

They Killed Him, We Killed Him . . . God Killed Him . . . for Us!

Introduction

The Text

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—²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. (Acts 2:22–23)

Carrying on in Acts

- A. We carry on now in our journey through the book of Acts and we come to these words from the Apostle Peter. Remember, to this point . . .
 - 1. Jesus has risen, appeared to his disciples, ascended to the right hand of his Father.
 - 2. And now on this the day of Pentecost he has poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit upon them.
 - 3. They're proclaiming the gospel miraculously in the languages of the nations.
 - 4. People are gathering around wondering what is the meaning of this.
 - 5. Peter stands up to preach.
 - a. He first points them to Joel's prophecy showing that, with the triumph of Jesus at the cross and the subsequent outpouring of the Spirit, we are now in the last days.
- B. And it's at this point that he sees fit to make crystal clear, then, the place of this cross of Christ in both the plan of God and the history of the world.
 - 1. And, suffice it to say, according to Peter, no surprise, the cross is at the very center of all the action. It's the point. It's the fulcrum around which everything else pivots.
 - a. And he aims now to make that abundantly plain to us in the verses that follow.
- C. Now, this morning we shall only be focusing in on [vv. 22-23](#). Small in number but sweeping in their scope.
 - 1. And I should like to bring our attention to three things in particular: (1) Attesting Signs; (2) Definite Plans; and (3) Personal Rejections.

(1) Attesting Signs

Messianic Credentials

- A. Look once more at the words of Peter there in v. 22. Speaking to these Jews who have gathered around him now, he refers to Jesus as “a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst . . .”
1. He’s referring now to Jesus’ earthly ministry in particular and all that God had done through him. These were his messianic credentials you might say.
- B. I don’t know if you’re like me but, nowadays—when everyone is a self-proclaimed expert, when anyone can start a blog or website or write a book and tell you what you should think and do about this or that subject—before I even begin to listen to a person, do you want to know what I’m looking for? Credentials.
1. What are their credentials? Why should I listen to them? Have they been educated, have they been trained, have they been tested, or are they just spouting off looking for likes, views, or whatever?
- C. Well, that’s what these “mighty works”, “wonders”, and “signs” are for Jesus. They are God’s stamp of approval. They are his accreditations. They are his credentials. God really is with him.
1. Therefore, the implication is: take what he says and does with the utmost seriousness.

The Gospel of John

- A. As many commentators have long since pointed out, this idea of “signs” in particular play a significant role in John’s gospel. Indeed, it would seem he organizes his whole account around them.
1. So, at the end of his gospel, he states his intention and purpose in writing the whole of it—[John 20:30-31](#): “³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” “I recorded these signs so that you may believe.”
 - a. The miracles, like signs along the freeway, are intended, not to be an end in themselves, but to point a person beyond the miracle to the Messiah. You see his miracles, you believe he’s the Messiah.
 - i. That’s the point of John’s gospel!
- B. And so the whole first half of it in particular is devoted to an explicit recounting of these various signs that God did through Jesus—thereby attesting to his messianic identity, and even his deity.
1. He turns water into wine ([John 2:1–11](#)).
 2. He heals the official’s son with a word ([John 4:46–54](#)).
 3. He puts legs back under the invalid who had been in that state some 38 years prior ([John 5:1–15](#); [6:2](#)).
 4. He feeds the hungry multitude from five loaves and two fish ([John 6:1–15](#)).

5. He restores sight to the man born blind ([John 9:1-7, 16](#)).
 6. He raises Lazarus from the dead ([John 11; 12:18](#)).
 7. And ultimately he points to his own resurrection as the final sign ([John 2:18-22](#))—which is worked out in the second half of the book ([John 13-21](#)).
- C. But the reason he’s killed in the latter half of the book results from the way this first section concludes. Here’s the turning point, the hinge.
1. After all these mighty works, wonders, and signs, John strikes this note of sobriety: [“Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him” \(John 12:37\)](#).
 - a. They saw it, they knew what it meant, they read his credentials top to bottom . . . but they rejected him all the same.

Two Observations

A. Here now I wish to make two very important observations for us in all this . . .

Observation #1: Christianity Is Not Opposed to Reason . . .

- A. First, and most simply, we must remember that Christianity is not opposed to reason. I shall never tire of saying this, because it seems to me the culture never tires of touting the opposite.
- B. But here we see plainly: God gives signs. He gives reasons for faith.
1. He doesn’t ask you to close your eyes and “just believe.”
 2. He asks you to open your eyes and truly see.
 - a. Christianity is not a leap in the dark but a step towards the light!

