

God's Purpose in Raising Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 April 2015

Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] Let's turn together to the passage we read in Acts chapter 5 and we'll read once again at verse 29. After the high priest had brought the apostles, Peter and his companions, and said to them, We charge you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

But Peter and the apostles answered, We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as leader and saviour to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him. These were amazing days.

Remarkable things were happening during this time of the apostles, when the New Testament church was being established and founded, things that we read of in this chapter itself.

Prison doors being locked, and yet those, Peter and his companions, taken out of the prison without the knowledge of the guards, and set outside back in the temple, so that when attempts were made in the morning to bring them out and bring them back for questioning, they weren't found in the prison.

[1 : 3 8] Remarkable things. Things to do with the healing of diseases. So that people brought those who were sick in great numbers, and laid them on cots and mats in the streets, hoping that the apostles would go by, and even there, as we read in verse 15, hoping that as Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them.

Maybe there was some superstition involved on the part of some people, that even such as Peter's shadow might itself automatically cure people.

Maybe it means that that in fact happened. Not clear from the passage, but it is clear that there were many miracles performed in the name of Jesus, things which many people, even down to our own age, have tried to copy or to emulate, but this was a particularly special and important and foundational time.

And we should not expect that all the things you read of with regard to the apostles and God's establishing of the New Testament church through the apostles ought to be expected in days subsequent to that.

God can work miracles in any age, and he can work miracles through any person he chooses. Nevertheless, we have to give due place to this particular time as a very special time in the history of the church.

[3 : 1 3] And because of it being such a special time, these remarkable things accompanied what was being done by the apostles. Now the message that brought about this great stir in Jerusalem was the message of Christ's death and his resurrection.

As you go into the record of the sermons that were preached by Peter and the apostles, as you find that in the early part of Acts especially, it's very clear that these were the two main things that they emphasized, that they preached Jesus and the resurrection.

They preached his death. They preached his triumph over death. That was the substance of that message, as it must still be the substance of the message of the gospel.

People then believed that message and also believed in the Jesus who was presented in that message. Not only did they accept the message as factually accurate and correct, these had been, after all, witnesses to these events, as Peter himself said.

They had seen these things. They had experienced it for themselves firsthand. And their preaching carried the authority of those who had firsthand experience of the death and of the resurrection of Christ and of meeting the risen Christ.

[4 : 31] And despite the attempts of the high priests and the religious authorities and also later on attempts from the likes of King Herod, all of these authorities that wanted to stamp out the church, wanted to exterminate the message of Christ and the people that carried the name of Christ, despite all of that, you find remarkably there in verse 14, more than ever, believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.

And so it is elsewhere in the book of Acts. But this is what led to the imprisonment of Peter and his companions and also the remarkable deliverance that took place when they were taken out of the prison by the angel of the Lord and reset in the temple so that when it came to them being called for, this is the message the officers brought back to the high priest and those who were in authority with them, they're not here.

They're standing in the temple. Look, they're back standing in the temple and teaching the people. And so they questioned them and said, we strictly charge you not to teach in this name.

And yet here you have, and you notice how he put it, he filled Jerusalem with your teaching. And they recognized that this teaching, this gospel, this message was something that had reverberated so much throughout the whole of Jerusalem that you could describe it as having filled Jerusalem with your teaching.

Everybody was talking about it. Everybody was aware of what had happened and what was happening still. And then it was rather ironic the way in verse 28, the high priest said, you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

[6 : 27] It's as if the writer here, Luke, is really ironically saying to us, here is the high priest of Israel. He doesn't know the meaning of sacrificial blood. He doesn't know the meaning of the blood of Christ.

He doesn't have any conception as to why this Jesus died and how this Jesus fulfilled all the blood sacrifices of the Old Testament that anticipated him, that prefigured him, that were representations or types of him.

It's an ironic note, surely, that he says, you intend to bring this man's blood upon us. You can imagine Luke, as it were, saying, well, if only you appreciated what this blood means.

If only you appreciated what it would be to have this blood upon you in the sense of covering your sins and giving you righteousness with God. But such it was.

A man who himself was in a position of being the high priest, who in the Old Testament was one of the chief types or representations of Christ.

[7 : 36] Christ. And he's blind to who Jesus is. And the response of Peter and the apostles, because although Peter is the speaker, they all answer through him, it says in verse 29, there Peter and the apostles answered, we must obey God rather than men.

