh! how well some of you know it, and how gladly do you welcome it!—that the reason why Jesus died was because He took the sin of His people upon Himself and being found in the sinner’s place, He had to suffer the sinner’s doom, which was death. But after He had endured the penalty, that is, after He had died and remained the appointed time in the tomb, how could He be held any longer in the grave?

After He had said, “It is finished,” and after the predestinated hours for a full examination of His work before the throne of God had passed, why should He be detained any longer? He was the Hostage for our debt, but when the debt was paid, who could keep Him in durance vile? Having borne the penalty, He was free forever and so, as Paul writes, “Christ, being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.”

In that He has satisfied all the claims of the law of God, what hand can arrest Him, what power can hold Him captive? He died for our sins, but He rose again for our justification, and His rising proved that all His people were accounted righteous in the sight of God. It was not possible, while there was a just God in heaven, that Christ should remain in the tomb. As His work was done, justice demanded that He should be let go—

“And now both the Surety and sinner are free.”

In the next place, it was not possible that Christ should remain in the tomb because *He had His Father’s promise that He should not*. I have already reminded you that David, speaking by inspiration, had said, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades” (the abode of departed spirits) “neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” That promise must be kept, so it was not possible that Christ should remain in the grave beyond the appointed period. Indeed, this was part of the Father’s purpose and plan, and an essential part of the great work of the redemption of His elect—that He who died should rise again. And what is in JEHOVAH’s plan and purpose, none shall ever gainsay. When He opens the door, no man is able to shut it, and where He shuts up, no man can possibly open.

Even Nebuchadnezzar, when he came to his right mind, said concerning the Most High, “None can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” So, when the Father had purposed and decreed that His Son, Jesus Christ, should not be held any longer by the bonds of death, it was not possible for Him to be detained.

Remember, too, dear friends, that there is a fifth reason for Christ’s deliverance, that is to be found in *the perpetuity of His offices*. You scarcely need for me to remind you that our Lord Jesus Christ was a Priest, but not after the order of the Aaronic priests, for they died and there was an end of them so far as their priesthood was concerned. But to Christ it was said, “Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.”

But a man cannot be a priest when he is dead. Therefore, since Christ’s is a Melchisedec priesthood, He “is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.” And in order that He might have that endless life, it was necessary that He should rise from the dead—His Melchisedec priesthood required it.

Next, Jesus was King as well as Priest. You know what sort of a King He was, for it is written, “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever.” Now Christ must reign. It is also written that “He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet.” But a dead king cannot reign and therefore, Christ must rise from the tomb. He must have death under His feet, for death is one of His enemies. But if He had not risen from the dead, He would have been under the feet of death, and that could never be. So that both His priestly and kingly offices required that He should rise from the grave.

Ay, and so did His office as our Redeemer, for when He undertook to become our next of kin and to redeem us, it was essential that He should continue to live, or else that ancient cry of the patriarch Job would not have remained true, “I know that my redeemer liveth.” Therefore, He must rise from the dead. I cannot stay to go further into this argument, but if you will think over it yourselves, you will see that because Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, and today, and for ever”—because each of His offices is everlasting, ordained of God in perpetuity—therefore He must rise from the dead.

But to come to the close of this part of our subject, it was not possible, *in the very nature of things*, for Christ to be held by the bonds of death. If He had been, think what the consequences to us would have been, for, first, we should have had no assurance of our own resurrection. The blessed hope that those who have been called away from us and whose bodies we have committed to the earth, shall rise again, would have been without any substantial foundation. “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.”

When you get the first fruits of a harvest, you feel certain that the rest of it will be garnered in due time. So Christ has risen as the first of a great host and we thus have an assurance which otherwise we could not have had, but which is essential to the comfort of Christians.

Only imagine what would have been the consequences to us if that assurance had not been ours. There would have been no evidence of our justification. I might have said, "Yes, Christ took my debt, but how do I know that He paid it? Christ bore my sins, but how do I know that He put them away?" So, if He had never risen from the dead, we should have had no proof that we were justified.

