

Can We Save Ourselves ?

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[0 : 0 0] this. Verse 22, 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. This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified.

And killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

And then if you go to verse 36, Peter begins to sum up what he's been saying, because the in-between bit was him just showing how it couldn't have applied to King David or anyone like that. This prophecy relates to Jesus and nobody else fits the description. And so he says at verse 36, let all the house of Israel, therefore, know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

now, when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, brothers, what should we do?

And Peter said to them, repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins.

[1 : 4 6] And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

And with many other words, he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, save yourselves from this crooked generation. So those who received his word were baptized and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul.

And many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts. Praising God and having favor with all the people.

[3 : 0 7] And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. And I'm very grateful for their lovely selection.

So here we go. So Peter, Peter is a man on fire here. Try and remember, this is the Peter who just a few weeks before denied having anything to do with Jesus.

He denied him three times. He denied him with curses on his lips that hadn't crossed his lips in years. It was like Peter reverted to nature to try and defend himself from any possible association with Jesus.

But this is a different Peter. This is a Peter filled with the spirit of the living God. God is in the transformation business.

The heart of the gospel is transformation. If we are not being changed by the activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives, then what we've got is religion.

- [4 : 22] It's not Christianity. Christianity is about change. God takes us and says, I love you too much to leave you as I found you.
- I'm going to change you. I'm going to make you into the likeness of my son. That's God's plan for each one of us. And so Peter says to these, to the gathered crowd, this awesome crowd, you need to bear in mind that Peter must have known the danger of opening his mouth to say these things to that particular crowd.
- Because all through that crowd were the Jewish leaders, the religionists, who only a few weeks before were rejoicing that they had got rid of the thorn in their flesh.
- They had got rid of Jesus of Nazareth. And then Peter stands up to address the crowd.
- He says, Men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God. Let's just hold that for a minute. A man attested to you by God.
- [5 : 41] What is he saying? He's using the language of the courtroom here, isn't he? And he's saying, when Jesus of Nazareth was on trial, the witness for the defense was God.
- How did you manage to find him guilty when God was the witness for the defense? How did you achieve that?
- With mighty works and wonders, God attested this man to you.
- The signs that God did through him. Remember Nicodemus came to Jesus at night and he said, we, meaning he was representing a group of people, an opinion within the Jewish council.
- We know that no one could do the things that you do unless God were with him. So, here they were, within their own numbers, within the numbers of those who condemned Jesus to the cruelest possible, cruelest imaginable death, were men and probably some women who knew that he had come from God because the evidence was there for any reasonable minded person to see.
- [7 : 10] And he says, you yourselves know this. You know. He's appealing to what their consciences already know. They can deny the evidence of their eyes they can deny the testimony of other people.
- They can deny the words that even come from the lips of the Son of God. But the one thing they can't argue with is their own conscience. You yourselves know.
- You crucified and killed this man by the hands of lawless men. You didn't even do it yourself. You rigged the whole thing to make sure that other lawless people, people that you considered beneath contempt, would do the job for you.
- But God raised him up, he says, loosing the pines of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it. We're going to look at that in a minute.
- Why was it not possible for him to be held by death? It's a big question and it's got a big answer. Let all the house of Israel therefore know at verse 36, know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.
- [8 : 34] Let's unpack just that one sentence. Who is it that needs to know? How do they need to know it? What is it they need to know? The whole house of Israel needs to know this.
- Jesus had even said once to a Canaanite woman who came, the Syrophoenician woman who came with a daughter who was desperately sick and she asked Jesus to heal her.
- And Jesus said, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And he said something that to our mind seems quite appalling.
- He said, it's not right to take the children's bread and throw it to their dogs. And this woman had such faith, let me put it into modern language what she actually said to him.

What this woman said to Jesus is astonishing. She said, well if I'm to be treated like a dog throw me some crumbs because even your crumbs will be enough to set my daughter free.

[9 : 38] Even your crumbs, that's all I need, just a crumb and my daughter will be okay. That's the faith this woman had in Jesus. I don't care what you say about me.

