The power of the Resurrection

Text: Acts 2:22-42

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**Scriptures** Psalm 16; Acts 2:22-42

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 309, 32, 307, 216, 527

Series: Occasional – Easter Sunday

Theme: The Resurrection of Christ displays the power of God

Proposition: Our hope rests securely on the risen living Christ who could not be held by death, who could not be touched by decay, and who will not be kept apart from His church.

**Introduction**

Many of us here can personally testify to the transforming power of the gospel in our lives. The Apostle Peter was radically changed by grace to become a faithful servant of Christ. The loud, dynamic, disciple Peter was reduced to a deserter of Christ by the words of a servant girl who said to him “*You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus*” (Mark 14:67). After the arrest of Jesus, Peter’s profound weakness surfaced. He was shown to be coward whose bold words to Christ at the Last Supper “*If I must die with you I will not deny you*” (Mark 14:31) were proven to be impotent.

In complete contrast, Peter’s first sermon recorded in Scripture after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, it is clear that the Apostle has been fundamentally altered by the power of the Risen Christ. He has been forgiven, restored and then he followed Jesus as a changed man for the rest of his life on this earth. He no longer relied on Himself, he had come to see the profound weakness deep within. He now trusted on the power of the resurrection at work in His life. This afternoon we are going to focus on Peter’s sermon as recorded in Acts 2:22-42 as we consider 3 truths that Peter proclaims about Christ:

1. He could not be held by death
2. He could not be touched by decay
3. He could not be kept apart from His Church
4. **Christ could not be held by death**

In His powerful sermon, Peter is bold as a lion in his preaching. He speaks with power and conviction. He does not flinch from proclaiming the dual reality of God’s complete control and our complete responsibility for our actions. He makes plain that Christ died according to the will of God: v23 “*this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God*”. He also makes clear that those “Men of Israel” to whom he is speaking are accountable for the death of Christ. v23 “*you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men”.* He is speaking to some of those whose sin Christ bore on the cross. About 3000 were added to the church that day (v41). Peter courageously says, “*You crucified and killed Him*”.

This is the plain truth: Christ’s life was violently and painfully taken from Him. We can be absolutely certain of this historic fact from multiple gospel accounts, based on many eyewitness testimonies. It is true that Christ had died at Calvary at the place of the skull. He had breathed His last (Matthew, Mark and Luke record). Roman soldiers, familiar with death, saw He had really died. They didn’t break his legs – done to speed up process. They pierced his side – water and blood came out.

Jesus’ body was wrapped for burial and placed in a new tomb. A large stone was rolled against the entrance. Pilate instructed that the grave be made secure. Guards was posted at the grave site. A seal was set on the stone

Peter then speaks plainly and factually of the resurrection: v24 “*God raised Him up again*”. Jesus came back to life as a man. The gospel writers present the evidence:

1. The tomb was empty, the stone rolled away, the guards were bribed to spread the lie that the disciples had stolen the body away.
2. Jesus appeared to many after His resurrection and before His ascension, to Peter, then to the 12, “*after that He appeared to more than 500 at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep*” (1 Cor 15:6). Peter says v32 “*This Jesus God raised up and of that we are all witnesses*”. The reality of the Risen Christ was no secret! Peter himself had seen the evidence with his own eyes.
3. There was a complete transformation of the disciples after the resurrection from scared, scattered and sceptical to joyful, bold and courageous. Within weeks of Christ’s death the disciples were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (Acts 4:33).

Peter says that “*It was not possible for Him (Christ) to be held by (death)*” v24. The word translated ‘held’ means to seize, arrest, restrain, hold fast. You may be able to hold someone with an arm lock or a straight jacket. Putting a person in prison restrains them. However, the ultimate way to immobilise a person is by their death. Those who plotted against Christ wanted to permanently restrain His power and authority by taking his life.

Why could Christ not be held by death? Because of power of God’s redemption is shown in His resurrection: Death is swallowed up in the victory of Christ over sin on cross. Christ was proven to be 100% faithful and true. God’s power raised Christ because the price was paid for the sins of all God’s people. The sting of death was removed. The judgement was exacted on the Holy Lamb of God.

The Lamb of God was slain and found worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and honour and glory and blessing. Death could not hold Him because He is “*the resurrection and the life”.* Whoever believes in Him shall live even if he dies. Jesus is full of grace and truth. He never lies! Brothers and Sisters in Christ. We who trust in the Lord, who live for Him: death cannot hold us because it could not hold Him! In the words of HCLD17: “*by his power we too are already now resurrected to a new life*”. Christ could not be held by death, nor could He be touched by decay, which brings us to our second point:

1. **Christ could not be touched by decay**

If you leave a piece of steak on the kitchen bench it will begin to change. Bacteria cause the meat to turn dark brown then a greeny-blue, then maggots appear and eventually it will become a very smelly liquid. A dead body does not stay the same – it decomposes. *Jesus said, "Remove the stone."* (from the grave into which the body of Lazarus had been place) *Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days*." (John 11:39). The smell of death is due to the decay of perishable flesh.

