

May 31st, 2020

Pentecost Part 5 I have set the Lord always before me

Friends, last week we looked at Acts 2: 22-24 under the heading, 'You yourselves know; and the realities of death'. After explaining that what Joel spoke of in Joel 2:28-32, (being fulfilled on that day), Peter then began to lay the blame of Jesus' death squarely at the feet of his hearers. I suggested that rarely do we ever really take personal ownership of our Lord's death. We think it is all of those 'bad people' out there who caused him to die! But no, we ourselves mocked Him, we beat Him, we condemned Him, and we drove the nails into His hands and feet and thrust the spear into His side. Yes, although we know all of the truth about Him we seek to cast responsibility for His death aside. As Adam and Eve did for their sin in the garden of Eden!

I explained that all of God's harsh dealings with His people were always to bring them to repentance. This was also Peter's goal. Acts 2:22 "Men of Israel listen to this: all of those things which you demanded, "miracles wonders and signs", with those very things Jesus "was accredited by God" "as you know." Yes, they were well aware of all the evidence and yet they crucified Him nonetheless! The miraculous and the spectacular do not a convert make.

John 21:25 tells us the things that Jesus did a whole world of books could not contain, and yet there was no revival. Yes, the people were responsible. Acts 2:23 "This man was handed over to you and with the help of wicked men you put him to death by nailing him to a tree." So the cross is our responsibility. Removing it from the gospel takes sin out of the message, even the very reason why Jesus had to come, the Salvation of our souls!

And I closed by saying that apart from God v24 there is "agony" in death and death has an eternal "hold" on us. It's only because of Jesus' death and resurrection have we been set free!

So now we resume our walk through Peter's life with Jesus: an ordinary man serving an extraordinary God. Pentecost part 5. Brothers and sisters, in Acts 2:25-35 Peter yet again applies God's Word to having been fulfilled in the coming, the death, the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus Christ. Those things were given His Royal seal with the coming of His Holy Spirit. And Peter begins to do this by applying Psalm 16:8-11 using King David's words. Verse 25 "I saw the Lord always before me" or as David himself put it "I have set the Lord always before me." Beloved, we can set so many things, (even gods we might say,) before us can't we? Our family, our friends, our finances, our recreation our retirement and a myriad of other things. But where do such things lead us and leave us? Well, may I suggest mostly to fleeting comforts and often, to anxieties, disappointments, despair and helplessness. And particularly so, when we consider our eternal souls!

So what should we set before ourselves? What should be in the forefront of our minds to guide us, to comfort us, and to give us peace for this life and hope for the next? Well, of course its not *what* but *who*. David spells this out for us. Verse 25 "I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand I will not be shaken." Oh dear friends, when we too "set the Lord always before us" what comfort and peace we can always lay hold of during times of trial and uncertainty. And perhaps even more to the point, not only is He at our right, but we would be at His left. It is not so much that *He is with us* but that *we are with Him*. What I mean is that "He is our help and stay" as the scripture says. And also that He "carries us on eagles wings."

Yes, “because of this I will not be shaken” David writes. There are many things which can shake our lives, even shake our faith. Many people have been shaken during these uncertain times. But “setting God before us, we will not be shaken.” David continues in verse 26: “therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope.” Can you see what he is saying? Because he has “set the Lord always before him” his “heart is glad.” It speaks of a contentment with his lot in life. There is a fullness in David's life which earthly things cannot provide. They are fleeting things, they are temporary things, and this life is far more important than just the here and now! He's saying, that not only does God fulfil me and sustain me in this life, but after I'm dead, my body also “will live in hope.” I say this is because it does seem that Peter has interpreted these words of David. In the Psalm David writes “my body will rest secure”, and so we do in the resurrection of our bodies in Jesus.

Yes, to “set the Almighty always before us” means that death no longer has that eternal ‘hold’ on us. It is no longer “agony” for us as we saw last week because as surely as Jesus is risen, so too we “rest secure” in the hope of our own resurrection. Look as David continues: “my body will also rest secure” (verse 27) “because you will not abandon me to the grave.” He saying that it is only through death the Almighty through Jesus will take us by the hand to be with him. No, God does not “abandon us to the grave” Brethren. Even when death`s shadow hangs heavy upon us and our life is coming to a close, with death`s door feeling so near, we are never alone.

Yes, in death, Jesus will take us by the hand and lead us to be where He is. Oh Beloved, what is the consequence of having “set God always before us”? David tells us in verse 28 “you have made known to me the paths of life.” Can you see? It's not only that we live but *how* we live that matters.