I don't care how you treat me. I don't care if you think that we people are just dogs compared to the Jews. I don't care about any of that. I just know who you are.

I know what you're capable of doing. Just throw me a crumb. It will be enough. And Jesus was blessed at the woman's faith.

God gave the Jews this gospel to give to the world. This apparent favoritism on the part of God is not favoritism. We need to get rid of earth's ways of thinking when we think about God.

God doesn't fit our categories. He's not a God who has favorites. He's not a God who chooses people and rejects others out of hand as though he's just kind of fickle and doesn't really care about some people and cares about others.

[10 : 46] Not like that at all. What's actually happening here is that when God chose the Jews he chose them from the world for the sake of the world.

he chose them he took them out of the world to put them into the world as light for the world. That was the whole point of the choosing. And most Jews today have still not caught that.

They still don't see it. But the day will come. So who needed to know the whole house of Israel needed to know? And how did they need to know it?

It says you need to know for certainty. And the word in the original is asphaltos. It's the word from which we get the word asphalt.

Asphalt like the tarmac you put on the roads. He's really saying the same word is used there's a Greek translation of the Old Testament that describes Genesis 34 about the town of Shechem when it was shut up and feeling secure it was attacked by Jacob's sons.

[12 : 01] Just at the very point where the city felt it was really secure everything was going perfectly it was all just going according to plan and everything was secure they felt like they were standing in a solid place.

That's the same word that's used there in the old Greek translation of the Old Testament. this is truth that will bear your weight.

This is what Peter is saying to them. Let all the house of Israel know this truth and you need to this is how you need to know it. You need to know it for certain. You need to know that this is a truth that will bear your weight.

You can run a fleet of buses over it or a bunch of trucks because it will take the strain. This is truth that won't crumble under pressure. you need to know this for certain.

God has made him Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified. Peter's laying it on here. He's really laying it on. So what is it they actually need to know?

[13 : 07] They need to know that God's verdict about this man because you need to bear in mind that the witness for the defense is also the judge. now just imagine imagine you're in a courtroom and the the the prosecution has presented their case and then somebody turns and says now who's the witness for the defense and the judge comes down off the bench and gets into the witness box to speak on behalf of the defendant.

That's what happened here. It's God himself who's the witness for the defense. He's the one who attests that Jesus of Nazareth is none other than his own son.

So this is what they need to know. They know that they passed a verdict on Jesus but they need to know that God passed the opposite verdict and they need to know that for certain.

They need to know they got it badly wrong. They need to know that the crowd is wrong.

That God's presence and power are clearly with the minority. The majority vote in this case was seriously out of step with God. You criminalized him says Peter but God lionized him.

[14 : 34] He's the lion of Judah. He's the Messiah. He's the king. He's the one who was prophesied and expected. He came and when he came you didn't know him.

You didn't recognize him and you hated him and you killed him. He's your Lord. He's your king. He's your Messiah.

Now judge for yourselves. This is the effect of what Peter is saying to the crowd. In God's eyes, judge for yourselves. In God's eyes, where is the true criminality?

That's why they were cut to the heart. Because once you suddenly realized that God has spoken in defense of the man that you criminalized, you suddenly realized that in the eyes of God, you're the criminal.

The true criminals were the crowd. Most of the world today is still wrong about Jesus Christ. People with the help of the media look at the official church, the one that's always quoted in the newspapers and the TV and the social media, and they think that the Christian religion has had its day.

[15 : 46] They think it's on the way out. Well, there's a lot of church out there that has the name of being Christian, but it's nothing more than empty religion. It's not Christianity.

It's just empty religion. These people get some time that they grab in front of a camera or some microphones, and what do they do with that precious opportunity?

Do they tell the world about Jesus Christ? No, they talk about global warming and carbon footprints. Instead of trying to save sinners, save souls, they want to save the planet, which is reserved for fire on the day of judgment, because there will be a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

Have you any idea how many people die, and enter eternity during a five-minute clip where someone is talking about saving the planet? Do you know how many people die during that time?