Observation #2: . . . But We Often Are!

- A. But then, second, and most concerning for us, we see that, even though Christianity is reasonable, and in some ways undeniable, still we are prone to reject and deny it all the same.
1. The fact of the matter is: Christianity is not opposed to reason . . . but we, on the other hand, often are!
- B. Look at how [v. 22](#) ends: [“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”](#)
1. You know this. You saw it.
 2. And yet still you killed him.
- C. Oh what a window into the dark recesses of the human condition. You see, here we have it plain as day:

1. Our rejection of Jesus and Christianity is fundamentally not an issue with the facts or the evidence, it's an issue with our hearts.
 2. At the end, it's not so much about what we do or don't know, it's about what we do or don't want.
 3. Oh we'll put forward all sorts of reasons why it is we don't believe. But at bottom the truth of the matter is that we simply don't want to.
 - a. Man's biggest problem isn't that he lacks the light, it's that he loves the darkness.
 - i. This too is made plain in John's gospel—[John 3:19](#): “[T]he light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light”
 - (1) Brothers and sisters, we must beware our tendency to twist what we know to serve what we want.
- D. Have you ever been called in for jury duty? Why do you think they have this long arduous process in the beginning where many folks are tested and then discarded from the court?
1. Some of it just has to do with your availability, but the next part of it has to do with your relation to the matter you'll be deliberating over.
 2. If you're going to be adjudicating on a matter let's say concerning theft in some way and you yourself actually had a great deal stolen from you a while back in a similar manner, well you probably can't serve on the court. Why?
 - a. Because you won't be able to be neutral or objective on it.
 - b. Your emotions, your reflexes, your desires will pollute your reason.
 - c. You'll be ready to condemn the man before you even hear his case: “What a monster. I know his type.”
 - i. You see our reason is affected by our heart. You've got skin in the game, so to speak.
- E. And you better believe it's that way with the claims of Christ and the gospel. You are not neutral. You have skin in the game here as well.
1. The call, at first, is to repent. Oh sure the gospel culminates in forgiveness and salvation, but it begins by calling you to own up to your own sin.
 - a. Who wants to do that? No one. Isn't this what we're all always arguing about. “It's not my fault—it's my dad, my mom, my boss, my biology,” and so on. “It's not me.”
- F. So get honest with yourself. Of course you're not going to want to evaluate the signs of Jesus appropriately, objectively. You're going to want to twist it.
1. Guard against such things. Ask God to open you to the truth. Don't run from the light however uncomfortable it may feel at first. And what we may find by the end is, at last, you can truly see!

(2) Definite Plans

- A. Here we come to those magnificent words of Peter in v. 23 of our text: “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

Two Truths in Tension

- A. Oh what do we do with this?! There is so much marvel and mystery here.
1. As one commentator remarks rightly of this verse I think: “Here we have the paradox of divine predestination and human freewill in its strongest form. Even in putting Jesus to death, the Jews were simply fulfilling what God had already determined must take place and indeed had foretold in the prophetic writings” (TNTC).
- B. You have divine sovereignty and human responsibility colliding at the cross.
1. It’s God’s plan intended for good.
 2. But it’s brought about by man’s evil deeds intended for ill.
 - a. Divine sovereignty. Human Responsibility. The two are always held in tension through the Scriptures. We don’t know exactly how they hold together. We only know that they do.
- C. Now, before we really press into this verse further, I want step back for a moment and consider with you how people often respond to this tension, this mystery, in the Scriptures that subsists between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.
1. As you would suspect, it seems to me at least that we are prone to fall off on either side of the issue . . .

Falling off on the Side of Divine Sovereignty

- A. Some end up maximizing or absolutizing God’s sovereignty.
- B. For them God becomes so sovereign to the point that he would almost appear to be, for all intents and purposes, guilty of our sin.
1. If the sin of man against Jesus at the cross was a part of his plan, is he not then somehow responsible for it? He ordains, he permits, he plans . . . it flattens out into: he authors, he commits, he is the responsible party—even for the evil in this world.
 - a. He becomes a sort of unchecked despot in the sky when it’s all said and done, and we are nothing more than puppets on the end of his string, robots operating only in accordance with his programming, and that is all.
- C. So if we do evil, if we sin, it is not our fault. God is ultimately to blame.

