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## JESUS GIVES LIFE

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### Part 1 of Jesus Loves His Church

Pastor Mark Driscoll | June 24, 2012

### WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN

The Christian life is an amazing life. It's a miraculous life. It's a supernatural life. And Christians go to church, but you can't get this life from the church. And Christians are baptized, but you can't get this life from baptism. And some Christians are born into Christian families, but you can't get this from your parents or your grandparents. This life, this amazing life, this Christian life, it only comes from Jesus Christ. And it's literally the life of Jesus coming into your life and changing, radically altering, transforming your whole life.

As we begin our study on "Jesus Loves His Church," we're going to go back and look at where the church started and began, and look at the first Christians in the New Testament context. If you've got a Bible, go to Acts 1. We'll be in Acts 1 and 2.

And for us, this is a bit of visiting our family history. My dad and I, not long ago, we had an opportunity to go to Ireland. We're the O'Driscolls and we wanted to find out our history, and where our ancestors and our forefathers were from, and to understand the people that we are a part of. And it was a great time for my dad and me.

When we pick up the book of Acts we're doing that same thing spiritually. We're getting to know our family history as the church. We're meeting our spiritual forefathers, who have gone before us. And we're looking at history that is two thousand years old, and how the church came into being, and what it means to be a Christian.

### JESUS' LIFE (ACTS 1:1–11)

So we'll start by looking at Jesus' life in Acts 1 because before we get into the church we have to deal with Jesus. The Jesus that we love is a Jesus who's alive. He's a Jesus who puts his life in us. And he makes us his living church. So here's where it begins, Acts 1. "In his first book, O Theophilus."

All right, we're going to stop right there. Do a little bit of an introduction. The author's name is Luke. He's a man who writes two books of the Bible. He writes the Gospel of Luke, which we spent a few years in not long ago, looking at the life of Jesus. And that's a prequel. And then he writes a sequel called Acts, which is the history of the early church.

He was a man converted into Christianity later in life. And he was a well-known medical doctor. For those of you who are professionals, you have professional degrees, maybe you're in business, or medicine, or research, or something of that nature or kind. You're like Luke. He had a white-collar job. He was an educated, affluent, successful man.

There is no indication that he entirely gave up his medical practice. He did go into ministry as a pastor, but he probably had a full-time job, and then he was a volunteer leader in the church. So, some of you, that's your story or God is calling you into that kind of story, to use everything that you've learned in your vocational and education background, and then applying that to church and ministry without going into paid vocational ministry. That's Luke.

And he was close friends with a man named Paul. As we read the New Testament, they travel a lot together, they work a lot together, they're partners. And what we see, as well, is that Luke may have actually been Paul's personal physician.

And so these two men, Paul and Luke together, give us the vast majority of the New Testament. Paul writes some, I think it's thirteen or fourteen letters in the New Testament. There's a debate as to whether or not he wrote Hebrews. And then Luke gives us the very long books of Luke and Acts. Just by sheer tonnage, these two men contribute the majority of the New Testament.

And so Luke's a very important man. And in both of his books, Luke and Acts, where he's looking at the history of Jesus and the history of Jesus' people, the church, he mentions early on this man Theophilus, or Theo. His name literally means one who loves God, or lover of God. And what we can ascertain about this man, Theophilus, is that he was a wealthy, affluent, successful businessman. And Jesus had lived, and Jesus had died, and Jesus had risen, and then Jesus had returned to heaven. And some of the witnesses of his life, death, burial, resurrection had died, and they had passed on, though some were still alive.

And so it seems as if Luke and Theo together decided, "We really need to go out and interview the remaining, living eyewitnesses. Need to go find Mary, his mom, and James, his brother. And we need to go find any of the disciples, and apostles, and followers, and those who were healed, and those

who were witnesses to his miracles and his resurrection. We need to go find them. We need to interview them. And we need to do some historical work of collecting all this eyewitness data before they've passed on."

And so Theophilus wrote the check, and he bankrolled and funded it all. And then Luke was the one who went out and did all the research and all the interviews. And so what we're getting here is not philosophy, it's history. We're getting the facts from the eyewitnesses of exactly what happened. And some of you are going to be like Theophilus, you're going to help generously fund the work of the gospel. Some of you are going to be like Luke, researchers, and scholars, and teachers who help to write down things that help others know Jesus.

And ultimately it's all about him, and it's only about him. And all that Luke has to say connects directly to Jesus. And what we see in his first book, Luke, is he talks a lot about Jesus' relationship with the Holy Spirit. And that's a theme he's going to pick up on with the Holy Spirit's relationship with the church in the book of Acts.

So what we see is that Jesus is God, he's the second member of the Trinity, he comes down, takes upon himself human flesh, and he lives this amazing life. He casts out demons, he heals people, he teaches and preaches with authority, he goes water skiing without a boat. He does some amazing things. And the question is, "Well, how did he do that? How did Jesus live this supernatural, miraculous, amazing life? How did he say no to sin every single time and yes to God at every single opportunity?" Well, though he was God, he set aside the continual use of his divine attributes, and he lived as we do. He was really tempted, really hungry, really tired, really tried. But he lived by the presence and the power of the third member of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit.

And Luke, more than any other gospel writer, really bears this out. So in Luke 1 he told us that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. In Luke 2, he says that Jesus is called the Christ, which means the one anointed by the Holy Spirit. In Luke 3, we see the baptism of Jesus, where Jesus goes into the water, the Father speaks from heaven, "This is my Son in whom I'm well pleased," and the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus in the form of a dove.