About 540 every five minutes. That's about 57 million souls a year who pass into eternity, and they don't have another opportunity for salvation.

[17 : 04] And we use that precious five minutes to talk about carbon footprints, when we should be telling the world, be reconciled to God. You need a savior.

We're standing on asphalt. If we're believers in Jesus Christ today, we're standing on a surface that will bear our weight forever. It will never let us down.

It will never crumble. Jesus ever lives. And when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, brothers, what should we do?

You see, they were cut to the heart because their conscience was in agreement with God. You know, that's a strong point, brothers and sisters. If you're concerned about folks in your family or in the street that you meet who are without hope and without God in the world, if you want to preach the gospel to them, there's one big thing that gets you off to a flying start.

They've got within them an ally of the living God. They've got a conscience. They know they need forgiven. They might have buried it over the years.

[18 : 25] They might have found a thousand ways of describing their sin and sanitizing it and making it look like something else or calling it something else. But there's a place within every single unbeliever called conscience that they can't argue with because it agrees with God.

And you know, Peter's response to the crowd when they said, brothers, what shall we do? Peter's response is absolutely staggering. it's an amazing answer that he gives them.

What has he done? He's just been talking to people who masterminded the death of the Son of God, who masterminded the mock trial, the handing over to the Romans, the release of Barabbas.

These are people who said the criminal should be let out of jail and the good man should be put in jail. Does that seem familiar?

Is that not quite modern when you think of it? When you think of all that's happening in our society today? Is it not the case today that good is the new evil and evil is the new good?

[19 : 48] Are we not seeing examples of that all over the place? But they said, give us Barabbas. Here's a man who was a killer. Let's get him out of jail and let's put this man who's done nothing but good, let's put him in jail and let the Romans put him to death in the cruelest possible way.

These are the people that Peter is speaking to. These are the people who are now saying, brothers, what shall we do? We're cut to the heart here. What do we do? We're clearly on the wrong side of God.

What do we do? And Peter makes the most astonishing response. He says, let's listen to this carefully. Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins.

And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now, this is forgiveness from who?

From the judge who found the defendant not guilty. This is forgiveness from God whose son was criminalized and cruelly tortured to death.

[21 : 09] death. This is forgiveness from God to the very people who have most offended him, who are least deserving of his kindness and his mercy.

mercy. You see, he said once to Moses, he said, I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy.

What did he mean by that? God said, Moses, don't ever try to put me in a box and think, I can forgive that one and show mercy to that one, but not to him or not to her, because their behavior is so appalling.

I'm bound by the nature of their behavior to withhold forgiveness, because God is not bound in any way. God's mercy is not bound in any way.

God doesn't have limitations placed upon him by your behavior or mine. And so God can look at the appalling behavior of the people in this crowd and still hold out mercy to them.

[22 : 12] There is no one beyond hope. absolutely no one beyond hope. I tell you now, on the authority of God's word and God's character, there will be some surprises in heaven when we get there and discover some of the folk who found forgiveness and salvation.

And we never would have believed that they could ever receive God's kindness. God is not in a box.

God doesn't say, well, Agnes has put up with David for 51 years, so it's time I showed some kindness to her. And David, well, he's made her life miserable for 51 years, so I can't forgive him.

God doesn't look at it that way. God can show mercy to me as quickly as to Agnes. Because God is God. God is love and he only ever acts in love and for love and through love.

This is our God. And God is saying to these hideous sinners in the crowd who murdered his son, you can have forgiveness in the name of the son you put to death.

[23 : 36] You can have my mercy here and now. be baptized in his name. What does that mean?

You will receive the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? Let's, let's, let's look at these things. What does it mean to be baptized?

Does it, does it mean, does it mean that we're, that we're better than other people? Well, baptism is just simply a way of saying, I completely and utterly identify with the one in whose name I'm being baptized.

I'm going to do a 180 degree turn here because there are lots of people in this crowd who still think that he's a criminal. But I'm doing a 180 degree turn right now. I'm convicted by the Holy Spirit and as far as I'm concerned now, I stand with Jesus.