1. We know we ought not to say of our sin: “The devil made me do it.”
2. But then here we see another way out. Maybe we can say: “God made me do it.” Or, if he didn’t make me do it, he certainly didn’t stop me, when we all very well know that he could have!
 - a. He must have willed this depravity of mine in one way or another. After all, doesn’t Paul write that God “works all things according to the counsel [Gk. *boulē* = plan] of his will” (Eph. 1:11)?

Falling off on the Side of Human Responsibility

- A. But, on the other hand, some fall off the opposite side. They see God as ultimately beholden to the free will—and even sovereignty, we could say—of man.
- B. They say God would never impose himself upon man’s free will, and, in fact, he can’t really do much about things here down on earth at all.
 1. As such, the best he could ever do is foreknow what we will do and try to react or respond accordingly. He’s always playing catch-up, trying to keep the house of cards from tumbling down.
- C. When he talks about having a plan, therefore, it’s not so much really his plan at all is it, but ours, and he just happens to know about it in advance. He can access what we will do with his omniscience, but he can’t really shift it, he can’t really move it, he can’t marshal it in one direction or another.
 1. The course of history isn’t guided by the sovereign and good pleasure of God.
 2. It’s guided by us.
- D. If that’s the case, what basis do we have for hope at all? God says to the struggling saint in exile: “I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jer. 29:11).
 1. Oh we love that verse. But who cares about God’s plans if he can’t execute on them!
 - a. What’s to say Pharaoh, or Nebuchadnezzar, or Cyrus, or Caesar, or Putin, or whoever won’t come and thwart those plans? And whatever hope he promised us is dashed?
 - i. No, if man is piloting history’s ship, we’d all best abandon it now before it takes on water and drops to the seafloor. There is no ultimate hope. Who knows how it will end, let alone whether it will be good or not.

Mysterious Orthodoxy

- A. But now I think you can see that neither one of these extremes is biblical.
 1. It seems to me that, perhaps in our well-intentioned desire to understand the Scriptures’ teaching, as we go about trying to cram the things of God into our little minds, we inevitably

end up making certain reductions—downgrading things from their full complexity to something simpler, something we can get our heads around.

a. And when we do so, we inevitably introduce marked distortions and errors.

i. In other words: because we're not comfortable with mystery . . . we end up in heresy.

B. I remember trying to get at this dynamic with you a while back when we were developing things for Covenant Membership here (you can still find some of this in the Expansion Packet).

1. I talked about what I call "mysterious orthodoxy" and how at the heart of the orthodox Christian faith has always been mystery—and understandably so, because we are creature and he is Creator.

a. In the same way that you wouldn't expect an ant to properly execute on high end trigonometry,

b. or you wouldn't expect a grasshopper to appropriately enjoy the musical brilliance of Jolie Huang-Liaw on the grand piano,

c. so too we shouldn't expect that man could ever properly get the fullness of God into his little brain—who he is, how he works, what he's up to in the world—we won't be able to comprehend how it all fits together sometimes.

C. God is sovereign. Man is responsible. We see the two lines run through the Scriptures. But how they both are true we sometimes struggle to ascertain.

1. It's similar to other teachings in Scripture. God is one and yet God is three. Christ is God and yet Christ is man. Two lines running through the Biblical record. That they are both true we believe with all our hearts. How they are both true, we aren't entirely sure.

a. The lines converge in the clouds. They come together and hold somewhere up there in the divine being, mind, and will. But it will always be a bit cloudy to us.

i. I think of Moses ascending Sinai. What is up there at the top, do you remember? Smoke, clouds, and something referred to as a "thick darkness"—Exod. 20:21: "The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was."

D. As we try to bring the lines together, we enter the cloud. We can't see it. We don't get it fully. But we know it's true.

1. He is sovereign over all. And yet our little choices still really matter. How he holds that together, I don't know.

a. And it makes sense that that doesn't fully make sense. Because, again, we are creature and he is Creator.

E. So, when it comes to the cross, was God sovereignly guiding the whole thing or was man responsible and trying to thwart his purposes in their treachery?

1. Yes. Both are true. And both are right here on the surface of this verse ([Acts 2:23](#)) . . .

“Delivered Up”

A. Perhaps the best way to bring this out for us is to focus in with you on those two words there at the front of [v. 23](#): “[this Jesus \[was\] delivered up . . .](#)”

1. When we read of Jesus being “[delivered up](#)” the next and natural question we should then want to ask is: by whom? Who delivered him up? Or to put it more pointedly: who is responsible for Jesus’ death? That’s what’s in question here, isn’t it?

B. Now, here’s where things get particularly interesting. What’s translated here as “[delivered up](#)” is really just a single word in the Greek: [ekdotos](#).