Then, too, if He had never risen and gone up to heaven in His human body, we would not have had anyone to take possession of heaven on our behalf. Now we have "a man in possession." We have a wondrous Representative before the throne, who has taken seizin and grip of the divine estates. What a joy it is to us to know that He is there to represent us before God!

Further, if Christ's body had remained in the grave, there could have been no reign of Christ, and no sitting down at the right hand of God as there now is. He would have been in heaven in the same respect as He is here as God, but there would have been no visible appearance of the representative Man, and the once-crucified Redeemer—and the ransomed ones could not have sung, "For thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood," for He would not have been there to hear the song. They might have recollected the sacrifice on Calvary, but He, as the Lamb that had been slain, wearing the marks of His priesthood and death, would not have been there.

II. Now I pass on to my second observation, which is that, AS CHRIST COULD NOT BE HELD BY THE BONDS OF DEATH, HE COULD NOT BE HELD BY ANY OTHER BONDS.

If He was more than a match for death, who or what shall ever be able to stand against Him? Death, the slaughterer of all mankind, before whom kings and princes, as well as the meanest of their subjects, lie prostrate in the tomb—death, before whom giants bend as a rush sways to and fro in the wind—even death is vanquished by Christ. He is the destroyer of destruction, and the death of death.

Then what power can possibly stand in opposition to Him? I want to cheer you, dear friends, in these dark and evil days, with a strong belief in our great Master's omnipotence and invincible might. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. With such a hero as He is to lead us on, victory is sure, however stern may be the conflict.

Think, for a few minutes, how many things have tried to bind the Christ of God and to overthrow His righteous rule. At first, and even until now, *old established error* has assailed the truth of God. What fools some people thought that those few fishermen were when they imagined that they could upset the firmly-established Judaism of the chosen people and the deeply ingrained idolatry of other nations.

The systems of the heathen were beautiful with art, adorned with poetry, intensely lascivious, and they had a tremendous power over the popular mind. If we had lived in those days and had been unbelievers who had seen those fishermen start out to preach, we would have said to them, "Go home with you! Do you think you are ever going to overthrow the philosophies of Plato and Socrates, and all the reverence for the gods and goddesses of Greece and Rome?" Ah, but from their deep foundations, that little band of men plucked up by the very roots those old idolatries, for Christ could not be held in bondage by them.

Then there came another period, in which men thought themselves exceedingly wise, and the *wisdom of this world* set itself in array against the Gospel of Christ, even as it does today. But He who was Victor over death can never be defeated by the Academy. Think not, beloved, that the most learned fools can be a match for Him who overcame death itself. When Christ's cause was at the lowest, ebb—when He Himself was dead and all His disciples were scattered—yet even then He snatched the crown from the hands of the skeleton king and won a complete victory over him. Do you think that He, who is Wisdom Incarnate, does not know how the wise men and the scribes of today jest and jeer at Him? Yet there is no philosopher who can bind the Christ any more than Samson could be bound by the green withs of the Philistines.

Next, there came a time when men tried to bind up the kingdom of Christ with *the bonds of ignorance*. They took away the Bible from the people, they concealed the Gospel in the Latin tongue, and the nations were steeped in midnight darkness. Yet Christ could not be bound, even then. He had only to call Wycliffe, and Huss, and Jerome, and Luther, and Calvin, and Melancthon, and Zwingli,

and very soon they let men know that Christ could not be held in the bonds of the Pope. The Conqueror of death was not to be vanquished by any mortal man, whoever he might be.

Since then we have come to times in which *wealth, and rank, and fashion, and prestige* are all against the Gospel. But what matters it? Nowadays the multitudes pour their scorn upon righteousness and call it “cant and hypocrisy,” which is really a defense of that which is right and true. And Satan is casting a fatal spell over the professing church itself, so that it is getting worldly and is giving up its primitive simplicity.