And if that means that I get put to death as well, so be it. But my baptism is my signal to the whole public crowd that I stand with Jesus.

[24 : 49] He's not the criminal in this thing. I was the criminal and he took my place. And Peter says you can receive the Holy Spirit.

You know, the Holy Spirit doesn't come to dwell in you and me as believers because we're clean.

He doesn't look at our house and say it's lovely and clean. I'll come and dwell in this. He says this house needs cleaning. So I'll just move in and get to work. That's why God fills us with the Holy Spirit.

That's why these sinful people, these murderous people were offered forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Because God was saying when I forgive your sin, that's the start of it.

That cleans your ledger. That clears out the debt that you owed to me. But that doesn't make you clean. Now we're going to start the business of making you clean.

[25 : 59] And I'll give you the Holy Spirit to make you holy. Holy. Jesus told the story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and who scorned and mocked everyone else.

He said two men went up to the temple to pray. One of them was a Pharisee. The other was a despised tax collector, collaborator with the Romans. The Pharisee stood by himself and he prayed like this.

He said, I thank you God that I'm not a sinner like everyone else. I don't cheat. I don't sin. I don't commit adultery. I'm certainly not like that tax collector.

I fast twice a week and I give you a tenth of my income. But the tax collector, he stood at a distance.

He wouldn't even lift his eyes up to heaven. When he was praying, he just beat his chest in sorrow. Oh God, be merciful to me.

[27 : 03] I'm a sinner. And Jesus said, do you know who went home justified in the eyes of God? Not the Pharisee, not the guy who expected God to be impressed, but the man who was honest with God and said, I deserve to be punished.

I deserve your anger. Forgive me. Have mercy on me. And he was the one who went home justified in the eyes of God.

Because God's kindness is like that. God's kindness is like the Pharisee. The Pharisee had set himself a standard and he lived up to it, but he had convinced himself that God would be impressed with his performance.

He didn't need God and he didn't need a savior. The tax collector, on the other hand, was a realist. And he saw, and this is what he saw, he said, God, be merciful to me.

I'm a sinner. Be merciful to me. He saw that it was going to take the mercy of God to clean him up. And he went home justified in the eyes of God.

[28 : 16] There is no exaggeration possible for the horror of sin. You look at Calvary and you see exactly how God feels about sin. Jesus was so horribly, cruelly tortured that he no longer looked human.

He was so disfigured. The wages of sin is death. If we die, the reason we die will have something to do with sin. No matter what illness it might be that carries us off or a bus with our name on it or whatever.

It'll have something to do with sin. It's sin that brings an end to our lives. Because if we didn't have any sin in our lives, death couldn't hold us prisoner. But the beauty of it is, if we have trusted Jesus Christ as our Savior and submitted to him as our Lord, he has paid our wages.

Because the wages of sin is death and he paid the wages. And death cannot hold us any more than it could hold him. The promise, said Peter, is to you and your children and to all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

And with many other words he bore witness and he continued to exhort them and said, save yourselves from this crooked generation. And that was the phrase that leapt off the page at me through the week. Save yourselves?

[29 : 40] Come on, Peter, surely you've got it wrong. How can we save ourselves? God sent a Savior. So that means that we need a Savior because God wouldn't have sent a Savior we don't need.

God sent a Savior and that means we need a Savior. Savior, that means we cannot save ourselves. Okay, are we okay so far? Do we follow this logic? God sent a Savior, which means we need a Savior, which means we cannot save ourselves.

So what on earth does he mean when he says save yourselves? Well, the key word is from. Save yourselves from this crooked generation.

It's not save yourselves from your sins. That's the Savior's job. But he's saying this. You're going to have to be separated out from the crowd that's got it wrong.

You're going to have to belong to a different group. You're going to have to join the people of God, the holy people of God. Save yourselves basically means you're running with the wrong crowd.

[30 : 51] You cannot run with these people. They're on a collision course with God. You cannot run with these people. The crowd is always wrong in matters of salvation and eternity.