Now we mustn't leave the thing at that. Sometimes we do that. We just say, this is what Peter did. We must obey God rather than men. Of course he said that. That's what it's saying in the verse.

But it goes on, the God of our fathers raised Jesus. In other words, they must obey God because this message is so important. Because the message of Christ crucified demands that they actually go forth and preach this message to everyone who will hear it.

They must obey God rather than man because this message of the resurrection of Christ has such force about it, constrains and impels them.

It demands that it be taken forth and not confined or stifled. It has to be heralded. It has to be announced.

[8 : 51] We must obey God rather than men because the God of our fathers raised Jesus so as to give repentance and forgiveness of sins.

In other words, what we're dealing with really is God's purpose in the resurrection of Christ. God's purpose in raising Jesus Christ his son from the dead.

That's really the main theme of the passage. It doesn't just tell us about the resurrection as a fact which is what we'll look at first of all. It also gives us following on from that the purpose for which he raised him up.

He raised him from the dead. He exalted him to his own right hand as leader and saviour and that's why the purpose is that he would give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

So look first of all at the fact of Christ's resurrection. God raised him from the dead. The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.

[9 : 54] And you notice that there's a very obvious contrast or indeed a comparison which involves this contrast if that's not a contradiction but you find the comparison made between what they did in killing Jesus and what God the Father did in raising him from the dead.

They killed him. You killed him. You were responsible he says to the high priest and those who were with him in the verdict that they announced over Jesus that he was to be crucified.

You killed him. You're responsible for this. Elsewhere of course we know that Peter said that God was in total control of everything that was happening in his sovereignty yet the responsibility the accountability for the death of Jesus is with these people who gave him over to be crucified.

You killed him. But the God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed. Now we mustn't think that the contrast or the comparison is just between the killing on their part the putting to death of Jesus on their part and the raising up by the Father on the other hand.

There is that. But there's something else along with that. Because the resurrection followed by the ascension is itself evidence of God's approval of this Jesus.

[11 : 19] Of this Jesus and his work on the cross of his death and of his resurrection from the dead. You would say that the resurrection is itself the evidence of his approval although that had been specified beforehand.

You remember very well known words of the God the Father for example at the time of Christ's baptism. This is my son my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

The approval of God the Father for the son as he went about the work of a servant in the mission that he had on earth. That is something which in the resurrection comes really to its height.

God's approval of him is something that's made clear in his resurrection. That's why he was raised from the dead. Because everything he had done by his death was proved to be fully acceptable to God as an atonement for sin.

And you see what it's saying is that as God approved of Christ and raised him from the dead so the opposite is not just of putting him to death but of disapproval and rejection.

[12 : 35] That's part of the contrast. God the Father raised him up he approved of him you put him to death you rejected him you disproved of him you did not approve him you rejected him you found fault with him well they didn't actually find fault with him as you remember but they concocted something so that he would be carried over to his sentence.

That's the contrast. But it follows on that it's important that we carry that into our own particular situation because every rejection of Jesus Christ on the part of anybody who hears the message of the gospel who hears about God's approval of him who hears about the resurrection as evidence of God's approval of Jesus every rejection of God's son as savior is a rejection of the one that God has fully approved of and that makes it you could say doubly serious you're not just rejecting someone who in his own right is perfect you're rejecting anyone who rejects the Lord Jesus as savior is rejecting the very one that God fully approves of as savior sometimes we have things commended to us as having been fully tested whatever they are commodities you might use in your home or whatever piece of electronic equipment it is you'll find a sticker on it somewhere that says tested maybe a number or whoever tested it just to make sure that it's working properly it comes with that approval but it doesn't always work it doesn't always mean the thing is perfect sometimes it doesn't work sometimes it develops a fault you have to send it back with Christ there is absolutely no danger of that whatsoever nothing in his life nothing about his death is disapproved of by God it's the opposite everything that he ever did every word he spoke every action on his part fully approved of by God as providing a savior for his people think tonight before you reject the

Lord think of who you're rejecting think of the seriousness of rejecting someone that's stamped with God's approval someone of whom God says this this is my beloved son this is the one that I approve of this is the one I've commissioned this is the one I have found fully acceptable God is saying to me he's fully acceptable to me there is no fault in him to me he's the fully equipped savior of sinners to me he's the one that is able to be the means by which you are presented righteous in my presence don't surely say to God then well but I can't accept him because remember not accepting him not receiving him is really the same as rejecting him even if it comes with a promise to yourself that one of these days you will accept him one of these days he will be a savior to you what's important is now what is he now to us have I accepted him have I approved of

