

# Christ in 01 in the Acts

by Jim Flanigan

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*The apostles' use of the title Jesus of Nazareth emphasizes Jesus' humanity and connection to the town of Nazareth, highlighting his approval by God and rejection by men.*

**Duration:** 54:19

**Scripture:** Acts 2:22, Acts 6:14, Acts 7:2, Acts 7:30, Acts 7:55, Romans 1:16, Hebrews 1:1-2

**Topics:** "Jesus Christ", "Divine Authority"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the glory of Jesus Christ by highlighting his title of humiliation. He explains that Jesus, who was despised and rejected by men during his time on earth, is now the exalted and risen Lord. The preacher mentions that Peter and John preached about Jesus of Nazareth, asking people what they would do with him, as their response would determine their destiny. The sermon also discusses three words used by Peter to show God's approval of Jesus: miracles, wonders, and signs. These words demonstrate the power and authority of Jesus and were also used to approve the early disciples.

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## Transcript

Now you remember our remaining meetings, please, tomorrow evening and Thursday and Friday, and we trust that you'll come again, if you can, as we continue looking for the Lord Jesus in various parts of our Bible. Tomorrow evening and the following evening, we want to look at the two great foundational epistles. That is, of course, the epistle to the Romans and the epistle to the Hebrews, and to see how the Lord Jesus is presented there.

There are perhaps about eight epistles that are built on top of each of these two epistles. We saw one evening that there was a very interesting order in the arrangement of the books of the Old Testament, and the New Testament is nothing different. There's a very interesting arrangement there, and the epistle to the Romans and the epistle to the Hebrews are two very, very different epistles, but they're both filled with Christ, and the epistles that follow the Romans and the epistles that follow the Hebrews, there's a very marked difference now in these two sets of epistles.

Well, we look at that tomorrow evening and the following evening, God willing, and then we want to look a little at the book of the Revelation, and to see the Lord Jesus there. So we trust that you'll come again if you can, and that the Lord will bless you for coming. Last night we were looking at the Gospels, and it would have been very interesting this evening to have followed a little bit more along the line of the

Gospels, but we must leave the Gospels, just trusting that your interest has been aroused in these four very interesting books.

And now we come to the other historical book in our New Testament, the book of the Acts of the Apostles, and just a few readings, please, from the Acts of the Apostles. We read from chapter 2, first of all, chapter 2 of the Acts. Now Peter's preaching on the great day of Pentecost, and that begins at verse 14.

And we're sort of breaking into his preaching, and we're reading at verse 22. Verse 22, "...ye men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man uprooted of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.

Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pens of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." Now chapter 6, please, for a little reading. Chapter 6. And we're reading at the end of the chapter, and it is sometimes referred to as Stephen's Apology, sometimes called Stephen's Defense.

But we're reading at the end of their accusation against Stephen. Verse 13 of chapter 6. "...they had stirred up the people, of course." Verse 12, "...brought him to the council." Verse 13, "...they set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." Stephen begins to speak then, and toward the end of chapter 7. Verse 54 of chapter 7. "...when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.

And they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." There are many other scriptures in the Acts to which I want to refer, but we leave the reading there, and the Lord will bless those readings of his word. Some weeks ago, with our friends at Broomhedge, we were having a little look at some of the places that are linked with the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus.

And of course, it was inevitable that we had a little look at Nazareth. And that evening, we talked about that lovely title of the Lord Jesus, where he is called constantly Jesus of Nazareth. We found that 20 times in the New Testament, he is referred to as Jesus of Nazareth, and that 13 of those occasions are in the Gospels, and the other seven were in the Acts.

Now, we had perhaps a little look, mostly, at those references in the Gospels, and what I want to do tonight is to link together the references to Jesus of Nazareth in the Acts of the Apostles, because I have

discovered that this, in fact, plays a very big part in the Apostles' presentation of the Lord Jesus. They constantly, in their preaching, refer to him as Jesus of Nazareth, and seven very distinct times we get that title in the Acts of the Apostles. Now, to appreciate what the title means, I think we must have a little bit of repetition with regard to Nazareth, and just point out the kind of place that Nazareth was.