In His sermon on the Mount Jesus Himself elaborated upon these very things. Matthew 7:13-14 “enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few you find it.” Yes David says, “you have made known to me the paths of life.” And we know that Jesus is that path. “No one comes to the father except by me,” He said. John 14:6 “I am the way and the truth and the life.” Yes, “to set God always before us” is to you have Jesus “make known to us the paths of life.” And we know that Jesus is that path.

“You fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.” Yes, the things of which David spoke were eternal things. He was looking far beyond the here and now because he knew that this life was preparation for the next. Hebrews 11:10 “for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, who's architect and builder is God.” Yes the great king always had an eye to the eternal!

Brothers and sisters, let us now return to the context. And let us remember why Peter is using this Psalm in his declaration of who Jesus was: prophecy fulfilled whilst also pointing them to their responsibility of putting Him to death.

This is why I have left the second part of verse 27 until now. “Nor will you let your holy one see decay.” Let`s listen to Peter`s applying of Christ (and not David himself) to this part of the verse. Firstly, let`s remember that this is still the one sermon. Those thousands of people are still standing before him. Then verse 29: “Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the Patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day.” So what is Peter`s first point here? It is simply this: these things could not have been written about King David himself because David`s bones were still with them. They all knew that his tomb was there in Jerusalem.

So Peter says (I paraphrase) 'brethren, let's study the facts. You all know that Israel has been waiting for God's Holy One for over 1000 years since David died. But being inspired by the Holy Spirit, he spoke of things that were yet to come!' Friends, he spoke of Jesus. Look at his words in verses 30 to 31: he is saying that though David died there was something very special about him and the words which he spoke in Psalm 16:30 "But he was a Prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne."

And now we have Peter's explanation of the king's words verse 31: "seeing what was ahead he spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did His body see decay." So what is he telling them? Well it's that throughout Israel's whole history there is but One who defeated death. Only one who went into the tomb and broke the chains of death and its consequences of hell. Yes, only one which the power of death could not hold onto. Jesus body "did not decay", just as David prophesied, because He lives!

Friends, may I suggest that by now, those thousands would have been deathly silent and uneasy, as Peter's theological lesson cut deeply into their blood stained hearts. He'd already told them in verse 22 that "with the help of wicked men they had put Him to death by nailing Him to a tree." He has used Joel's prophecy as having been fulfilled on that day in the "pouring out of the Holy Spirit", and now, he's used David's prophecy concerning the Saviour whom they had killed, but has defeated death. Verse 32: "God has raised this Jesus to life and we are witnesses of that fact". Peter declares 'we've seen it all. But so have you. You saw the miracles, you saw the wonders, you saw the signs with your own eyes and yet you crucified the Lord of all creation. Examine yourselves this day. Do you think that you will be exempted of His death? Do you think that you will be accepted having murdered God's own Son? He will be your judge, this one whom you killed' (my paraphrase).

"Exalted to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear." "You wanted miracles", Peter says to them, 'you wanted wonders and you wanted signs, and all of these were given to you, and yet you still refused to believe. Well what you now hear and see is the greatest sign of all: that Jesus has been raised by God and has sat down at His right hand. He received from God which was promised through Joel and now these things are fulfilled in your hearing where does this all leave you?'

Brothers and sisters, let's now tie Peter's whole theological argument of proof together as to who Jesus was and is. Peter applies yet another prophetic Psalm concerning Him. He explains verses 34 to 35: "for David did not ascend to heaven and yet he said" (as he quotes Psalm 110:1) "The Lord said to my Lord: sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." Friends, it can be a bit confusing but we need to read these words of David's like this "God said to Jesus sit had my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

So in this moment of Holy Spirit inspired theological genius, this common fisherman has applied three separate prophecies spanning over 1000 years, to prove that this man Jesus was the very Son of God and that his hearers were all responsible for His death. What the hearers now heard with their ears and saw with their eyes was the King's very own seal upon all that He had done!

Brothers and sisters, it is very easy for us today to think to ourselves how could these people have been witnesses to such things and yet still remain so hardened to Jesus' message of 'Come'? Yet as I said last week, the miraculous and the spectacular do not a convert make. It is simply evidence of how black and hard the unsaved soul is. Of how incapable we are of choosing that which is upright and righteous in the sight of God. Were we there physically, we would have been no different. And of course spiritually, *we were*, in effect there. Again, as we saw last week we are the ones who

mocked him, we are the ones who cried out 'Crucify Crucify', we beat Him, we drove the nails into His hands and feet and we thrust that spear into His side. Yes we all have blood on our hands dear friends. Yet what was His response to it all? This son of man this son of God? "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

As Peter draws his gospel message to a close, having spoken with the inspiration, fire and boldness of the Holy Spirit in his heart and soul, he lands the final blow. Verse 36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ"

Brothers and Sisters, since we too are responsible for the death of our Lord Jesus, to have His Name always before us, in our hearts and minds is to examine ourselves daily.