Sometimes I am inclined to sit down and weep and grieve as I see how sadly the battle seems to go against us today. We seem to be losing ground instead of gaining the victory. But will I wring my hands in despair? God forbid! “The Strength of Israel will not lie,” neither shall His cause fail. Let men forsake Him if they will, or let them come out armed against Him if they dare—His kingdom shall still stand fast, for He must reign—and as death cannot bind Him, nothing else can. The pleasure of the Lord must prosper in His hands, therefore in patience possess your souls.

Go on quietly witnessing for Christ and if you do not see the rulers of the nations converted to Christ, and the great and learned men bowing humbly before Him, remember that it was never so, and is never likely to be so. Take care that you remain steadfast in faith in the Eternal, and all shall be well with you.

III. Now, in closing my discourse, there is a truth of God upon which I wish to insist with great earnestness. It is this—**AS CHRIST COULD NOT BE HELD BY THE BONDS OF DEATH, IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO KEEP IN BONDAGE ANYTHING THAT BELONGS TO HIM.**

You recollect that when Pharaoh told Moses that the men among the children of Israel might go into the wilderness to offer sacrifice, he said that they must leave their little ones behind. But Moses would not accept that condition. The next time Pharaoh said, “Go ye, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your little ones also go with you.” But Moses answered, “Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the LORD our God. Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind.”

All that was of Israel was to go with Israel—and that is still our Master’s will and way. “Where I am,” says He, “there shall My people be also. If I am in the grave, they must be in the grave, too, buried with Me. If I rise, they also shall rise, for I will not rise without them. And if I go to heaven, I will not go without them.” This is our joy, and with dear old Rowland Hill we can sing,

*“And this I do find, we two are so joined,
He’ll not be in glory, and leave me behind.”*

Now, my friend, where are you—you *who are struggling to get to Christ*? You are somewhere in this place, I verily believe. You have been resolving to find Christ and you have really put your trust in Him. It is a very poor little trust as yet, and no sooner have you begun to think seriously about divine things, than you are in great trouble. There are your old sins and you wonder how you will ever get rid of the guilt of former years.

Ah! my dear hearer, if you fully trust in Christ, your old sins shall vanish away through His precious blood. They are bonds that cannot hold a soul for whom Christ has died. “Oh, but there are also my old habits,” says one, “my tendency to do what I have been doing for years. ‘Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?’ How then shall I, who have been accustomed to do evil, learn to do well?”

Put your trust in Christ and those old habits shall not be able to hold you. They may, perhaps, take some time to break, but they shall all be broken and you shall be set free. Christ could not be held by the bonds of death, neither shall you, who truly trust Him, be held by the bonds of habit.

Possibly you say, “my old companions get round me and they worry me to go back to them.” Let them worry you as much as they like—but if you trust in Christ, God will give you grace to set your face

like a flint against them, and you shall be a bolder and braver soldier of Christ because they oppose you. Perhaps it is better for you to be persecuted than to be allowed to live too easily.

The other day I put some primroses in my conservatory. Those that were left out in the open to endure the cold windy nights, bloomed splendidly—but those that were in the warmer atmosphere did not get on nearly so well. There are some Christians that are like the primrose—they need a little cold weather and do not get on so well where it is too warm. The Lord sends you opposition to make you all the stronger. But the bands of the wicked cannot hold you—break loose from them, I pray you, through the power God gives you by His grace.

“Ah,” you say, “but Satan himself breaks in upon me.” Very likely he does, but just resist him, steadfast in the faith. Possibly he is throwing blasphemies into your mind, injecting evil thoughts which you never had before. But if a thousand devils were to bind you thus with cords, so that you could not move hand or foot, yet, depend upon it, you shall slip out of the cords and come into perfect liberty—for all the devils in hell cannot hold a soul that belongs to Christ—and you do belong to Him if you truly trust Him.