1. And, while this word only appears here in the NT, it’s related to a similar word that shows up elsewhere countless times: [paradidōmi](#). Similarly this word is translated often as “[to deliver over](#)” or “[to hand over](#).”

C. And here’s what I want you to see: the word is used to refer to the actions of, not just one, but many players in the recounting of Jesus’ last days.

1. First there’s Judas. He comes into the chief priests at the temple there in Jerusalem and asks: “[“What will you give me if I deliver him over \[Gk. paradidōmi\] to you?’ And they paid him thirty pieces of silver” \(Matt. 26:15\).](#)

a. It was greed that motivated this man to deliver Jesus up.

2. And then Jesus is in the hands of the Jewish leaders there. They hold a kangaroo court and falsely accuse him. And they proceed to deliver him over as well now to the Roman, political authorities.

a. So Peter could say to the Jewish people in [Acts 3:13](#): “[The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over \[Gk. paradidōmi\] and denied in the presence of Pilate . . .](#)”

b. This is why Peter says bluntly to the Jews here in our text: “[this Jesus . . . you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men](#)” ([Acts 2:23](#)). Oh you may have handed him over to the Romans, but it was you who crucified and killed him nonetheless.

i. We’re told in [Matt. 27:18](#): “[\[Pilate\] knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up \[Gk. paradidōmi\].](#)”

(1) Greed set things in motion with Judas.

(2) Envy kept it rolling in these religious leaders. “We don’t want the people going to him, listening to him. He’s making us look bad. He’s stealing our power.” They were envious. So the Jews delivered him up.

3. But then the very same word is used to speak of Pilate and what he does with our Lord. [Matt. 27:26](#): “Then . . . [having scourged Jesus, \[he\] delivered](#) [Gk. paradidōmi] [him to be crucified.](#)” And the Roman soldiers would take it from there.

a. For Pilate, we understand that it was fear of an uprising, political expedience, pragmatism that motivated this deliverance.

i. He didn’t think Jesus was guilty or deserving of death. He just wasn’t willing to risk his power and the peace of his district to defend him. So he delivered him up.

D. But we’re not done are we? Not even close.

1. At the end of the day it wasn’t Judas or the Jewish leaders, Pilate or the Roman soldiers that delivered Jesus up.
2. He offered himself up.

E. He knew about all this before it ever happened. None of this caught Jesus by surprise. Way back in [Luke 9:44](#), he says to his disciples: “[Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered](#) [Gk. paradidōmi] [into the hands of men.](#)”

1. And yet he went forward anyways. He didn’t try to stop it. He willingly submitted to it. Why? Love.

- a. [Eph. 5:2](#): “[Christ loved us and gave himself up](#) [Gk. paradidōmi] [for us . . .](#)”
- b. [Gal. 2:20](#): “[I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave](#) [Gk. paradidōmi] [himself for me.](#)”

- i. It wasn’t the slippery wiles of Judas or the Jewish leaders that snagged him;
- ii. it wasn’t the sheer force of Roman might that cornered him;
- iii. it wasn’t the devil or his demons that had him outsmarted or outgunned.
- iv. As Peter goes on to say in [Acts 2:24](#), it wasn’t even possible for death to hold him down.
- v. If the grave couldn’t hold him, you can know for certain it wasn’t those old rusty nails that held him to the cross.

vi. So if not all this, what was it? It was love.

(1) Love for you and for me.

(2) And love for his Father . . .

- F. This brings in the final dimension in all of this. As Peter says in our text: “this Jesus [was] delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (v. 23).
1. It wasn’t just Judas or the Jews, or Pilate or the Romans, or even Jesus himself who delivered him over to the cross.
 2. There’s one more player in all of this. Indeed, it was God who “did not spare his own Son but gave him up [Gk. paradidōmi] for us all . . .” (Rom. 8:32).
 - a. And he did it just as the Son did it—in love for you and for me. “For God so loved the world, that he gave [Gk. didōmi] his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).
- G. It is true, in an ultimate sense, what the old preacher Octavius Winslow once said: “Who delivered up Jesus to die? Not Judas, for money; not Pilate, for fear; not the Jews, for envy;—but the Father, for love!” (quoted by John Stott in *The Cross of Christ*, 64).
1. Amazingly, in all of this, it’s not man’s sin that gets the final word, but God’s love!

We Need Both!