We see as well, in Luke 4, that Jesus was, quote, "full of the Holy Spirit." He was Spirit-filled. His life was empowered, and directed, and enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit. It also says in Luke 4 that he was, quote, "led by the Spirit." Everywhere he went was by the direct leading of the Holy Spirit. It says, as well, in Luke 4 that he came, quote, "in the power of the Spirit." So when Jesus would preach, and teach, and perform miracles, he did so by the power of the Holy Spirit.

He sums it all up in Luke 4 where he's in a synagogue on their Sabbath day of Saturday, and he opens up the ancient scroll of Isaiah, and he reads a verse that says simply, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." And so Jesus is saying, "Today this is fulfilled in your hearing. You've been waiting for the anointed, appointed, coming of the Messiah God. I am here and the Holy Spirit is on me. The Holy Spirit is in me. The Holy Spirit works through me." And so we're to see Jesus' life empowered by the Holy Spirit.

### ***The Life of Jesus' People***

And this is really important because when he moves from Jesus' life to the life of Jesus' people, the church, he has the Holy Spirit descending on the church at Pentecost, as the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism, to take the life of Jesus and place it in us. So that we might be new people, with new desires, and new power, to live a new life patterned after by Jesus. And that's exactly what Christianity is. It's Jesus for us, and ultimately Jesus in us.

So, "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach, until the day he was taken up," he ascended back into heaven, "after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit."

He's going to keep emphasizing that the ministry of Jesus, the life of the church, the conversion of people is through the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. You need to know that at Mars Hill Church we firmly believe unless it's about Jesus and the Holy Spirit shows up, it's not Christian. It's Christian if it's about Jesus and the Holy Spirit's involved. That's what we believe. It takes God's person, God's presence, God's power to make us God's people.

He goes on, "After he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles," those are leaders, "whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his sufferings by many proofs, appearing to them forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God."

So Jesus died on the cross in our place for our sins. He was buried. Three days later he rose. And for forty days he proved to everyone that he was very much alive. So people could have meals with him, and hug him, hear him preach and teach. Thomas the doubter said, "I don't believe unless I see the scars myself." Jesus says, "Here they are." And he fell down and worshiped him, and proclaimed, "My Lord and my God." Jesus' own mother worshiped him as God. "My son is alive, he really is Lord." Jesus' brothers worshiped him as God. Even enemies, like Saul of Tarsus who became Paul the Apostle, worshiped him as God.

Big idea: Jesus died. Jesus rose. Jesus hung out for forty days. And lots of people, crowds upwards of five hundred at a time, 1 Corinthians 15 says, they saw him alive. This was just a fact. This was just a fact. And again, if Jesus is dead, our faith is dead. If Jesus is dead, our hope is dead. And if Jesus is dead, then we are dead. But Jesus is alive. That is the issue for Christianity, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

"And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem," which is where they were for a feast called Pentecost, "but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me; for John,'" that's his cousin, "'baptized with water, but you'll be baptized with,'" what? "'The Holy Spirit,'" or I should say, with whom? "'The Holy Spirit not many days from now.'"

So everybody's really excited, "Hey, Jesus is alive. This is great. We've got to go back home and tell everyone. This is amazing." Jesus said, "Not yet. First you need to receive the Holy Spirit." Before life can be lived, before ministry can be done, the Holy Spirit needs to show up in your life. Because the Christian life is not the life that you and I live for God. It's the life that God lives in us. It's the life that God lives through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. It's the life of Jesus taking up residence in our life. So he tells them to wait.

The story continues, "So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'" Here's their question: "Are we done? Can you go kill some Romans? Can you reverse the curse? Could we just have a lot of milk and honey? Can we call into work tomorrow and tell our boss what we really think about him because we're done? Is the kingdom of God here? Are we done?"

How many of you feel that way? Right? Your question to Jesus today would be, "Can you just bring the kingdom? Can you crush our enemies, lift the curse, give me something to eat in a hammock? Can we do that today?"

### ***The Power of the Holy Spirit***

Here's what Jesus is going to say, "He said to them, 'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons.'" He says, "'It's not for you to know the times or the seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive,'" what? "'Power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.'"

Here's the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian: A non-Christian can appreciate and admire the life of Jesus, but they can't experience and enjoy his power. Do you get that? For a Christian we can enjoy and experience the power of Jesus not just in his life, but unleashed in our life. And Jesus says, "When the Holy Spirit comes, he comes powerfully." He utterly changes people.

To give you an analogy, there's a section in Pennsylvania where people are living in nice suburban and rural homes. There's electricity, you drive through at night, the lights are on in the homes, the street lights are on, the businesses are open. And then you hit the Amish community. And it's dark because they don't have any connection to the power grid. They've chosen to live without any connection to that powerful resource. Though it's available to them, they've not availed themselves to it. Some people live like that spiritually.

Jesus is alive. The Holy Spirit is powerful. The Holy Spirit is glad to indwell you, to transform you, to empower you, to enable you to love Jesus, to live like Jesus, to be a new person as a Christian and a member of the church. But some people are not connected to Jesus through repentance, and faith, and the Holy Spirit. All of that power is available to them, but they don't avail themselves to it.

For those of you who are non-Christians, you cannot live the Christian life apart from the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit. For those of you who are Christians, when you're tempted, and tried, and troubled, here's what I want you to do: Invite the Holy Spirit to empower you. Believe that he is with you. Believe that he is for you. Believe that what Jesus has for your future is possible through his presence and power.

So Jesus says, "Don't worry about everything yet. First things first, be connected to me through the person, the presence, the power of the Holy Spirit. "And when he comes you'll be able to live a new life, a life like mine, living by the same power that I do." This is exciting stuff.