Perhaps I am also speaking to *some child of God who has fallen into great trouble*. You are an old Christian and yet you have got into a sad scrape. You were never in such a condition before, and you seem to be bound with the cords of trouble after trouble—as if they were tightly knotted around you so that you could not get loose. There are also the cords of depression of spirit and they sometimes cut very painfully, and hold you bound like a poor captive. Perhaps also the devil, as well as your own depression, has tied you up. There is a diabolical temptation that has come to you—you are even afraid that you are not a child of God at all—and you begin to doubt everything. You were never before bound as you are now—you seem to be thrust into the inner prison and your feet made fast in the stocks.

If so, I believe that God has sent me to do to you as the angel did to Peter. You know that the angel went to Peter, when he was asleep in the prison, and smote him on the side. Well, I cannot get near enough to you to do that, so you must take it as done. Then what did the angel do to Peter?—He raised him up, his chains fell off his hands, and the angel said to him, “Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did.” Then the angel said, “Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.” And Peter did so, and he walked through the first and the second ward of the prison.

At last they came to the iron gate leading into the city—that great gate that needed half-a-dozen men to open it, and Peter was surprised to see it open of its own accord. He never saw anything like that before—and he soon found himself with the cool night air playing on his forehead, and he was a free man again.

All the Herods and all the devils cannot shut up a man who trusts in God. So, my friend, you will come out of your prison again. You are like a cork in the water—men may press you below the surface, but you are bound to come to the top again. You know what Haman planned for Mordecai—he meant to hang him up on the high gallows that he had erected. He was not satisfied with that, for he intended to also kill all who belonged to the same race as Mordecai. He meant that not a Jew should be allowed to live, but when his plans could not be carried out as he intended, his wise men and his wife said to him, “If Mordecai is of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast began to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him.” And so it came to pass—for there swung Haman on the gallows that he had erected for the execution of Mordecai.

My dear friends, there may be a Haman plotting against you—leave him alone. If he is making the gallows, let him finish them—they will come in for himself in due time. If you belong to Jesus Christ and if you belong to the seed of the believers, before whom Satan has begun to fall, he will never prevail against you, but you will overcome him, for you must reign with Christ forever, for He Himself has said so.

Finally, beloved, there is a part of Christ’s redeemed possession that is under mortgage at present. It is not yet delivered from the bond that holds it. What part is that? It is *this poor body—these bones, and this flesh and blood*—for although “the Spirit is life because of righteousness,” the body is still “dead

because of sin.” And soon, that poor body of yours, unless Christ shall come first, will see corruption and mold, and go back to dust. But mark this, as I have already said—Christ will not leave any fragment of His people in the hands of the enemy. He will not leave any portion of His people—no, not so much as a bone of them—under the dominion of death. The hour shall come when the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised. And as the soul has been redeemed, so shall the body also enter into the fullness of the joy of adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body.

We have buried many of the godly. There is many a *Campo Santo* round about this great city, where sleep the pious dead. And we have wept as we have committed them to the silent clay. But they are not lost—not one of them is lost. No baby, chosen of God to see heaven ere it saw much of the world, no man or woman in middle life, taken from the midst of the conflict, no grey-headed man, who leaned upon his staff for very age, and came to the grave like a shock of corn to the garner—there shall not one of them be lost, nor an eye, nor a foot, nor a hand of any one of them—yea, and the very hairs of their head are all numbered. The Lord has taken an inventory of all that He has bought with His precious blood, and He will have it all—not merely the souls and spirits of His people, but their bodies, too.

Who is to stop Him? Death knows His power and must yield to it. The strong man armed did keep the sepulcher, but a stronger than he came in and burst the bands of the tomb—and He came forth alive. And—

*“As the Lord our Savior rose,
So all His followers must,”*

for, as it is written, “A bone of him shall not be broken.” And it is not possible that they who are, as it were, the bones of His mystical body, should be holden by the bonds of death. O happy people, who belong to Christ! God grant that we may all be numbered amongst them, for His great name’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

ACTS 2

Verse 1. *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.*

The first lesson that we ought to learn from this Inspired record of what happened on the day of Pentecost is that we cannot expect a revival until there is unity among Christians. The Spirit of God will not visit and bless a church where there is strife. These disciples in Jerusalem “were all with one accord in one place,” “in prayer and supplication,” as the fourteenth verse of the previous chapter tells us.

