

## Acts 2:22-33

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[ 0 : 00 ] The date was Saturday 14th November 1992. It's one of the most memorable afternoons of my life. I was 16 years old. It was an incredibly memorable afternoon. I was at Stradi Park in Llelley, about 5 miles from where I grew up.

I was at Stradi Park, which is a rugby stadium, to watch the world champions Australia versus Llelley. Less than a year earlier, Australia had beaten England in the Rugby World Cup final. Australia were the best rugby team in the world. Probably the most gifted player of his generation, David Campesi. Llelley were playing well, but they were a club side. Llelley is a town that's got a population of about 35,000.

Australia has a population of 25 million. At half-time, the score was Llelley 7, Australia 6. The final score was Llelley 13, Australia 9. You can watch the whole game on YouTube or the edited highlights. Take your pick.

[ 1 : 20 ] You can also watch it in Welsh or in English. It depends. There was a pitch invasion at the full-time whistle. All of us rushed onto the pitch, and we carried the players shoulder high.

There it is. It hangs in my study. I think that might be my hand. I thought you don't know. I love live sport. I don't know about you. I love it. There's something about it.

But there was something particularly about that day, the 14th of November 1992, that makes it too tantalising for words. The crowd erupted, including me. We raced onto the pitch.

People hoisted onto their shoulders. There was singing. We were soaked by beer being sprayed everywhere. The whole community together. I don't think I've ever been in an atmosphere like it. To say it was exhilarating was an understatement. And that night, when I finally got home to my mum and dad, I said to them, you'll never believe what happened. And I told them the story, and they said, we know we watched it on telly.

[ 2 : 23 ] And in the days that followed, I told everyone that would listen, people in church, the following day. But by that time, there was no point in saying you'll never believe what happened.

Because everybody alive in my village and in that town knew what had happened. Instead, my story changed to say to people, I was there. I was there.

I saw it with my own eyes. It was amazing. And I love telling the story to this very day. Maybe you can tell. Now, what I want to say to you this morning is, when we come to Acts chapter 2, that is the kind of thing that we're dealing with.

We're dealing with something very similar in Acts chapter 2. Because what we read there is a record of what the apostle Peter said on the day of Pentecost. By this time, Jesus has ascended into heaven.

And the Holy Spirit has fallen onto the disciples in Jerusalem. It's enabled them to speak in various languages. And as a result of that, a great crowd has gathered around the apostles.

[ 3 : 28 ] And it gives Peter the apostle the perfect opportunity for a sermon. I don't know what you think about when you hear the word sermon. But in this instance, it's not the kind of dry, droning oration of a kind of dusty old clergyman.

It's much more like my conversation when I got home from the rugby on the 14th of November, 1992. Peter's sermon is the excited testimony of somebody who was an eyewitness.

It's the testimony of someone saying, you'll never believe what happened. I was there. It's a testimony of the most astounding and thrilling things.

And the story is helpfully summarized. Can you see it in verses 22 to 24? If you've got a Bible, do look down there. It's the paragraph at the start of the passage we read. And Peter's really got three key points.

He says to you, first of all, that Jesus lived a life that was accredited by God. That's verse 22. You got it?

[ 4 : 38 ] Men of Israel, hear these words. People of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth. That's where he came from. 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.

And so Peter here summarizes the amazing life of Jesus Christ. A man who loved everyone he met. A man who spoke with rare authority.

A man who could heal the sick. A man who forgave sinners. Who fed the hungry. Who calmed the storms. Who raised the life to dead.

Who touched the untouchable. And made clean the unclean. His life was full of miracles and wonders. And all these are signs, says Peter. Signs of who Jesus really was.

Signs of where he came from. These were God's way of accrediting Jesus. Every miracle he performed was another stamp on Jesus' life saying he's the real deal.

[ 5 : 43 ] Every miracle assuring people that he really did come from God. And Peter had seen these miracles with his own eyes. And he says, some of you listening to me today, you've seen it too.

But Peter's second point is this. Jesus died a death planned by God. Look at verse 23. This Jesus delivered up and according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.

You crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. Again, we're reminded, aren't we, that the people listening to Peter's sermon were intimately involved in Jesus' death.

In fact, he says, you were responsible for Jesus on the cross. But not only that, Peter reminds them that Jesus' death, it occurred, didn't it, by the deliberate plan, the definite plan, and the foreknowledge of God.

And so given the plan of God, can you see it was impossible for Jesus not to die? I'm working through Mark's gospel with a number of people in the minute.