This is so important because a lot of times people wonder, "How do we know who the Christians are?" "Well, were they baptized? Did they grow up in a Christian family? Are they moral? How do they vote? Do they attend church?" The one sign, seal, symbol, certainty of salvation is the Spirit. The other things may or may not be indicators of true, genuine relationship with Jesus.

But when the Holy Spirit shows up in somebody's life, Jesus says, "He comes with power." People flat out change. You're not just a better version of your old self, you're a new person altogether.

### ***His Witnesses at Home and to the Ends of the Earth***

So the story continues, "'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth.'" If you belong to Jesus, if you're filled with the Holy Spirit, you want others to come to know Jesus. You want to live your life and tell your testimony in such a way as to be a witness.

So for us, we don't believe this myth that faith is private and personal. It's public and practical. We don't believe, "Oh, well this is my life and I don't want to in any way have you feel uncomfortable because you feel pressured to meet Jesus." I don't want people to feel pressured to meet Jesus, but if the Holy Spirit is pressuring them, I want them to feel pressured to meet Jesus.

Some of you have been cowardly about your faith. You've not been witnesses. You don't talk about Jesus. You don't share Jesus. You don't give Jesus credit for even things that people are seeing in your life. "How's it going? Wow, that's encouraging. That's really interesting." What you don't say is, "Jesus is alive. God has showed up in my life. By the grace of God I'm changing. I know I'm not perfect, but I know one day in the presence of Jesus I will be, and he's working on me until then."

How's it going telling your story? And here's what witnessing is: you love somebody, and you want other people to meet the person you love. That's all that it is. Say, "Man, Jesus loves me. I love him. He's changed my life. He loves you. I love you. I want you to meet him." That's called evangelism.

When you fall in love, that's what you do, right? You go to everybody you know, you say, "I've met the most amazing person! And they are changing —my whole life, my outlook, my heart, everything's different." If you've met Jesus, you've tasted his love, you just go out and tell the people that you know what his love has done for you.

Jesus calls that being his witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth. Means we start at home and we go out from there. That we ring out

to the nations of the earth 'cause God loves the whole world, and there is good news for all people that Jesus is alive.

He goes on, "When he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight." You think that was a weird moment? Can you just see that? Like, hey everybody's there. All right, here are all the new Christians, there are 120 Christians at this time. Not a big deal. Christianity is not billions like it is, just yet. "Jesus, you're alive. This is amazing. What is it the fortieth day now? Oh . . ." Can you imagine that? I mean, I'm sure there was a long awkward silence and a lot of stares at each other like . . . "How come we didn't put a string on him? Like, what? He's gone."

'Cause see, Jesus lived in heaven, he came down to the earth, he lived, died, rose. He evidenced his resurrection for forty days. And then he ascended back into heaven. So Jesus is alive right now. He's ruling, reigning, he's Lord, God, Savior, King, Christ, he's high and exalted on a throne. But here's what everybody's wondering at that point, "What do we do now? We had a nice church of 120, Jesus was our pastor. What now?"

"While they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men," maybe two angels, "stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way you saw him go.'"

Said, "Guys, he's going to be back." "When?" "None of your business. Okay?" "What do you want us to do?" "Tell the whole earth that he's alive." "We can't do that." "Oh, he said the Holy Spirit's coming. You can." One hundred-twenty people are now today on the earth, a few billion people who worship Jesus. Why? Because the Holy Spirit showed up with power. And people scattered and are his witnesses. And we are the church. We're part of this great legacy. This is our family history.

I can't get into all the details, but what happens next is the Holy Spirit does fall on the leaders, and they start speaking in tongues. There are three kinds of tongues in the Bible. There is a private prayer language that Paul tells the Corinthians that he prays in a tongue. So it can be a personal connecting time with Jesus.

Other times it's a revelation, where God has something to say, he says it to someone, and then they speak it in tongues, and it's translated. We see that in 1 Corinthians 12.

And thirdly, sometimes tongues is where Jesus loves somebody, and you don't speak their language, but he wants you to tell them about him. So he enables you to not only speak their language, but their dialect. And here in Acts 2, both the Greek words are used. They not only speak the language but the dialect.

So like, if you were evangelizing a Southern redneck, right, you would not only speak their version of English, which the British would say isn't English, and you would communicate it with a Southern drawl. They would be like, "That's amazing. You speak redneckanese. That's amazing. You're communicating in my native language and dialect." Similarly, if they were Canadian, or they were British, or they were Australian, you'd have that dialect and the language. And what that is, is that's God doing a miracle, and showing the hearer how much he loves them. He's overcoming the confusion of languages that happened at the Tower of Babel, and he's bringing people together again around the person of Jesus.

So what happens is these rural fishermen and farmers, pretty simple folk for the most part, they are speaking about Jesus in languages and with dialects, or slang words, and drawls, that absolutely fit the hearer. And so the Holy Spirit falls, and then what happens is that those who are hearing it are mystified. "What's happening? This is supernatural. This is miraculous. God must really love us to talk to us." And so there's a lot of interest and confusion, and those who are present want to know, "What's God doing?"

## **JESUS' LIFE FOR US (ACTS 2:22–32)**

And so it moves from Jesus' life to Jesus' life for us in Acts 2:22–32. So to explain what is happening and who this great savior Jesus is, a man named Peter stands up. Peter was the leader, human leader of the disciples. He's always listed first in their names. He is close with Jesus for three years. He himself was a coward until he saw Jesus risen from death, until he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and then he became courageous.