And when you understand the kind of place that Nazareth was, and for that matter still is, you can understand the reaction of Nathanael when he said, can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Nathanael, of course, he knew Nazareth because he lived at Cana, and Cana is not very far from Nazareth, and he must have been very familiar with the kind of place that Nazareth was. And it was with a great measure of scorn, I think, that he must have said, can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? You say, Nathanael, you know Nazareth very well, apparently, and he knew it very well. And if you had asked him just what kind of place Nazareth was, I tell you it wouldn't have been a very pleasant or a very nice story that Nathanael would have given you.

He would have told you, for one thing, that Nazareth never ever was mentioned in the Old Testament, and therefore as far as theology was concerned, it was a town of utter obscurity. There is not one mention of Nazareth in the Old Testament. You get Bethlehem, of course, mentioned in the prophets, and many other places are predicted very clearly, but there is not a single mention of Nazareth.

And one place in particular where some think there is a little play upon the words, where the Lord Jesus is called the branch, and apparently in Hebrew it looks a wee bit like the word Nazarene, but I think perhaps we are straining our imagination a little bit because it is a fact, I tell you, that Nazareth is never mentioned once in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, Nazareth has become a very prominent place now because our Lord Jesus spent almost 30 years, I suppose at least 28 years, of his life he spent in Nazareth according to the time that he was down in Egypt. He must have been at least 28 years in Nazareth, and because of that Nazareth has become very precious to us, and our Lord Jesus has been called now the Nazarene and Jesus of Nazareth.

So it was a town linked with obscurity, first of all, and the theologians had no time nor place for Nazareth. Not only that, but Nazareth has ever and always been linked with poverty, and I think everyone will agree, and all the commentaries and all the historical geographies that you read of Nazareth will all agree with that, that it was ever linked with poverty, and I think we may say that it still is. Not only that, but Nazareth was also a town noted for its squalor, and I think again that Old Nazareth is still exactly the same.

And as well as that, it was a town that was ever linked with immorality, and perhaps this is what they had in mind when they said, we be not born of fornication. They knew the kind of town that Nazareth was, and they didn't believe the story of the virgin birth, and they knew of course that Nazareth was the stopping place for merchants and traders and soldiers coming down from the north. They came from Syria and Lebanon, and they came right down, that was the way down to the south, and they stopped overnight at Nazareth and gave it this dreadful name of being one of the most immoral towns in Palestine, as it was then called.

And so you see, those four words have ever been linked with Nazareth, and I understand that in those days, one of the worst things you could have called a man was a Nazarene. If you had wanted to insult a man, if you had lived in Greece, if you had lived over in that part, you would have called him a Corinthian, and that was the worst thing you could have called a man over there. But the Corinthian of Palestine was Nazareth, and a Nazarene was just the equation of a Corinthian in the other country.

So you can see that it was wondrous grace that brought him down, and voluntarily he became known as Jesus of Nazareth. And this is a very beautiful title now, but originally it must have been linked with great shame and with despising among the people. Now before we come to look at the Acts of the Apostles, I would like to take this opportunity, as I very, very often do, of commending to you the little assembly at Nazareth.

And I know it has nothing much directly to do with our message this evening, but perhaps it is an opportunity to ask you to remember that little company, a tiny little company, that, well I suppose there might be twenty in the meeting, but that is a little bit misleading because the assembly is very weak really. And they struggle on a very uphill work, and they maintain a testimony in Nazareth. And their meeting place is a little hall in old Nazareth, in one of the narrow little streets of old Nazareth, and there they meet.

And there's a to his credit, if credit's the right word, but he has been remarkably saved. And his ministry is to literally drag people into the streets, and this is what he does, and he brings them in, the young men, he brings them in, and they have seen quite a little work there, but the assembly is still very weak. Now this little company, some time ago they had a bit of encouragement, but the encouragement brought with it an added burden.