- A. Can I just apply all this to you for a moment?
1. Listen, you need both sides of this tension for life out there in the real world. Human choices matter. But God is sovereign and good.
- B. Maybe you’ve made a real mess of things lately. And your deep in some grievous sin.
1. On the one hand you can’t say that it doesn’t matter. Your sin is real and you need to repent.
 2. But on the other hand, you can’t say it’s hopeless. Because God is sovereign and he’s able to take even your sinful mess and make from it a masterpiece of grace. He can bring good, even from what we meant for harm.
- C. And maybe it’s not you, but someone else has come in and made a mess of your life. They’ve hurt you, they’ve sinned against you.
1. Listen, again, on the one hand, we don’t just say “God is sovereign” as if what they’ve done isn’t horrible and worth spilling tears over. It’s real evil.
 2. But on the other hand we know you don’t have to be ruled by what they’ve done to you either. God can and will bring good from it. The pain will mark you, no doubt. But it doesn’t have to define you.

(3) Personal Rejections

You Crucified and Killed Him

- A. This is the last thing I'd hope to bring out for this morning. And I'm getting it from what Peter says there at the end of v. 23 when he looks out at this crowd of Jewish people that now surrounds him on this the Day of Pentecost and he says: "[Y]ou crucified and killed [Jesus]."
1. He says the same thing later down in v. 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." "You did it. You killed him."
- B. And here's what's interesting. The Day of Pentecost, you remember, was some fifty days after the Passover, after the time of Jesus' crucifixion. And the whole of Jerusalem during these great feasts were up in a churn. People would come and go and the population would ebb and flow.
1. Suffice it to say: not everyone who was in attendance here on this day of Pentecost was there on the day of Jesus' crucifixion at Passover.
 2. And yet here Peter says on no uncertain terms: "[Y]ou crucified and killed [Jesus]" (v. 23).
 - a. Where does he get off? What does he mean?
- C. Well, I think you know what I'm getting at. Certainly this crowd knew.
1. For we get to the end, and not one of them objects. "We weren't there. This is unfair and unjust."
 2. No. They got it. Were told in v. 37 (immediately following v. 36 which I just read): "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart . . ."
 - a. They get it. "I may not have been there. But I was there."

My Mocking Voice

- A. I thought of that line that almost always makes me want to cry from the modern hymn *How Deep the Father's Love for Us*. Do you remember this?
1. "Behold the man upon a cross / My sin upon His shoulders / Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice / Call out among the scoffers."
 - a. My voice is calling out, not in defense of him, but in defiance.
- B. I'm not just an innocent bystander. I'm not a mere witness to the evil of other men. I'm a full-fledged, whole-heartedly engaged participant in the crucifixion of Jesus.
- a. I got bits of Judas' greed and idolatry in me.
 - b. I got bits of the Jewish leaders' envy and power-hunger in me.
 - c. I've got bits of Pilate's cowardice and opportunism in me.
 - d. I delivered him up. I killed Jesus. And every sin I ever commit is me hitting that on repeat. "I'll be God. I'll be King. Not you. Get out of my life."

- C. It's a personal rejection. And you've got to get that. But when you really do, a very surprising thing happens.
1. You're not pushed away, forsaken in his wrath.
 2. You're attracted, drawn in by his love.
 - a. I thought of that Roman Centurion—likely the man superintending the crucifixion of Jesus there at Golgotha. When he saw all this—how we treat him and yet how he responds with kindness, affection, mercy—he's compelled to confess: *"Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39).*
 - i. You're broken up about your sin—"I did that!"
 - ii. But you're put back together in his grace—"He did that!" He loves me.
- D. I conclude with the words of John Stott taken from his masterful work entitled *The Cross of Christ: "As we face the cross . . . we can say to ourselves both, 'I did it, my sins sent him there,' and 'He did it, his love took him there.'* [And now here he goes on to point us back to the very text we've been focusing on this morning:] *The apostle Peter brought the two truths together in his remarkable statement on the Day of Pentecost, both that 'this man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge' and that 'you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.'* Peter thus attributed Jesus' death simultaneously to the plan of God and the wickedness of men. *For the cross which . . . is an exposure of human evil, is at the same time a revelation of the divine purpose to overcome the human evil thus exposed"* (64-65).
1. Is Christ's blood on our hands? Absolutely.
 2. But here's the thing: the very blood of Christ that stains our hands (in guilt) is the same blood that washes our hands and our hearts clean (in mercy).
 - a. Yes, we killed Christ in rebellion against God. But God killed Christ in love for us.
- E. In the greatest mystery of providence, God turns my sin for my salvation.
1. Oh brothers and sisters, there is nothing like the gospel. Repent and receive it afresh or for the very first time today!