2-6. *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together,—*

It was a great cause for surprise that men should be able to speak in foreign tongues without any previous instruction. The sound was heard outside the upper room where they were gathered—many pressed to the door to listen, and then went away to tell the strange news, and thus “the multitude came together,”—

6-7. *and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?*

“These men are Jews, and they come from a country district where the people are more than ordinarily illiterate. It is strange that they should be able to speak in foreign languages.”

8-11. *And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.*

“I think you, good sir, come from Parthia?” “I do, and I am astonished to hear these Jews speak the Parthian tongue.” “And you, sir?” “I am from Media, and I am amazed to hear them speak the language of the Medes. ’Tis strange, ’tis passing strange. ‘How hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?’”

12-13. *And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.*

They heard languages which they did not understand as well as those they did understand, so putting the worst possible construction upon the wondrous scene, they said that the speakers were drunk. It is the mark of a wicked mind when we are ready to attribute evil reasons in the lack of any other. Let us never do this, but always be ready to believe all the good of men that we can.

14-15. *But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.*

“It is but nine o’clock in the morning—you cannot really imagine that these men are drunk.” We might have thought it hardly worth while to take notice of such an observation, but Peter knew how to conciliate the crowd and to meet them upon their own ground. He began where they left off, but he went on to say what they little expected to hear.

16-21. *But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

Peter was speaking to a Jewish audience, so he began by quoting from the Old Testament. He was wise to win their attention by a long passage out of one of their own prophets. Now he comes nearer to his main point—

22-23. *Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:*

How boldly he puts the truth of God before his hearers! He charges home the murder of Christ upon them, yet he skillfully softens it by that introduction about “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” This is a very wonderful verse, because it shows us that everything is predetermined and foreknown by God. And yet when men do wickedly, they are responsible for it. “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”

There is no man in this world who knows where these two great truths of man’s free agency and divine predestination meet. There have been all sorts of schemes and inventions to make the two doctrines agree—and one set of men has denied one of the truths, and another set has denied the other—but do you nothing of the kind. Believe them both, yet do not pretend that you can reconcile them. It may be that, in another state, with larger capacity of mind than we at present possess, we shall be able to reconcile these two truths. I am not sure that we shall do so and I do not know that even angels can understand this great mystery. But it is a grand thing to exercise faith where we cannot comprehend

what is revealed to us. He who only believes what he can understand will have a very short creed, and soon he will have none at all—but he who believes what he cannot understand, simply because it is taught him by revelation from God, is the man who walks humbly with his God and he shall be accepted. I thank God for the mystery that conceals so much from us—where would there be room for faith if all things were as plain as A B C?

24-28. *Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.*

Note how Peter keeps to the Old Testament. Those quotations added force to his argument, for his hearers believed the ancient Scriptures to be the very voice of God and therefore, he gave them much of it.

Having quoted from the Psalms, Peter goes on to make this comment upon David's words.

29-32. *Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.*

Standing up with the eleven apostles, and with the greater company of disciples behind them, it was a noble utterance of Peter—"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses."

33. *Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.*

"This, which is a mystery to you, is the result of Christ's exaltation at the right hand of His Father."

34-36. *For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

There does not seem very much that is original or striking in that sermon. Certainly it is not a very sensational one. There is no fine metaphor in it, no garnishing of poetry, but in plain, simple language, Peter proves that it is Jesus Christ of whom David spoke in the Psalms. This was exactly what the people wanted to have proved—many of them were ready to receive such proof as that and they did receive it.

37-40. *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.*

That is to say, "Come out from among the ungodly; leave the world behind and escape for your lives."

41-47. *Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*

Oh, that we might have the same blessed experience! God grant it, for Christ's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—872, 309, 302

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