

Jesus Saves

The Point: Jesus saves all who trust in Him.

Session Passages: Acts 2:22-24,32-41

Acts 2:22-24

Connection to the Point: Salvation comes through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Context. The book of Acts, written about A.D. 61 from Rome, is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke by the same author. Although Luke is not named as the author in either text, we identify him by ancient tradition, by tracing Luke's part in the story, and from Paul's letters. Both books were written to someone named Theophilus ("Lover of God").

Fifty days after Jesus's resurrection and ten days after His ascension (Acts 1:9-11) was the Jewish festival of Pentecost in Jerusalem. On that day, the promised Holy Spirit fell on the disciples of Jesus causing them to speak in many different languages. The people there wanted to know what this meant (2:1-13). So, Peter delivered a message explaining how the Scriptures both foretold this outpouring of the Spirit and pointed to Jesus as Messiah (vv. 14-36).

Fellow Israelites (v. 22). After hushing the crowd and getting their attention by quoting Scripture (Joel 2:28-32), Peter identified with his audience addressing them directly as "fellow Israelites." Furthermore, what he was about to tell them had special relevance to the Jews gathered in Jerusalem from around the world.

Jesus of Nazareth (v. 22). In the ancient world, people were often identified by their hometowns. Luke used this phrase for Jesus throughout Luke-Acts. The term *Nazareth* means "branch." Nazareth was a small village in lower Galilee located about midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea.

Attested (v. 22). This word was used of someone who held a prominent position or office. It indicates that the individual had received accreditation from the proper authority to hold his rank. In this case, Jesus was accredited as the Messiah by God Himself by miracles, wonders, and signs.

"Miracles" are mighty acts of Jesus recorded in the Gospels. They testified to Jesus's inherent power to perform miraculous things. "Wonders" are events done through the power of God that cause the observers to marvel or stand in awe. The term translated "signs" usually precedes or follows the term for "wonders" (Matt 24:24; Mark 13:22; John 4:48; Acts 4:30). "Signs" are miracles which show evidence of divine authority. In Jesus's case, all three of these terms were applicable.

Delivered up according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge (v. 23). Jesus had been arrested, tried, and crucified by the Jewish leaders and the Roman authorities just over seven weeks earlier. However, they had done this not solely on their own, but according to God's determined plan. Jesus's death on the cross was a crucial part in God's preordained strategy for making salvation available to all those who will repent and place their faith in Jesus as Messiah. The apostle Paul wrote, "When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4-5).

In His omniscience, God both determined and foreknew the plan through which His Son's death would achieve salvation for humanity and restoration to all creation. However, in his words Peter was careful to balance divine purpose with human responsibility. While Jesus's death was a known and determined part of God's plan of redemption, this in no way absolved those who executed Jesus of their guilt.

Lawless people (v. 23). Peter proclaimed that his audience had used lawless people to do their dirty work. Lawless people nailed Jesus to a cross and killed Him. This was Jewish slang for Gentiles. The Romans carried out the death sentence using their most terrible method of capital punishment: crucifixion. So, Gentiles bore the guilt along with the Jews who had called for Jesus's death. Paradoxically, however, their evil deeds were used by God to achieve salvation for all who will repent and believe in the atoning work of Jesus.

God raised him up (v. 24). Here is the heart of the Christian gospel. Yes, Jesus was crucified and died for humanity's sins. But that was not the end of the story. Peter proclaimed that God raised Jesus from the dead. Scripture attributes Jesus being raised from the dead to both God the Father (Acts 2:32-33; Rom. 6:4; Gal. 1:1), to Jesus Himself (John 2:18-19; 10:18), and God the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:11).

Ending the pains of death (v. 24). The Greek can be more literally translated as "loosing him from the birth pangs of death." Through His resurrection God freed Jesus from the bonds of death. Jesus's resurrection demonstrated that death had no hold over Him and was a defeated foe (Rom. 6:9; see Rev. 20:14). Furthermore, while believers will physically die, death has no hold over them in the sense that through Jesus we have eternal life (1 Cor. 15:53-57).