The crowd is always wrong. The majority view is always wrong in regard to salvation. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. That's the crowd. He came to his own people and even they rejected him. That's the crowd. But to all who believed him and to those who accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

They are reborn, not with a physical birth, resulting from human passion or human planning, but a birth that comes from God. And if you're saved, you will belong to a different crowd.

You will be different. You'll be distinctive from the people you've left and you will have a different way of living. And so we finish looking at the fellowship of the believers.

[32 : 12] They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. This was a crowd who before had despised these apostles, had despised these Galileans.

Now they're hanging on their teaching. Now they're sitting down, devoting themselves to learning from the very people they had once despised.

That's the beauty. That's the transformation that the gospel brings about in the lives of those who believe. And they had different interests.

All came upon them. Every soul. Wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and prayers. Things they had no time for before.

And they were selling their possessions and their belongings. Why? To distribute the proceeds to all so that people who had need would be looked after.

[33 : 13] There was a new generosity in their hearts. There was different behavior going on. And day by day, attending the temple and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God.

And having favor with all the people. This was a different religion they had. This was not a religion in which they were trying to impress God.

This was a religion in which they were impressed by what God had done for them. And they spent their time in praise. And so they were saved and added.

New people were being added to their number every day. God was building a different family that had a different future and different prospects. Here's what Warren Weersbe says.

Certainly, he says, the church today needs a new filling of the Spirit of God. Apart from the ministry of the Spirit, believers cannot witness with power.

[34 : 13] Apart from the Holy Spirit, they cannot understand the Scriptures. Apart from the Holy Spirit, they cannot glorify Christ. Apart from the Holy Spirit, they cannot pray according to the will of God.

And apart from the Holy Spirit, they cannot develop Christian character. We need to be praying for revival, for a deeper working of the Spirit in his people, leading to confession of sin, to repentance, forgiveness, and unity.

And he's talking about the church here. He's not even talking about the people outside our door who don't know Jesus. He's talking about the church. And here we finish with a story. Charles Swindle told this story.

It tells of a wedding where one of the wives of a leader of his church, this is the wife of a leader of his church, she came to Charles Swindle and she told him this story.

She says, my husband and I have been down at the beach for the past week. And my husband has walked to the beach for hours and hours in the greatest agony.

[35 : 16] And after several days of this pacing up and down the beach in agony, he finally came into the house and he threw himself on the couch and he wept for three hours straight.

And then he asked Christ into his heart. As a church leader.

There isn't any one of us who doesn't need to ask these questions of ourselves.

Let's sing blessed assurance, but let's be assured that we've got the assurance. Because here was a man who was a leader in the church and he was in agony walking up and down this beach.

Agony of conscience. And then finally he comes into his house, throws himself on the couch and weeps for three hours solid. And at the end of that, he gives his heart to the Lord.

[36 : 21] Sobering stuff. Moses, referring to the word of God, said this is no empty word for you.

This is no empty word for you. You can read about it. Carl has given us a piece from from John Piper for the newsletter this week.

So if you haven't got your copy of the newsletter, get it because there's a good piece from John Piper in there about the Bible. It's no empty word. This is full of God's mind to you and me.

And let's not assume because we've been in the church all our lives that we're in the right place before God. It's for God to tell us we're in the right place with him. Let's be humble.

Assurance is best enjoyed by the humble, not by the proud. By the tax collector, not by the Pharisee. Everyone who calls in the name of the Lord will be saved.

[37 : 26] Let's pray. Living God, we bless you. You are a God who does not play games. You're a God who loves the truth.

And you desire truth in the inward parts of each of us. It's so easy for us to deceive ourselves or just to bury things that we don't want to face.

Father, please let the Holy Spirit bring conviction to us. Let him either convince us that we are right to be full of assurance and gladness or let him convince us that there are matters in our lives that we need to put right with you.

You are ready to forgive. If you would forgive the people who murdered your son and conspired for his death, there is no one on the planet who is beyond the reach of your mercy or forgiveness.

Help us remember that you are slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.