At one point in his life he tragically denied that he even knew Jesus, yet after Jesus rose from death, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. When it came time for him to be crucified, they said, "Peter, we're going to crucify you unless you deny Jesus. And we'll crucify you painfully, and arduously, and openly, and publicly." And Peter said boldly, "Then crucify me upside down. I'm not going to deny Jesus, and I don't deserve to die like him." And that's how he died. See, the Holy Spirit came on him in power.

Here's what he has to say in the sermon. Now let me say this, Christianity starts with a sermon. I personally love this. Okay. Personally, I think this is awesome. The church is what happens when the Bible is preached, and the Holy Spirit comes, and people are connected to Jesus. The result is the church. But it's always back to the preaching of the Word of God, the repentance of sin, the power of the Spirit, the life of Jesus. The result is a bunch of people called Christians who are on mission together as the family of God, the church. Christianity starts with a sermon. It's why we still have preaching today. We believe that God works through the Scriptures. That the Holy Spirit wrote the Scriptures, that he empowers preachers and teachers to proclaim them, and he opens understanding to receive them.

So here's Peter's sermon, and it's actually not his whole sermon, it's a bit of a summary transcript. "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth," Where does Peter start his sermon? Jesus. I love that. "Jesus of Nazareth." That's it. "I wonder what he's talking about?" Jesus. It starts with Jesus, it ends with Jesus, it's all about Jesus, it's only about Jesus, and it's always about Jesus. And the Holy Spirit wants you to know Jesus, you to be excited about Jesus. Peter's filled with the Holy Spirit. Where does he start? Jesus. "Dear everyone, Jesus of Nazareth, that's who we're talking about."

Let me say this too, as long as I'm preaching, you're going to hear about Jesus. Mars Hill Church, from day one when we were flat broke, homeless, and poor, we were talking about Jesus. And though many things will change, one thing will never change, the Book will be open and Jesus will be proclaimed, by the grace of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, at Mars Hill Church.

"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—" Here's what he says, "Guys, Jesus, you know he did the miraculous. Some of you were there." He's talking to some of the early eyewitnesses. "You saw it, right? A little boy gives him a Lunchable, he feeds a stadium. Interesting. Right? Dead people come back, give him a hug. There's a sign. Different. Moses and Elijah come down for lunch. Unique, right?"

He says, "We've seen Jesus' life, he does stuff nobody else does. He says stuff nobody else says. We know that he comes with God's power and authority. We know that he's God's presence among us." Says, "You know it." See, we can't just look at Jesus' life and say, "What an amazing life." No, it's beyond a human life. He does far more than we could ever do.

### **God's Definite Plan**

"This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." Okay, some people call this Reformed theology, we call it Bible. Okay. Here's what he says, "You killed Jesus, but it was part of God's definite plan, and he knew of it in advance through his foreknowledge."

Anybody confused? If you're not confused, you weren't paying attention, okay? Let me say it again, "You killed Jesus, but it was part of God's definite plan, and he knew it would happen according to his foreknowledge." It all comes together.

First of all, God is good, not evil. God only does good, not evil. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. When evil happens, when injustice happens, when oppression happens, when sin happens, you can't look up in heaven and say, "God, you're sovereign, why do you do evil things?" God doesn't do evil things. God grieves evil things.

I had a woman come to me some years ago; she'd tragically been raped. She said, "Why did God have me raped?" I said, "Sweetheart," she was a young gal, "God is not a Father in heaven who is organizing the rape of his daughters." God doesn't do that. That's not how God works.

Sometimes in the name of God's sovereignty we can forget the goodness of God. We can so emphasize the sovereignty of God, that he's only sovereign and no longer good. Great error happens when you take any attribute of God and you make it the totality of God. "God is love." Okay, then he can't send anybody to hell. He's also just. Don't just take one attribute of God and turn it into the totality of God. God is sovereign. He is sovereign. He rules and reigns over everyone and everything. But he's also good. Don't make him evil.

You're responsible for your sin. He says, I'll read it again, he says, "You crucified and killed," Jesus Christ. So you, and me, us, and we, have sinned. We've not done what God wanted. We've done exactly what God forbids us to do. We can't look at God and say, "Well, you're sovereign, everything that happens is your responsibility. It's not my fault. I'm clean." We have to say, "I'm guilty. You're guilty. I'm guilty. We're guilty."

But, though we do evil, God remains good. And God is so good that he rules over evil, and he uses it for good. Isn't that amazing? Here it's called the "definite plan." Not a hypothetical, potential, possible plan. A definite plan.

God also, it says here, has foreknowledge. What this means is you and I are bound by time, limited by time, live in time. We don't know what the future holds, right? But God does. God sees everything completely, perfectly, in totality, continually. So though God does not cause evil, he foresees it, and he has a definite plan to overcome it and to use it for his glory and our good.

Give you an example in the Scriptures, there's a man named Joseph. He's like a type of Christ. He was betrayed by his brothers. Thrown in a hole and left for dead. And he comes out of the hole, and he rises up to be a king who saves a multitude of people. And when he stands before his brothers in Genesis 50:20, he looks them in the eye and he says something very similar. He says, "What you intended for evil God used for," what? "Good, and the saving of many lives."

Jesus comes along as the greater Joseph. His brothers, the Jews, have betrayed him. They have thrown him in a hole and left him for dead. And here he comes out of that hole and he is now a living, ruling, and reigning king. And it was part of God's definite plan that though they sinned against him, that he would use the evil for good and the saving of many lives, including mine, and I pray by the grace of God, yours.