About fifteen miles from Nazareth, in a little village called Ibelin in Galilee, there was a certain man there, a school teacher, and he was very interested and anxious about something, looking for something, and he didn't know exactly what he was looking for. He had this void, as we call it, he had this striving in his heart after something or other, and had no idea what he wanted, and had tried almost everything looking for satisfaction. One day over at Haifa, he was talking to a man, and putting to the man this strife of his after satisfaction of some sort, and this man, who himself was not a believer, he said, well I can tell you, he said, that if you go to Nazareth, he said, there are people there who actually have what you're looking for.

He said, there's a little company there at Nazareth, and he gave them directions, and he said, now they preach, he said, and they have what you're looking for, and he said, I would advise you to go and listen to them. Well now, this man, he wasn't going to be taken in by anyone, so he decided that without mentioning it to anyone, he would go and he would watch these people at Nazareth, and for six months he watched them. He watched them coming and going to the place of meeting.

He contacted them in their daily lives, and without them knowing it, he was scrutinizing them for six months, watching how they lived, listening how they talked, and making inquiries about them in the town of Nazareth as to what kind of people they were. And after six months of scrutiny, he came to the conclusion that these were people of integrity, and indeed, they seemed to have what he was looking for. Well, he came to the meetings, and he was saved.

But then, he lived in Ibelin, which was 15 miles away. Well, he didn't know the gospel, of course, until this that he had heard now from the people of Nazareth, and anyway, he invited them to come to his village and have a little meeting there. So they began to go out a night or two to Ibelin, 15 miles away, and he gathered folk into his house, and after a little while, they rented a room, and this is all in very, very recent years, just this last couple of years, and eventually, this man's wife got saved.

And then there was another notorious character in the village of Ibelin, and I don't think that anybody of any age had ever seen him sober. It seemed that he was always drunken, and when he'd heard that this particular man had gotten involved with religion, he thought, well, now, this is very interesting. I'll have to come and see what he has.

Well, the result is that he's got saved too, and his life has been remarkably changed. So the people of the village watch, and they say, what sort of thing is this that changes the life of this man? They couldn't understand it, so some of them came to the meetings, and they got saved too. And now, I think there's maybe 13, 14, or 15 of them at Ibelin, but they've all been saved just out of darkness, and our brethren at Nazareth have got to travel out and to teach them.

So you can remember this work at Nazareth, the little assembly that would be struggling to maintain its own testimony apart from Ibelin, but now they have the burden of Ibelin as well, and the burden also of a building which is 150 years old and crumbling down around them, literally crumbling down. So they have their problems, great difficulties, but they have joy in the Lord, and I ask you just to remember every time you read of Nazareth, please remember this little company. I have the privilege of visiting them fairly frequently, and always they ask about assemblies here, and they can't understand, of course, how numerous assemblies are here, and how few come to visit them.

Well, Nazareth then is still a very precious place, and in the town of Nazareth, I repeat, for 28 years at least, the Lord Jesus lived. The town of the open sewer, it has been called, and still today that open ditch runs down the center of the streets of Nazareth, and there our Lord Jesus played as a boy, and there he grew as a young man, and somewhere there he labored at the carpenter's bench, and when eventually he came out in his ministry, they said, Jesus of Nazareth, and 13 times in the gospels they give him that title. Now, I'm sure that it is by design, and not at all by chance, that the apostles used that title when they preached the gospel in the acts of the apostles, and over and over again, as we have said, they keep referring to him as Jesus of Nazareth.