God's approved son if not then I'm rejecting the very one that God has fully approved of as a savior of sinners so there's the first thing God raised him up and he's noted the God of our fathers that's an interesting reference by Peter as he's speaking to the high priest people who were Jews people who belonged to Israel people who looked back to the old testament and the God of the old testament the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob the God of the exodus the God of Sinai the God of the prophets well he says that's this God the God of our fathers has raised up this Jesus because you see they're saying we don't accept this Jesus we think this Jesus is a fraud we don't accept him at all as what he made or claimed for himself to be someone equal to God someone sent by God someone commissioned by God and here is Peter saying who did this who raised this

Jesus from the dead the God of our fathers you see he's pressing home the point that if they really believed the old testament and really accepted and understood the old testament prophecies about the Messiah they would have accepted Jesus they would have accepted his death as God's atonement for sin they would have accepted his resurrection as God's approval of him the God of our fathers he's saying my father and your father and our fathers before us the God they said the God all through the years of the old testament he raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree but then God exalted him as well as raised him God exalted him at his own right hand or could be translated by his right hand as leader and savior exalted means of course that he elevated him he you could use the word promoted and it's clear from the new testament that like so philippians chapter 2 that is in consequence of the work that he did leading up to and including his death in consequence of that because that was so approved of by

[18 : 47] God that he then exalted him therefore God has highly exalted him and given him that name that's above every name that's how philippians 2 puts it that's what it means that he's at his own right hand it's the highest possible position and that means that Jesus tonight has maximum authority glory power dominion right isn't it the height of arrogance for human beings to dismiss the claims of Christ isn't it the height of arrogance to claim human rights and dismiss the rights of Jesus Christ with the verdict that he doesn't even exist anymore that he died that he was a famous person perhaps but that there's no such thing as resurrection which is really as we'll see in a minute what the Sadducees were saying the Sadducees especially didn't believe in the resurrection that's why they especially were so concerned about this whole thing they were convinced there's no such thing as resurrection as Jesus shows in

Matthew 22 when he spoke to them and what arrogance it is for human beings today in the blindness and deadness of their hearts to say Jesus I don't believe Jesus exists I don't accept the claims of Jesus I don't regard this Bible as in any way special to any other book however much it's in a place in history I'm my own person I look after my own life I have the right to choose how I live I have the right to actually decide what I decide I have the right to end my own life if I want to end my own life and euthanasia that's what people are saying and all of that is packed into it an arrogance of sin against the right of Jesus Christ that's the terrible dilemma that we're in that's the way that we've plunged as a people in dismissing the Bible and getting rid of the Bible and saying that religion doesn't belong in human life or in public life at least and especially the Christian religion this is one of the things you end up with that human rights are all that matter and the right of

Christ is not recognized not believed in and yet here is Peter saying God raised him up and exalted him at his own right hand he has all the rights all the right to your obedience and mine all the right to give for you to give an account ask an account demand an account from you of how you live and of me as to how I live he has all of these rights he's the one who's got all of this in his hand isn't that how he said to the disciples before he was carried up as the end of Matthew's gospel tells us what we usually call as the great commission the mandate that Jesus gave to his church to go and to make disciples of every nation baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit and lo I am with you to the end of the world teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you what is the preface to that great mandate how does it begin all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me when we come to worship

Jesus as we do as we worship the father and the spirit as we worship God of whom Jesus is the second person we worship one who has a right to our worship a right to our obedience a right to our compliance with his command a right to rule our lives a right to make demands of us a right to say to every human being I am your king I am your lord he exalted him to his own right hand but it's as leader and savior these two words are also used to describe Jesus of course God exalted him as leader and savior the word leader is used earlier in chapter 3 verse 15 and what you find translated there differently in some translations it's there in the

ESVS author you killed the author of life that great paradox and there it means the originator of life the one who gives life the creator there's the paradox we looked at it quite some time ago but it's so difficult impossible indeed for us to keep these two things at the same time to be true of this person and the only way it could be true of him was he gave himself to death because he is the creator in our nature providing a facility for himself to give himself to death to die for his people and he's the author of life and here the words translated leader it actually means not so much author originator in this context but another nuance of the leader somebody who is the head of somebody who is a leader or in charge of something what is he in charge of what is he leading what is he the savior of what is he leader and savior it's in regard to repentance and forgiveness of sins before we look at that just notice that there are witnesses we are witnesses to these things you listen to people today who don't accept the bible and who reject its teachings and who say about the resurrection of christ you know you need credible witnesses credible evidence you need evidence that you can actually put under scrutiny and if there were to be evidence put under scrutiny then we would be in a better position to say well yes perhaps