This is God's definite plan. God knew that we would sin. God knew that sin would cause us to die. God knew that we would deserve hell and the wrath of God. And God in his foreknowledge sent his son Jesus Christ, with a definite plan that they agreed to in eternity past. Ephesians 1 talks about him working out everything according to his plan. And the Father and the Son agreed on this plan.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, comes into history and he is sinned against, but he remains faithful because he knows the definite plan. That is that he would live without sin, and that he would be betrayed by a friend, and that he would be crucified between two thieves. And when it looked like God was defeated, God was victorious. When it looked like God was dying, the truth is, it's in his death we find our living.

The definite plan was that Jesus would die in our place, for our sins. That Jesus would give us salvation and forgiveness. That Jesus would take away our death, and give us his life, and send us his Spirit to make us new, to be his people together forever with him. What was done to Jesus was the worst evil in the history of the world, the murder of God. What was done by Jesus was the greatest good in the history of the world, glorifying the Father and saving a multitude. It is all part of God's foreknowing, sovereign, definite plan.

Now, let me say for you what this means practically. Don't freak out. Because there will be times in your life where you feel like God doesn't have a plan, and it's all chaos, and out of control. And as a result you'll struggle because you want to know the future. "What is going to happen? How do I plan? How do I prepare? How do I brace myself for what seems to be nothing but trauma coming my way?"

Here's the truth, God has a definite plan. God knows what tomorrow has for you. And he will not tell you his definite plan. And he may not tell you of your tomorrow. And for those of you who question his definite plan and you want to have the foreknowledge that he has, you're going to destroy yourself with worry, and grief, and anxiety, and stress.

I'm not saying that you live irresponsibly, and you don't plan, and prepare, and pray. But I'm saying, at the end of the day, there's only one who is sovereign and he loves you. And he's got it under control.

Here's what happens: sometimes Christians want to try to manipulate God to avoid suffering. Jesus endured suffering, and with Jesus we can endure suffering. And the truth is that Christians don't avoid all suffering, but with Jesus we can endure any suffering. God has a definite plan. He knows the future and your future. And it doesn't matter what sin you commit, or others commit against you, he will use it for good.

There will be a day when you see it. Some of you will see part of God's definite plan in your life. When we're in the middle of it we live by faith. We're looking out the windshield, like, "I don't know where we're going, what we're doing, I'm just trying to stay close to Jesus." You walk with Jesus for a while and all of sudden you look in the rearview mirror and you're like, "Ah, there was a definite plan. I see how this connected to that and they connected to this, and what he taught me here. And oh, he had a definite plan." Most of our life is living by faith, and once in while we get to look back and see the definite plan.

For some of you, the hardest, most difficult, arduous parts of your life, the painful, traumatic, grievous parts of your life, you may not see until you see him face to face. You may not understand the definite plan until this life is done. But know this, God is good, God is sovereign, God is bigger than sin. He uses evil for good, though he's not the author of it, he's the ruler over it. He has a definite plan, he knows the future, and you can trust him.

And when all is said and done, and your faith becomes sight, you will believe in your heart of hearts that his way was the best way, and his plan was the best plan, and you will praise him for who he is and what he's done. I need you to believe that. That's what he tells them.

### ***Jesus Isn't Dead***

"God raised him up." Hey, here's something I really need you to know. Jesus isn't dead. Did you know that? This is the one thing that changes everything. There's a lot of religions; dead guys. Mohammed, dead, Buddha, dead, Krishna, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead. Philosophers like David Hume and Bertrand Russell, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead. Jesus, not dead. Unique. Unique.

"God raised him up." You ever been to a funeral? If you don't believe in resurrection, death seems like this unconquerable enemy. If you believe in the resurrection of Jesus, and you know that that is your future in him, it changes how we live, it changes how we die. The worst thing, friends, is not to die, it's to die apart from Jesus.

"God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it." See, death comes where there's sin. Jesus died for our sin, though he had no sin, and death could not hold him because he was without sin. And so he rose from death and he conquered sin and death.

### ***Jesus Is the Greater David***

Then he quotes David. "For David says concerning him." For these guys, David is as big as it gets, right? If you would ask all the kids in, you know, the Jewish school today, "Who do you want to be like when you grow up?" "David." I mean, kids still pretend to be David. Do you have any sons? First time you read them the story of David and Goliath, that's all they're thinking about for the next ten years. "I want to be a shepherd boy who slaughters big guys." Next thing you know your kids are throwing rocks at you. You know, so . . .

But, you know, for the Jewish kids growing up, and the boys grow up, and they're like, "David, little shepherd boy takes down Goliath. And then he goes out and kills lions. Wow! Then he grows up to be king. You could be anything. You could be like King David. He rules the nation. He worshiped God. He writes books of the Bible. He sings songs to the Lord. He gets the plans for the temple." David's a big deal. If you ask the kids, "Who's your hero?" "David." David's as big as it gets.

So he quotes David: "David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken.'" See, Jesus is with you. This is why the presence and power of the Holy Spirit is so important. That's how Jesus is with you. So you won't be shaken.

"Therefore my heart was," what? "Glad." David had tough days. But you can have gladness of heart if God is with you. "And my tongue rejoiced." You could sing, and you could pray, and you could praise if God is with you. "My flesh also will dwell in hope." Can't buy hope, it's a gift of God. The Bible says that God gives us faith, hope, and love. Hope is what we all need. Right? Your hope can't come in trying to know God's definite plan. Your hope can't come in trying to know the future. Your hope comes that God is with you, that God is for you.

He goes on to say, "For you will not abandon my soul to Hades," that's the grave, "or let your Holy One see corruption." See, David, even a thousand years before Jesus was born, he had this idea that death is not the end, that resurrection is. That God made us for life, and we die because of sin. But God has more for his people than just a funeral, but a wedding awaiting them on the other side.