I wonder why they did this, and today as I was trying to piece them together, and trying to see how the apostles used this title, well, you know, I thought it was just a thrilling thing, that really it all seemed to sort of fall into two parts, these occasions when they used this title, and sometimes I found that Jesus of Nazareth, in the acts and the preaching of the disciples, he was on earth approved of God, but rejected by men, and sometimes then I found that this Jesus of Nazareth was in heaven, rejected by men, but approved by God, and I found that the two lots of scriptures sort of fell into those two categories, and then I began to find that there were certain names of men that were linked with this lovely title, and that these names, in fact, fell on earth. I found that earlier in the book, Peter and John were linked together with this title, and then I found a strange thing, that Amos and Caiaphas in chapter 4 were linked together in connection with this title, and you remember who they were, Amos and Caiaphas, the high priests when the Lord Jesus was condemned to die, and they're linked with it in chapter 4, with his rejection, and then when you come further over in the book to chapter 7 and chapter 9, I found the names of Stephen and Saul, and Stephen and Saul are both linked with the Lord Jesus, not so much as a man on earth approved of God and rejected by men, but rather now as a man in heaven rejected by men, but approved of God, and this is how Stephen and Saul see him, and we have read that of Stephen just now. Now there is another name which we have not read, which is also linked with Jesus of Nazareth, and that of course is the name of Cornelius, and we're leaving Cornelius, but I want to put to you a very interesting, and you'll remember that I'm not preaching it as a dogma, but it's just a little suggestion, and it's a very interesting suggestion in connection with Cornelius.

You remember when they crucified the Lord, there was a centurion there. You remember of course that Pilate was there giving judgment, and I'm sure that most of us know that Pilate did not live in Jerusalem. Pilate actually lived in Caesarea.

Now we can't get that in our Bible, but it is an historical fact, and there is archaeological and historical evidence, and we all know that Pontius Pilate actually lived in a villa in Caesarea on the coast, not Caesarea Philippi, but Caesarea Maritime, as they called it, Caesarea on the coast. That's where Pilate lived. Now he only came down to Jerusalem when there was trouble, or when he was needed there.

He came down to the city, and he held court in Jerusalem, and when he came down to Jerusalem of course, he would be accompanied by a great number of soldiers, and these soldiers that accompanied Pilate, they were in the charge of a centurion, a man in charge of a hundred soldiers. Now I think that it is a fair conclusion that the centurion and the soldiers that accompanied Pilate would be those that would be with them at the trial of the Lord, and we know that it was those same who actually did the deed of crucifixion. You remember that when they crucified the Lord Jesus, the centurion was astounded, and you remember what he said.

He said, certainly this was a righteous man, and his conscience obviously was smitten, but it's a fair conclusion that he didn't know the gospel, and didn't know much about the life of Jesus of Nazareth, but he was there, and saw the name above his head, and maybe was the one who helped to nail it there. This is Jesus the king of the Jews, so they wrote Jesus of Nazareth, maybe this very centurion had actually nailed the title above the Lord's head. Now the deed is over, Calvary's passed, and the day has passed, and perhaps a year or two passed, and one day Peter gets a message.

It's a long story, but eventually Peter gets a message, and the message is there's a man at Caesarea, he's a centurion, and he wants to see you. He's a man with a conscience smitten, and he's looking for salvation, and when Peter goes up to Caesarea, and talks to the centurion, whose name is Cornelius, well then eventually Cornelius the Gentile is saved. A very interesting story, and the wonder is as to whether Cornelius, the centurion of Caesarea, was the very centurion that accompanied Pilate from Caesarea down to Jerusalem, and watched the death of Jesus of Nazareth as was involved in it.

Well, whether that be so or not, it's an interesting conjecture, and at least we do know this, that Cornelius is eventually saved by the preaching of the same Jesus of Nazareth. That's the word that Peter uses when he's preaching to him, it's Nazareth he said, and the words were by this man who was saved, was the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth, a man anointed by God, and rejected by the people, and eventually of course raised again from the dead, and now exalted into the heavens. And that was the message, and I thought it was rather a bit of a rebuke, maybe to some of us, that the disciples and the early preachers, the apostles, they seem to be so insistent upon the preaching of the person of the Lord Jesus.

I wonder why in our day, and especially in our little province, there are some people who have great difficulties in understanding salvation, and I find that it's not so in some other countries, and I wonder do we need perhaps to examine our preaching, and to see if sometimes we are preaching perhaps rather a gospel of experience that demands a person coming in a certain way, and having this experience or that experience before he actually gets to salvation. We need to be very careful about that, occupying people with an experience rather than occupying them with the Lord Jesus. And I was impressed as I read through the Acts to see that the apostles preached the person, and exalted Jesus of Nazareth, and it was what would you do with him, and what people did with him, that's what decided their destiny, and it seemed was fairly clear-cut, and nobody seemed to have any trouble in believing or trouble in understanding the way that people have in our little province as they listen to the gospel.