[ 6 : 54 ] And again and again, you see that Jesus says the Son of Man must be killed. There's a definite plan that Jesus is working to. And so given the plan of God, it was impossible for Jesus not to die.

And that brings us to the third point of Peter's sermon. That Jesus experienced a resurrection accomplished by God. Can you see that verse 24? You crucified him.

You killed him by the hands of lawless men. 23 verse 24. God raised him up. Loosing the pangs of death. Because it's not, it was not possible for him to be held by it.

Peter said God did this. God raised Jesus from the dead that first Easter Sunday.

God freed Jesus from death's agony. And those who saw him after he came back from the dead, those like Peter, went around to anyone who would listen and was saying, You'll never believe what happened.

[ 7 : 54 ] You'll never believe what's happened. We've seen it with our own eyes. I was there. And this morning what I want to do in the rest of this time is I want to hone in on one particular phrase that I've not really seen before.

And it's the last line of verse 24. Can you see it? It was not possible for him to be held by it.

That it is death. Another way of putting it. It was impossible for him to be held by death. Let me just say it again.

It's so shocking, isn't it? It was impossible for him to be held by death. It's a really striking thing to say, isn't it? Peter could have said that the resurrection was surprising from his perspective.

It certainly was. Peter could have said because he'd lived with Jesus for three years, the resurrection was predictable. Because Jesus said it would happen again and again. He could have just said the resurrection, it was amazing.

[ 8 : 58 ] But Peter chooses his words very, very carefully. And I from one find that striking. He says it was actually impossible for the resurrection not to happen. If you read the Gospels, as I've just said, you'll find that it was impossible for Jesus not to die.

But now you read it was impossible for Jesus not to rise. And Peter's stunning claim is that this story about Jesus couldn't have finished in any other way.

What do you think he means by that? What do you think Peter means that it was impossible for Jesus not to rise from the dead? Well, I've been trying to think about that this week.

And I want to give you three reasons why Peter makes this claim. Number one, it's because of what God had promised. It was impossible for Jesus not to rise from the dead because of what God had promised. For hundreds and hundreds of years, God had been saying that the Messiah would die, yes, but he'd rise again.

Isaiah 53, really famous passage. We read it on Friday. It says that the death of God's servant, that Jesus would be pierced for our transgressions. And by his wounds, others would be healed.

[10:16] And a little bit later in that chapter, the prophet says, after he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied. And here in Acts chapter 2, Peter refers back to several other Old Testament passages which say something similar.

In particular, he quotes in Psalm 16. And David speaks in Psalm 16 of not being abandoned to the realm of the dead, but being shown the path of life. And as Peter points out here, that can't be about King David because King David died.

He was buried in a tomb. He's in Jerusalem. David couldn't have been speaking about himself. But he spoke about another king, another king who would come after him.

God's anointed Messiah. God who'd foretold the resurrection of the Christ he promised. And that's one of the reasons why it had to happen. Why was it impossible for death to keep its hold on Jesus?

Because God always keeps his promises. The second reason is this. Why Peter said that it is impossible for death to keep hold of Jesus because of what God sought to accomplish.

[11:26] Look at verse 23. There's a definite plan there, isn't there? And the foreknowledge of God. And so when Jesus died, when Jesus was crucified, nailed to the cross.

That is according to the plan of God. But that plan was for the resurrection as well. And the reason for that plan of God, of a death and a resurrection, is the great good that God wants to do for humankind.

As Peter will go on to say, that God's purpose is that men and women and boys and girls like you and I, that we might know and be given the gift of God's spirit.

That men and women and boys and girls like us, who are far away from God naturally, might be brought near to God. And none of those things, not one of those things would have been possible if God's king had stayed dead.

Not one of those things. Forgiveness, forgiveness, the gift of the Holy Spirit, being brought near to God, entering into his family. None of that would have been possible without a living saviour.

[12:52] And so the resurrection of Jesus plays just as an essential part of the good news as his death. Jesus died and rose again because God loves the world.

Jesus died and rose again because human sin, which we all share with, has got to be dealt with. Jesus died and rose again because God wanted to draw a people who are far away from him, back towards him. And that's the heart of the Easter story.

And that was the story that Peter told on this occasion. He didn't just want people to know that Jesus lived and died and rose again. He wanted them to know why.

Death could not keep its hold on Jesus because God was seeking to accomplish something. And God always does what he sets out to do.

[13:53] The third reason I want to suggest to you that Peter might want to say it was impossible for death to keep a hold on Jesus is because of who Jesus is. You see, Jesus is not like King David.

As Peter says here. He's not like all those other people whose bodies have been laid to rest. Given who Jesus is, he could never have stayed in the grave.