He goes on to say, "You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your," what? "Presence." He said, "You know what made David great? The presence of God."

Here's what can happen, friends, whether it's David or another leader, a political leader, a moral leader, a religious leader, a spiritual leader, a business leader, you and I are prone to choose heroes. We're prone to want to mimic them, and follow their example, and imitate them.

So what we will do is then we will ignore whole parts of their life that are sinful, and turn them into some fictitious character. So nobody ever talks about the fact that Gandhi was a bisexual who left his wife and slept with children. And nobody talks about the fact that Martin Luther King committed adultery a lot. And nobody talks about the fact that JFK was unfaithful to his wife.

We sort of revise history. We try to turn our heroes into saviors. And then we want to live a life like them. We want to be inspired by them. We want to follow their example. We want to be modeled after them. And they're all sinners. And they're all dead. And even the best among us isn't that great. David was an adulterer. David was a murderer. And even on his death bed one of the final things he does is puts out a hit to go have some guy murdered. So if you tell the whole story of David's life, he needs a savior too. He's not a savior.

What made David great? He says it, "Your presence." See, God was with David. And through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, God is with you, and God is with us. And we're sinners, and we have folly, and rebellion. And the Holy Spirit is willing to be with us. And what this means is even when life gets hard, 'cause we're sinning or others are sinning against us, at least we're not alone in it.

And let me say, if you're here looking for a version of Christianity where you will never suffer, there is no version that omits suffering. But when we suffer, God comes to be with us, he comforts us, we get to know him better, and we more greatly appreciate the sufferings of Jesus. There's something worse than dying, that's dying without Jesus. There's something worse than suffering, that's suffering without Jesus. And Jesus brings his presence to us, in us, through us, for us, sometimes in spite of us, by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

The whole thrust of the argument, the whole thrust of the sermon is, don't just look at the people in the Bible and ignore their sin. Don't just look at people in history and ignore their sin, and try to follow their example. Come to Jesus, receive the Holy Spirit, have God be present in you. And then the change that's happening is by the grace of God, for the glory of God. This is where the Christian life is not one where you live a life for God, but God comes and lives a life in you.

He goes on, "Brothers, I can say with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried." Two facts, there was a funeral, and he's in a hole. David's soul was with the Lord, but his body was in the ground. "And his tomb is with us to this day."

Says, "You know what, David was a pretty good guy, but he really can't do anything today." You go to his grave, "Hey David, what should I do with my wife?" Not going to be a great counseling appointment. He doesn't have a ton to offer. Even the greatest among us are still sinners. Even the greatest among us still die. Jesus is without sin. Jesus is alive. He's not just the best among us. He's in a category unto himself.

"Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne." You know what made David great? That through him would come one of his descendants, who would sit on the throne, and be a greater King, the King of kings, Jesus Christ. And so Jesus, like David, started out poor, and rural, and simple, and humble. And he was hated, and despised, and opposed even by his own brothers. And ultimately he grew up to be a mighty, powerful king.

Jesus comes along as the greater David. And he resurrects from death. And he is the King of kings, with a kingdom that never ends. "He foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ," because God has a definite plan, and he foreknows the future. "That he would not abandon to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, of that we're all his witnesses."

### ***Do You Have the Holy Spirit?***

Now here's their story. This is being preached to some "good people." Where are they? Where are they, Mars Hill? Jerusalem, the Holy City. Why are they there? Well, they're not atheists, and they're not just theists, or spiritual, or supernatural. These are devout people. They give lots of money to the temple. They read, if they're literate, the Scriptures. If not they have the Scriptures read to them in the synagogue. And they go there every Saturday. They don't eat pork. And they do everything the Bible says. And they're trying to memorize the 613 laws. Keep them all.

They've walked to Jerusalem. How many of you would have walked to church today? It's hot. It's rugged. It's far. There is no 7-Eleven with a Slurpee machine. It's effort. You know what I'm talking about? And they walk. And then they walk all the way up the hill. And they walk up to the temple.

And here's what Peter says. "That's not enough." Because you could be spiritual without the Holy Spirit. You could be committed to Jewish rules, but not Jesus' resurrection. You can be someone who admires the life of Jesus, but has not experienced it. You could be born into a religious family, but not born again into the family of God.

Is that your story? It's about family, morality, tradition, spirituality, religion; or Jesus. That was my story. As far back as we could trace, we're Catholic, Irish Catholic. We don't have any atheists; we have criminals, but no atheists. We all believe in God. I was baptized as a baby, but I didn't know Jesus. I grew up going to church, and I didn't know Jesus. I prayed, oftentimes before I went to bed or before a meal, and I didn't know Jesus. I knew a few verses of the Bible, and I didn't know Jesus. I was a fairly moral guy, and I didn't know Jesus.

A lot of people are like that. A lot of you are like that. Say, "Well, my family was Christian." Or, "I've been Christian since I was a kid." Or, "I was baptized as an infant." Or, "I'm a good person." Or, "I believe in God." Or, "You know, I go to church." All of that can be very good if you believe in

Jesus, and you have the Holy Spirit. If not, it's absolutely worthless. It's like a wedding ring without a wife.

## **JESUS' LIFE IN US (ACTS 2:33–41)**

So what did he tell them? You need Jesus. You need the Holy Spirit. Let me ask you this today, do you know Jesus? Have you received the Holy Spirit? That's where the story continues, Jesus' life in us. Acts 2:33–41, "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God," Jesus is alive. He's in the presence of the Father. He's at the right hand, the seat of authority; he's ruling and reigning right now.