Well, apart from Cornelius then, there are these three pairs of names, Peter and John in the early chapters, Annas and Caiaphas in chapter 4, and Stephen and Saul in a later chapter, and these three pairs now of men are very closely linked with the presentation of Jesus of Nazareth. Peter it is of course who's doing the preaching in those early days, and nevertheless when eventually they're brought to court, brought before the council, in chapter 3 to chapter 4, that would be because of the healing of the man who laid the beautiful gift, you remember, and these two men were eventually brought. It was Peter and John together, and Peter and John in their defense, they preached Jesus of Nazareth.

How careful they were to use that title, Jesus of Nazareth. It seems that to me, used the title of his humiliation to emphasize the fact of his glory. This certainly accented the glory of the risen Lord by showing that he who was ascended now was the despised Jesus of Nazareth of those days.

Now, Jesus of Nazareth then, in the preaching of Peter and John, is the man who was on earth rejected by men, but on earth he was approved of God. Now in that chapter 2 from which we have read, Peter uses three words to show God's approval of his son, and these are three very interesting words. He says that Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs.

Now, those are three different words, obviously, and three times in our New Testament, those three words are linked together. They're linked together here as God's approval of his son, they are linked together in Hebrews 2 as God's approval of the early disciples, and they're linked together again in 2 Thessalonians 2, only this time this word added. This time it is in connection with the man of sin, and it says of him that his coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, false wonders, in 2 Thessalonians 2. So it would seem that these three words are a kind of a requirement for approval, and although there's falsehood and lying linked with the man of sin, these are the three things that God has used to approve his son and also to approve the early disciples.

Now, they're three very interesting words, and they're very different words, but as we have said, they're linked together in this very interesting way. Now, the first word there, the word miracles, is actually the word power, and it is the word that sometimes our brethren translate very literally as the word dynamite, the same word. You remember the gospel, the power of God unto salvation, and even for those of us who don't know Greek, we have a little look at this word in the Greek.

If somebody puts the Greek characters into English for us, we can have a look, and we can see that it's very like our word dynamite. So it is that very same word from which we get our word dynamite, and here is the power of the things that he did. Now, not only that, but they were wonders, and this is a different word, and it seems to mean that here is something that makes a person stop and inquire.

It's something that appeals to the imagination of a person, and they see this strange thing that has happened, and it's called a wonder, and then the other word is the word sign, and that's the word that John always uses. We know that John in his gospel never uses the ordinary word for miracle. He calls all his miracles signs, and if the wonder aspect of it appeals to the imagination, then the sign aspect appeals to the understanding and the intelligence, and when we use the other word power, it simply shows us the origin, the supernatural origin of whatever it is that's being accomplished.

Now, here is for the embarrassment of the nation, God's approval of the man that they rejected. For three and a half busy years, he moved among them, and he accomplished power and signs and wonders, miracles and wonders and signs, and notice that it is which God did by him, which God did by him. Did Nicodemus recognize this when he said, no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be

with him, and here is God accomplishing these things actually by his son and approving his son in the midst of the nation.

What did they do? Well, they took him, and they took him by wicked hands, says this verse, and Peter charges them that they had crucified and slain the man that God approved. So the Lord Jesus moves among men in a busy ministry for three and a half years, and by miracles and wonders and signs, he is approved of God, but although on earth approved by God, the sad verdict is that he is rejected by the nation. Now, leaving the approval of God and coming to see what the nation did to him, again, of course, it is a very, very sad story, and the words that Peter uses, they're very serious words.