[25 : 14] Jesus did rise from the dead after all and maybe there is indeed something like resurrection after all who could quite easily go to hundreds who had seen Jesus alive after his resurrection and if the apostles had been talking nonsense here they could have gone to these people and said did you actually see this as well and they have been told yes we met him he spoke to us we were with him the evidence for the resurrection of Christ is actually quite overwhelming not just in scripture but even in writings outside of scripture as well I don't know if you've ever seen a video of a man called Lee Strobel an American he was an atheist and who dismissed such things as

Christianity and the existence of God miracles and things like the resurrection and they moved into a flat and the woman downstairs got friendly with his wife and she was a Christian and she kept speaking to this woman this Lee Strobel's wife not haranguing her about religion but just in an ordinary Christian tactful way and this woman became insulted she went to church with she was converted and she came back and she told her husband of what had happened in her life and her husband said I going to say two things to you first of all don't ask me to go to church secondly don't give any money to these people because that's all they're after but he began to notice that his wife was not the same that his wife went about things differently that her character had changed that she was actually a better person than she had ever been before and he began to get a bit curious and one of these days he did accept an invitation to go to church and he had gone with all the arguments that he had stored up for many years as an atheist against the existence of

God and he said I sat in that church and a young man came into the pulpit by the name of Bill Hybels and he began to dismantle every single one of the arguments that I had stacked up in my head until I went home from that place still an atheist but determined to actually do some research into this resurrection business this resurrection of Christ and he said he began to do all that research not just in the Bible but other sources as well historians other things that had happened or been written in history and he put it all and then it came to the point where he decided one of these days he would put it all together and he took out a notepad and he wrote down there all the arguments in favor of the resurrection and all the arguments that he had and stacked up against such a thing and you know he said this is the conclusion I came to it would have required much more faith to hang on to my atheism than to accept that

Christ rose from the dead he believed and he since become a very influential Christian author and teacher Lee Strobel but that's what he came to that's the conclusion he came to it would have taken more faith on me to continue holding on to my atheism than to accept the resurrection of Christ from the dead the evidence is in the scriptures particularly but then you see this is the reaction you get when you say but look at all the things that you find in the Bible historical people who lived people who were historical figures people who wouldn't have gone about in those days and just told lies or concocted a story because it would have been easy to disprove it and what you'll get is the reaction ah but that's in the Bible and the Bible doesn't count as evidence it's not the kind of evidence we need well of course it's evidence unless you're pre-programmed to reject it and

Peter is saying we are witnesses to these things and not only that but he says so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him now this is the frustrating thing for some of us for Christians when you try to present the truth of God and the truth of Christ resurrection to an unbelieving world the frustration is you know in yourself as a Christian that there's something in your heart or someone in your heart that these people out there don't have and so you come up against a cliff face as it were you can go so far and no further because the only thing that will take them further is the power of the Holy Spirit and let's remember that you're not going to convert anyone I'm not going to convert anyone I've never converted anyone here since I came nearly 20 years ago nobody has been converted here by me none of these elders are capable of converting anyone but as we witness to

[30 : 55] Christ as we speak to people about our faith as we present to them the teaching of the Bible about his death and about his resurrection the great witness to that resurrection is the one we pray will be active to bless our feeble efforts he's saying here so is the Holy Spirit a witness to these things whom God has given to those who obey him now one of the things that that really is involved in in that reference is something to really encourage us as we go on witnessing to Christ in a skeptical disbelieving age because the message that you're presenting while it may be frustrating for you and for me to be able only to take it so far and not any further you would dearly love to be able in a sense to convert these people to get them just to open their mind to see the truth but you don't need to you have someone far better to do it for you you have a greater witness than yourself to the resurrection something that our young people may have difficulty with we've all got difficult with understanding the trinity that there is just one