"And having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing." How many of you have seen the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in someone's life? "Man, they've changed, they're different, they're thinking differently, they're acting differently, they're behaving, believing differently."

How many of you have seen the work of the Holy Spirit in someone, but not experienced it in yourself? That's exactly what's happening here. These religious, devout, nice, moral, spiritual people, they're seeing God do something in others' lives that they themselves have not experienced.

"For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord,'" that's God the Father, "'said to my Lord,'" Jesus Christ, "'sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool.'" Now think of that. Every time you put your feet up think that's where the enemies of Jesus end up, at his feet, as his footstool. It's a powerful image.

This opportunity for salvation that you're getting invited to today, it's only for this life. When this life ends, you stand before Jesus, there's judgment, consequence eternally. This is it. It's appointed once for a man to die, then judgment. This is it. If you don't receive Jesus, you will meet him and be his footstool under his rule and authority, as his enemy forever. Let me just be clear about this. This is a sobering, serious subject.

Some of you would ask, "You trying to convert me?" Totally! Yes. "You trying to make me a Christian?" I'm not trying to make you a Christian, but I'm trying to make you a Christian. Only the Holy Spirit can make you a Christian. I'm inviting him to make you a Christian. Yes. That's why your family, your friends, your neighbors, your coworkers, your enemies brought you here. They're like, "Listen. You need Jesus. Hell's hot. Forever's a long time. Now's a good time." That's why you're here.

God knows the future. God knew you would hear this. And this is all part of his definite plan for you. Absolutely. You're supposed to become a Christian today. Not just religious. Not just moral. Not just traditional. It's not about family. It's about the family of God. It's not about being spiritual. It's about the Holy Spirit. It's not just about regulations. It's about the resurrection. And it's about Jesus.

## **REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED**

Now they hear this, and you hear this. The question is: "What do we do?" That's the question. He goes on, verse 37, "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart." "Oh, no. I'm a sinner. I need Jesus. I've missed him. That's the problem." How many of you are feeling that? That's the Holy Spirit right now, coming to you. Just hammering away. "Hey, pay attention. Jesus loves you. He died for you. He rose for you. He's Lord, God, Savior, King, Christ. Enough of it already. Today's the day."

"And they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles," here's a great question, "'What do we do? What do you want us to do?'" The answer is, Jesus already said, "it is" what? "Finished." We don't do anything. He did everything. We trust him for what he's done.

So here's Peter's answer, you ready for it? Peter said, "Repent and be baptized every one of you." I'd invite you all to salvation in Jesus. "In the name of," whom? "Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Unpack that. "Repent." What's that mean? Big, huge word. Repentance is when the Holy Spirit starts to change our mind. We start to think, "What am I doing? Where am I going? Why am I here? What's the point? Who am I?" Changes our heart. "I don't want to be this way anymore. I don't want to think this way. I don't want to act this way. I want to be different." Leads to a change of direction. Repentance is turning around. "Jesus, I need to get close to you. Where's that Bible somebody gave me? I need to pick that up. Jesus, I don't pray very well, but I need to talk to you. I just need to talk to you. Hey Jesus, where are your people? I need to get to know some of them 'cause I'm confused and I need the family."

It's a change of mind, and a change of heart, and a change of life direction. You stop walking away from Jesus, you start walking towards Jesus. You stop ignoring Jesus, you start listening to Jesus. You stop rebelling against Jesus, you start obeying Jesus. You stop despising Jesus, you start enjoying Jesus. And the closer you get to him the more like him you become. That's repentance.

Let me say this, Jesus invites you. There's a smile on his face. His fists aren't clenched, his hands are open. He's looking at you, saying, "Don't go any further, it only gets worse. Please turn around and come back." That's repentance. Have you ever done that? You're trying to hide your sin. Blame others for your sin. Excuse your sin. Manage your sin. Diminish your sin. Deny your sin. How about repent of your sin? "Jesus, you died. Here it is. I'm coming home."

He says, "Repent." And then what? "Be baptized." Baptism is an outward demonstration of an inward transformation. That's a baptism. Baptism doesn't save you. Jesus saves. But baptism shows, because he says, "You will be my," what? "Witnesses." Baptism is part of our witness. It's how we publicly preach the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

Jesus lived without sin. He died and was buried. Three days later he rose from death. Baptism is where we show Jesus lived without sin, died and rose for me. And just as water cleanses me from filth, Jesus cleanses me from the filth of sin. And so baptism is how we show that we personally believe in,



belong to Jesus. That we don't just admire his life, but we experience his life.

Have you ever been baptized as a believer? Some of you were baptized as children. Did you grow up as a believer? Did you grow up faithful to the Lord? Or were you like me, someone who got wet but not saved? Then you need to be baptized. You need to be baptized, not for your salvation, but as a witness of the salvation that Jesus has given you. We'd invite you today. Come forward, let us talk to you, pray for you, so you can repent, give your sin and your life to Jesus, become a Christian, receive the Holy Spirit, be baptized.

And he says, "Why?" "For the forgiveness of sins." Jesus says it on the cross, "Father, forgive them." And then he dies, providing the means by which forgiveness is possible. You can be forgiven. It's so liberating. It's so amazing. No more guilt. No more condemnation. No more blaming. No more hiding. No more denying. No more diminishing. No more shame. Forgiven, loved, known, embraced in spite of who you are. The Holy Spirit placed in you to make you someone else. I invite you to forgiveness. I invite you to Jesus.

## RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

And he says, "And you'll receive the Holy Spirit." God's glad to place his Spirit in you. And this does so many things. This could be a whole millennium of sermons. But I'll just pack it down to three big ideas: new nature, new desires, new power.