Because Jesus is God's Messiah. God's anointed King. He is God himself. He is the one who made the world and everything in it.

He is the one who spoke this world into existence. Jesus claims to be the source of all life. And so, of course, death could not keep hold of him.

Frankly, death just isn't powerful enough. Now, we, of course, and you may well have experienced death as something very, very powerful.

[15:07] It certainly felt like that in our country, hasn't it, in this last year? We've been a nation for the last year that have lived in fear of death for very good reason. Death is the great enemy.

We mustn't pretend otherwise. And try as we might, when your time comes, you will have no power to resist it. But not so with Jesus.

Death is a weakling compared to Jesus. Death is a puny and laughable opponent. The walls of Jesus are like sandbags.

You know sandbags? That they put up in the floor. Let's say they put sandbags on the beach. And they build a wall of sandbags. And they build it up on the beach, this big six-foot wall of sandbags, to try and keep the sea from coming in.

It's impossible, isn't it? Death to Jesus is like a piece of string trying to hold an 800-pound gorilla.

[16:18] Death can no more hold Jesus in a tomb than a pregnant woman can hold in her child when the moment for birth comes. Because the Bible teaches that the creator cannot be confined by creation.

The author of life can never be conquered by death. Death could not keep its hold on Jesus because of who it was that death was trying to hold on to.

It was never going to work because of who Jesus is. And is is the operative word. Because he is alive, even as I speak to you this morning.

He's alive this very day because the Easter story couldn't possibly have finished in any other way. And so you can understand, can't you, why Peter was so excited to share this story.

You'll never believe what happened, he said. Jesus was raised from the dead and I saw him with my very own eyes. And of course we say, you'll never believe it.

[17:30] You'll never believe what happened, but people do. People do believe it even now.

People believe this message because there were eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection who told the story and then it was written down.

People like Peter. But people today believe. They believe this because it makes sense. It makes sense because God had promised it would happen and he always keeps his promises.

It makes sense because God had a plan to save people from their sins and to bring people who were back who were distant from him. And God always does what he sets out to do.

And it makes sense because it is ridiculous to think that death can keep hold of God. It's ridiculous to think that death could keep hold of the one who gives life.

To everything and everyone in the world. And so the question for us is really obvious, isn't it? This is the Sunday. It's this. It's do you believe it?

[18:36] Do you believe it? Will you believe what happened that first Easter Sunday? Not everyone who heard Peter share his story on the day of Pentecost believed.

But many did. Look at what it says when we get to the end of the sermon. Just come with me to verse 38. 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. 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 calls to himself. And with many others he bore witness. And he continued to exhort them saying, save yourself from this crooked generation.

Many believed. Many accepted his message. And so today as we hear it again, I want to ask you, do you?

[19:52] Do you believe? Because if you will believe, it will completely change your life. There are many people here that can testify this is our experience.

We were once far from God. But now we've been brought near. And the resurrection of Jesus has forgiven our sins.

Our guilt. Or as guilty as can be. Has been dealt with. And he's given us his Holy Spirit so that we can know deep joy. Even in the dark times.

And every day God is making us more like the Lord Jesus. And that is why Easter is so very, very precious. Because this story has become our story.

And we're excited to tell it this morning. Because you'll never believe what happened. It was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

[20:53] And so he lives this morning. And he walks with us. And he talks with us. And he shapes our lives and our minds every single day.

No matter what the world throws at us. And that is the experience of so many of us this very day. But as you sit here and you listen to me.

You might say that's not my experience. And I want to say to you. It's my joy to tell you it's not too late. Because you just heard Peter's invitation.

That he made to you in this sermon. And that invitation still stands today. The promise of sins forgiven. And of a new life. With the living Jesus. And he says that is a promise for all who are afar off.

And you might feel really far off this morning. It's for you and your children. For all who are afar off. For all who on the Lord will call.

[ 21 : 53 ] And today he calls out to you. And so are you listening. The resurrected Jesus speaks to you. And he says will you come to him.

And if that's the desire of your heart today. And you don't know where to start. Speak with me after. Email me. Ring me. We would love nothing more than to help you. The resurrection of Jesus Christ. Is the absolute bedrock. Of the Christian faith. And as you will know. There are many in our world. That are deeply skeptical about it.

But this morning I ask you. How could you not believe it? Because it's not possible for the Easter story to finish any other way. God raised him from the dead, Peter said.

Freeing him from the agony of death. Because it was impossible. It was just not possible. The death to keep hold of him.

[ 23 : 03 ] Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Thank you.