Acts 2:32-36

Connection to the Point: Jesus is exalted as Lord.

God has raised (v. 32). In verses 25-28 Peter quoted a psalm of David (Ps. 16:8-11) wherein the psalmist declared the Lord "will not abandon me to Sheol [the realm of the dead]" (Ps. 16:10). Peter stated that David could not have been speaking of himself since he was still dead, and his tomb was in Jerusalem (Acts 2:29). But Peter applied David's words to the prophesied Messiah Jesus whom God raised from the dead. Jesus had fulfilled the prophecy of David. Peter reiterated the historical truth of his message, stating, "we are all witnesses of this."

Witnesses (v. 32) refers to eyewitnesses of an event who testify to its veracity. It also is the word from which the term "martyr" is derived. Paul noted that the risen Jesus, in addition to appearing to His apostles, "appeared to over five hundred brothers and sisters at one time" (1 Cor. 15:6).

Exalted to the right hand of God (v. 33). The Greek term for "exalted" means "to raise up and set on high." It was used in reference to honoring kings and other leaders. When used of God exalting Jesus, it refers to the highest level of glory.

The right hand of a king was regarded as the highest place of honor in his court. The term is often used in Scripture to describe a place of great honor in the heavenly throne room of God and is applied to Jesus after His resurrection and ascension (Matt. 26:64; Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69; Rom. 8:34). As he was being martyred, Stephen looked into heaven and "saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55-56). Jesus spoke of how those who humble themselves will be exalted, while those who exalt themselves will be humbled (Luke 14:11; 18:14). The term was also used by Jesus to describe His crucifixion ("lift up," John 8:28; see 3:14). Furthermore, the path to Jesus's exaltation was through His crucifixion.

The promised Holy Spirit (v. 33). Jesus had spoken to His disciples of the coming of the Holy Spirit during the Passover meal they shared on the night of His arrest and trial (John 14:15-17,26; 15:26; 16:7-15). After His resurrection, Jesus commanded His disciples to remain in Jerusalem awaiting "the Father's promise" (Acts 1:4-5,8).

Peter included all three of the Persons of the Trinity in his sermon. God the Father had raised Jesus, God the Son, from the dead and had exalted Him to the Father's right hand (2:32-33). After Jesus ascended to heaven, God the Father gave God the Son the privilege of bestowing "the promised Holy Spirit," God the Holy Spirit, on His followers (v. 33). Like an ocean wave of water pouring over them the God the Holy Spirit had flooded the disciples' hearts with joy and the miraculous ability to speak in different languages. The Jews in Jerusalem both saw and heard it for themselves.

Not David who ascended (v. 34). To further buttress his argument, Peter again appealed to King David, noting that it was not David who had been raised from the dead and "ascended into the heavens." "The heavens" refer to the place where God resides.

The Lord (v. 34). Peter again appealed to Scripture by quoting Psalm 110:1. "This is the declaration of the LORD to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.'" In the psalm, David used the name for God translated "LORD" (*YHWH*) and the more general name for a "Lord" (*adon*), one who has authority over another—in this case a reference to the Messiah.

Right hand (v. 34). Remember, the right hand was the place of greatest honor (v. 33). Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1 as a Messianic prophecy about Himself (Matt. 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42-43).

Footstool (v. 35). “The Lord” (God the Father) tells “my Lord” (Jesus) that He will remain at the Father’s side until the Father makes all Jesus’s enemies His footstool. A footstool was used for a king to rest his feet while sitting on his throne. God declared, “Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool” (Isa. 66:1; see Matt. 5:34-35).

Both Lord and Messiah (v. 36). Peter declared that while the Jews had crucified Jesus, God the Father had the final say. He made this Jesus both “Lord” (Phil. 2:9-11; equal with Yahweh) and “Messiah” (“Christ,” the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term for “Messiah,” both meaning “anointed one”). By raising Jesus from the dead and exalting Him to His right hand, God had demonstrated beyond any doubt that Jesus was the Jews’ long-awaited Messiah sent to redeem those who have faith in Him from their sin and give them new life in Christ.