New nature means it's not just a modified, updated, new-and-improved version of you. It's a totally, thoroughly, completely new you. You change in your core all the way down to your identity, your nature, who you are. When the Holy Spirit comes in, you are different. The Bible calls this being born again, being regenerated, new person, new man, new creation in Christ. Whole constellation of imagery.

But you just change. I can still remember at nineteen the Holy Spirit flipped the switch in me, and who I was died, and there's just somebody else with my last name. Now, sometimes he thinks and acts like the old guy, but the truth is, new guy, not perfect, but changing, totally different. Totally different.

New nature. New desires. As soon as I got saved, I can still remember, I started reading the Bible 'cause I wanted to. I remember on a Saturday, I'm in college; all my buddies are going out to do something. They're like, "What are you going to do?" I was like, "I think I'm going to read the Bible." They're like, "You're what?" I was like, "I'm as shocked as you are but I actually want to." Before it would have been like, "You know, I'm going to give myself a root canal." That's the same category I would have put Bible reading in. "Why are you reading the Bible?" "I like it, even though I feel horrible when I read it because I remember how bad I am. I still like it."

I started wanting to pray. I wanted to go to church. I wanted to meet God's people. I wanted to get in a small group. Next thing I know, I'm giving money. Like, "What am I doing? Money is leaving my wallet. Something has changed. I'm not getting anything in return; I'm just trying to help." Christianity is not about what you have to do, it's about what you get to do. Because if the Holy Spirit gives you your desires, that's what you want to do.

See, some of you, your real problem is you have conflicted desires. You're like, "I want to do this, but God wants me to do that." If you're a Christian, if the Holy Spirit is in you, here's the key, go with your deepest desires, your strongest desires. Because those are God's desires for you. Down deep you don't want to sin, you want to be holy. You don't want to disobey, you want to obey. You don't want to put your Bible down, you want to pick your Bible up. You don't want to run from God, you want to run to God. You don't want to avoid God's people, you want to be with God's people.

New nature, new desires, new power. You used to be powerless over certain sins, and now you're powerful to walk away from them. You can love God, you can serve God, you can obey God. If you're a Christian, you're not just a wicked, guilty, forgiven sinner; you're a wicked, guilty, forgiven sinner who's now a new creation in Christ, who has a new nature, who has new desires, who has a new power to live a whole new life, like Jesus, for Jesus, through Jesus, because Jesus is alive, and his life is in you through the Holy Spirit. This is a great life.

## A LINK IN THE CHAIN

"For the promise is for you and your children." Dads, are you the first link in the chain? Are you a broken link in the chain? Will you be the last link in the chain? See, what we want is we want your children and your children's children to know, love Jesus, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to receive a new nature, new desires, and new power.

Some of you, your parents, grandparents, they love Jesus, but the chain is broken with you. You don't have the Holy Spirit. You don't love Jesus Christ. Repent, be baptized, receive the Holy Spirit.

For some of you, your family was unbelievers. You come from a legacy of unbelief. You're the first link in the chain. God wants you to love and serve your children so that your children's children's children would know and love Jesus. And there'd be a great long chain with generations of faith that started with you as a matriarch or a patriarch, repenting of sin, being baptized, receiving the Holy Spirit.

And for some of you, you're the rebellious ones. You're the one who has broken that chain of faith.

Where are you in it? Will you be the last link in the chain? Will it be your children or your children's children who go apostate and deny Christ? Or will the Holy Spirit work through you, and work through your children and your children's children? We do not believe that your faith can save your children. We believe that the kingdom of God is a single-file line. We want your parents in front of you and your children behind you. We want you to all pass through that gate of faith together.

But one of the ways you can help and encourage your children is by modeling faith, and practicing repentance, and being filled with the Holy Spirit, and

worshiping Jesus as Lord, and encouraging them to follow in your example. This is a massively important word. It's for your children.

And it says, "For those who are far off, those who are in other nations and other places," we'll get into that in coming weeks, "everyone whom the Lord God calls to himself." Again some call it reformed, we call it Bible. God calls people to himself.

Is God calling you to himself today? Are you hearing God call you to Jesus? Is that ringing in your heart as it rings in your ears? If so, repent, turn from sin, trust in him. Come forward, that we might pray with you. We'll go ahead and baptize you. You'll be filled with the Holy Spirit. Your whole life can change by the grace of God. And some of you say, "But I didn't bring a change of clothes." In the definite plan of God we have a towel and a t-shirt for you. It's part of his definite plan. And in his foreknowledge he told us to bring them for you. You're welcome. So we're ready, we're ready to receive you. We're ready to pray for you. We're ready to talk to you about Jesus. We're ready to baptize you. Amen?

And so here's what we're going to do, we're going to celebrate Jesus. We're going to give our tithes and offerings, 'cause we want the whole world to know he's alive. As well, we're going to take Communion, remembering his broken body and shed blood means that God is not angry with me, he loves me. All my sin is forgiven in Christ. I'm a new person and as I take Communion in me, I'm showing Jesus is in me. I'm not saying the elements are literally Christ, but I'm saying as we partake, we remember that Christ is literally in us through the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit wants us to sing, he wants us to celebrate, he wants us to rejoice. And he's going to come, and he's going to live in us, and he's going to dwell in us as we honor Jesus. Amen? I'll pray.

Father God, thank you for the definite plan, the specific plan, the amazing plan. Jesus, thank you for executing the plan perfectly. No sin, substitutionary death, resurrection, exaltation. It is finished. Send the Holy Spirit to give us your life so that we can enjoy you and invite the nations to do the same. As we say thank you, Jesus, amen.

*Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.*