It has been this way since sin brought the curse of God on man. “*By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*" (Gen 3:19). The decay of the body is the process of returning to dust. It is a return to the physical lifeless substance from which we are formed: 99% of the mass of the human body is composed of 6 elements: oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, and phosphorus. (The other 1% is Potassium (0.35%) Sulphur (0.25%) Sodium (0.15%) Magnesium (0.05%) Copper, Zinc, Selenium, Molybdenum, Fluorine, Chlorine, Iodine, Manganese, Cobalt, Iron (0.70%) Lithium, Strontium, Aluminium, Silicon, Lead, Vanadium). These elements make up the composition of dust on the earth. They are all that remain when this flesh has perished.

Both Peter here and Paul in his sermon at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13) quote David in Psalm 16 where he writes: “*For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption*” (Ps 16:10). Sheol is the place of the dead. Those whose bodies undergo decomposition back to the elements from which they were formed. The word translated ‘corruption’ in Acts 2:27 means decay.

David’s life was being threatened when he wrote Psalm 16. Pleading with his Lord “*Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge*” (Ps 16:1). God did rescue David who reigned as king for 47 years and died at an old age. We read that: **“***David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David*” (1 Ki 2:10). David’s body rotted in the ground and returned to dust after he died and was buried. Apostles Peter (and Paul) understood that Psalm 16 looks forward in time. “*Knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him* (David) *that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ*” (Acts 2:30-31). David foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of Christ (v31).

The power of the resurrection is seen in that God did not allow the body of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy One of Israel, to decay. The glorified body of Christ showed clear evidence of His suffering before death but did not begin to return to dust. There was no decay. Remember: He said to Thomas, *"Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving but believing*" (John 20:27). Christ has broken the curse of sin for all who put their trust in Him. His human flesh did not and has not seen corruption.

However, the process for us is not exactly the same as for Christ: Our bodies, brothers and sisters, will undergo decay, they will return to dust, but then, at the general resurrection, they will be changed into glorified bodies incapable of decay. Paul puts it this way in 1 Cor 15:53 “*For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality*”. It is because of the power of God in the resurrection of Christ that His body has not suffered decay and also that we who are in Him by faith will not suffer decay in our new bodies; they will never return to dust.

The Heidelberg Catechism expresses the comfort of this power of God in the resurrection in these words: “*Not only my soul will be taken immediately after this life to Christ its head, but even my very flesh, raised by the power of Christ, will be reunited with my soul and made like Christ’s glorious body*”.

Christ could not be held by death, nor could He be touched by decay, nor could He be kept apart from His church, which brings us to our third point:

1. **Christ could not be kept apart from his church**

The power of the resurrection for Christ did not end when He ascended bodily, that is when He was lifted up and a cloud received Him out of the sight of those who looked on (Acts 1:9). On the day of Pentecost –the 50th day after the Sabbath of the Passover week - all the apostles and many of 120 people mentioned in Acts 1:15 were gathered together. Then the Holy Spirit came upon them with power.

There was a reversal of the curse of the scattering at Babel. “*There the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth*” (Gen 11:9). The crowd could hear each one speak in his own language. It must have been an amazing sight and sound. Although some mocked that they were all drunk with new wine, others were looking for understanding and asked “what does this mean?”.

Then Peter preached this sermon which we have read from Acts 2:22-42. He proclaimed the reign and rule of the living Christ: “*Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified*”. The power of the resurrection is clear in that God raised Christ to the exalted position at His right hand, as Psalm 110 had prophesied: *The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I make your enemies your footstool"* (Ps 110:1).

This rule of Christ is exercised through His sword-His Word. Death could not keep Christ apart from His Church, that is from those who hear His Word and obey it. We can see the powerful sword of Christ at work here in v37 as Peter preached his powerful sermon: ‘*Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"*’. Christ is at work in His Church, gathering the Bride He laid down His life for: 3000 were added to the church on that day of Pentecost. The church heard the Word of the resurrected Lord and it changed their lives: “*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers*”(Acts 2:42).

The power of the resurrection is seen in the convicting work of the Holy Spirit who convicts human hearts of the truth of God’s Word and ensures that Christ is not apart from His church. Peter explains in his sermon that the exalted Christ *‘having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit…has poured out the’ the work of the Spirit so that all who repent in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of theirs sins will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:38).*

The Holy Spirit confirms the certainty of the resurrection of all those who are in Christ (Eph 1:13) being ‘sealed’ by Him for the day of redemption (Eph 4:30). In the words of the Heidelberg Catechism “*Christ’s resurrection is a guarantee of our glorious resurrection*”. The Resurrection of Christ displays the power of God.

Brothers and Sisters, our hope rests securely on the risen living Christ who could not be held by death, who could not be touched by decay, and who will not be kept apart from His church. Peter was transformed by the resurrection power of Christ. We too, brothers and sisters, have likewise experienced this power. Power to convict. Power to save. Power to equip for service in the Kingdom of our Lord.

AMEN.