Acts 2:37-41

Connection to the Point: Salvation comes as we repent and turn to Jesus.

Pierced to the heart (v. 37). The effect of Peter’s sermon on the crowd was profound. Luke noted the Jews were “pierced [cut, stabbed] to the heart.” Usually in Scripture the heart refers to the inner seat of a person’s spiritual and emotional life. The Jewish hearers realized they were guilty, not only of rejecting their promised Messiah, but of putting Him to death.

What should we do? (v. 37). In their desperation they cried out to Peter and the other apostles. This is the honest response of sinners discovering the truth of their condition and under conviction by the Holy Spirit. Jesus indicated that one of the Spirit’s tasks was to “convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment” (John 16:8). Unfortunately, many people resist the Spirit’s tugging and harden their hearts to His call.

Repent and be baptized, each of you (v. 38). Peter answered their pleas for help using two commands. First, he told them to repent. In the Greek, Peter’s command is a plural, second-person imperative verb: “repent, all of you!” While this term means “to change your mind,” it has a deeper connotation that should not be lessened. To repent is to change one’s life direction and turn away from sin and turn toward God.

The second command is to be baptized, a singular, third-person imperative verb: “be baptized each one of you.” “Baptized” means “to dip, submerge, or immerse.” Baptists and many other evangelicals understand this to mean a new believer should go completely beneath the water at baptism.

The name of Jesus Christ (v. 38). Peter emphasized how this baptism is different in kind from any other, such as that of John the Baptist or various Jewish rituals. It specifically signifies the individual has placed their full faith in Jesus Christ alone as Savior and Lord. Baptism is an important symbol of one’s new life in Christ.

Forgiveness of your sins (v. 38). Peter answered his hearers’ question. If they repented of their sins and put their faith in Jesus as their Messiah, they would be forgiven of their sins. They would also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit as the apostles and other believers had earlier that day.

Some churches interpret verse 38 to mean water baptism is a requirement for salvation along with repentance and faith in Christ. However, in the verse, “forgiveness of your [plural] sins” is the grammatical result of “you” [plural] repenting, *not* of “each one of you” [singular] being baptized. Paul also emphasized that baptism is not a requirement for salvation when he wrote to the believers at Corinth, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 1:17). Furthermore, in Luke–Acts forgiveness of sins is usually linked with either repentance (Luke 24:47; Acts 3:19; 5:31) or faith (Acts 10:43; 13:38-39; 26:18).

You and your children (v. 39). Peter reiterated the fact that the promise of the Holy Spirit and forgiveness of sins was for his Jewish listeners and their progeny. Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, therefore, His death, resurrection, and ascension had special relevance to that nation. They just needed to repent and believe in Him.

All who are far off (v. 39). The promise however was wider in scope than just the Jews gathered that day in Jerusalem and their descendants. It included those in distant lands, even Gentiles. It was based on the prophetic word Peter had quoted in his sermon: “Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (v. 21; see Joel 2:32).

As many as the Lord our God will call (v. 39). Salvation is the work of God drawing people to Himself through the Holy Spirit (John 6:44). But at the same time, those who are drawn are called to repent and place their faith in Christ. “Be saved” (Acts 2:40) is another direct command. The people’s decision to respond positively to Peter’s invitation was the way to make this happen. We are saved by grace through faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9) which also involves the willful choice to follow Christ as Savior and Lord.

Corrupt generation (v. 40). Jesus Himself had also characterized His generation much the same way. “An evil and adulterous generation demands a sign” (Matt. 16:4). “You unbelieving and perverse generation, how long will I be with you? How long must I put up with you?” (17:17). However, every generation of humanity is corrupt in the sense that all human beings are enslaved to sin (John 8:34; Rom. 3:23) and in need of the Savior (Rom. 6:6-23).

Accepted his message (v. 41). Peter’s sermon had its intended effect. Luke recorded that all who believed it and responded were baptized in Jesus’s name as instructed (v. 38). Luke also noted that about 3,000 new believers were added to the 120 already in Jerusalem that day (1:15).