God and there are three persons you can see that in this passage who raised up Jesus from the dead God the Father who was raised up God the Son in our nature and who is the witness to these things the primary witnesses the Holy Spirit and for the young people's benefit let me just say this that the Bible tells us that our salvation is from God the Father through God the Son by God the Holy Spirit in other words the Father sent his Son Jesus into the world the Son took our nature our human nature and in that human nature experienced and accomplished the death of Calvary the death he died the death of the cross and in that nature he was raised by God the Father from the dead and the third person the

Holy Spirit then takes this salvation that is in Jesus and applies it to us he is the executive the one who comes to bring salvation into our hearts to apply it to us so remember there are these three persons not three gods but the three persons in the one God between them there is this most amazing wonderful arrangement in our salvation one sends another is sent and then another brings the result of that that's God the trinity the mystery of the trinity but it's a mystery involved in our salvation that's what you find in the passage there are these witnesses and the spirit himself is the chief witness so let's look in closing really all with time for it's just

God's purpose in raising Jesus as we said at the beginning he raised him up he exalted him as leader and savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins now you know the order in which Peter has put this it's repentance and forgiveness the fact that he says to Israel doesn't mean that it's just to Jewish people of that day this is something that carries on carries over into everybody's experience that comes to be saved it's in the same way there's repentance and forgiveness the one follows the other some people will tell you that turning to God is something that people do when they come to a realization that their sin has already been forgiven do you believe that you come to believe my sin has already been forgiven I'm alright so then

I'll come to worship God and to give myself to him well of course your sin is forgiven in the sense that Jesus has died for your sins and therefore forgiveness is in him but you've got to come and take it you've got to come and accept it it's God's gift in him and you don't have forgiveness unless you've repented repentance means turning from sin to God turning round from the way we naturally face as we are born as sinners to the opposite direction to face God like Adam we are by nature going away from God and that's the direction we want to go in until God turns us until we come to realize the truth until we come to repent which is turning then to face God how can we face God as sinners how can we possibly come to face

[36 : 21] God and knowing that we are sinners who deserve his condemnation how is it possible for us to come round from the way we're going naturally to face God and to face up to our sin all because Jesus has actually done everything we need to make us acceptable with God all that's required of us is that we come to receive forgiveness us that we come to repent turn to God and forgiveness becomes ours but there's something here that is really really important and it's this forgiveness of sin is absolutely certain when you come in repentance to God let there be no doubt in your mind as to whether or not you will receive forgiveness let there be no doubt in your mind whatever your past has been whatever age you're at whatever you've done whatever your circumstances in life are when you come to return to

God in repentance and plead with him for forgiveness when you come to ask for your sin to be forgiven you are 100% certain to receive it why because that's why Jesus died and that's why God raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand as a leader and savior to give repentance and forgiveness to everyone who comes for it there will be no such thing as repentance possible or forgiveness given but for Jesus but for his death and resurrection but for the father raising him up and it's in that that the passage is saying to us we find our assurance that our sin will be forgiven we repent and receive forgiveness on the other hand if we don't do that not only are we not receiving forgiveness if we don't come back to God we don't repent of our sin it's not just a matter of not receiving forgiveness it's actually acting in a sense as if

Jesus Christ had never been raised from the dead why was he raised from the dead to give repentance and forgiveness to us and what are we doing if we're not repenting and coming to him for forgiveness we're acting in the presence of God as if he never raised a son from the dead at all you see the argument really is powerfully towards us in this message of this passage God is saying if we can put it in these words God is saying I have raised my son from the dead and I have raised him from the dead for a particular purpose and it's so that the likes of you would receive forgiveness for your sin and if you haven't repented you are treating me God is saying as if I've never done such a thing as if Christ is still dead as if your sin cannot be covered that's why the passage begins and ends with obedience we must obey

God rather than men so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him obedience is at the heart of a saving relationship with God obedience involves repentance turning to confessing your sin accepting the fact that God did this to enable you to receive pardon and as we do so we are assured of our connection with Christ himself Hebrews chapter 5 verses 8 to 9 what does it say it says about Christ first of all though he were a son yet he learned obedience through the things which he suffered and being made perfect or complete he became the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey him he obeyed to enable us to obey it's the least we can do let's pray lord our god help us to appreciate increasingly the purpose for which

Christ was raised from the dead help us to appreciate the way in which that is directed towards our forgiveness enable us lord we pray to come with our sin and confession and enable us to come seeking earnestly that forgiveness that we are assured of as we come to the impenitence bless to us your word again we pray and all we ask is for Jesus sake Amen