Some time ago in a meeting, I made some remark about the Jews crucifying the Lord, and there was a certain man in the meeting with a Jewish connection, and he was very angry about it, and he argued that the Jews had not crucified the Lord, and that I ought not to tell a Jew this, but when I went back to the Acts of the Apostles, I find Peter continually telling them this in the very strongest of language. This man's argument was that the Romans had done it and not the Jews, but I find Peter charging them with having killed the Prince of Life. I find Peter charging the Jews with his crucifixion, and of course, the Romans can't escape guilt too, and somebody has put it like this.

They have said that the death of the Lord Jesus was actually the crime of the Gentile, but the guilt of the Jew, and so the crime and the guilt are shared together by Jew and Gentile, and here are the strong words now that Peter and John use. Here are Annas and Caiaphas, and of course, the scribes and rulers and the counselors, and they're all gathered together. I think a very, very sad thing that these two men that were present that night when the Lord was tried, and now they know that having put him to death and having watched him sealed up in that sepulcher, now they know that the tomb is empty, and they know, of course, that there is no other viable, reasonable explanation for the empty tomb, only that if he rose from the dead, and yet here are these two wicked men, Annas and Caiaphas, and just as they rejected the Lord in person, now they're rejecting him again in the preaching of the apostles.

Very sad and very ominous that the two men of the night of the Lord's trial are here again in chapter 4, and now they're going to try the men who preach the man whom they tried and rejected. Now, when you put all the language together, what the apostles say is this. They say, you have crucified and slain him.

That's the first, and those are strong words. Then Peter says, he says, you desired a murderer, and he says, you killed the prince of life. Oh, you see the play in the words there, and that word prince actually means the author, and you see how strong that is.

They killed the prince of life. They desired a murderer and killed the author of life. That's what they had done, and if it wasn't bad enough to have killed the author of life, they actually desired a murderer instead of him.

A reference, of course, to Barabbas, and what a sad state now the nation is in, and with what strong language Peter and John condemn the nation, and then again in very, very strong language, they say, whom ye crucified, whom ye crucified, and charged the nation with the crucifixion, and when you come to another chapter later on, they use strong words again, and they say, whom ye slew and hanged upon a tree, and so you see they charge the nation with the ultimate and cruel and callous rejection of Jesus of Nazareth. So you see now how the pattern is emerging. They have preached Jesus of Nazareth on earth, approved of God, but rejected by men.

Brethren, we must be very careful that we don't develop, that we don't opt for a kind of a, what might I call it, a very wishy-washy type of gospel, you know, milk and water doctrine, that sort of adapts our gospel to suit modern thinking. We must beware of ever being trapped by giving topical lectures and fitting in our gospel to meet the needs and the whims of men. The apostles never did this, and it's not that they couldn't have done it, and I tell you another thing, it's not that they weren't tempted to do it, because if I don't judge him wrongly, I think that Paul was afraid that he might be tempted to that when he went to Corinth.

You know what he says? He says, when I went to Corinth, he said, I went in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. You say, Paul, were you afraid, afraid of what the Corinthians would do to you? Oh no, no, he wasn't afraid. I can't for one moment imagine this little apostle being afraid.

This brave little man that had suffered so much for Christ, he wasn't afraid of what the Corinthians might do to him physically, and when you read the chapter and keep the whole thing in its proper context, what he was afraid of was this. I haven't the slightest doubt that his fear and trembling was this. He knew that Corinth was full of philosophers.

He knew that they liked debate. He knew that they loved a bit of reasoning and arguing, and you know, I think he liked that himself, a bit of debate and arguing, and he was a graduate of the university at Jerusalem, and he could have argued with the best of them, and I think that his fear and trembling was this, lest he might be brought down to this level of arguing with them and debating with them and reasoning and philosophizing with them and missing the point of it. And he said, I went and I made up my mind, he said, I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified.

You say, Paul, is that all you're going to do? They'll not like that at Corinth. If you're just going to preach Calvary and the shed blood of Nazarene for salvation, they'll not like that at Corinth. They want something more sophisticated than that.

But the apostle refused to be drawn into philosophies and reasonings and preached simply Christ and him crucified and the value of the blood of the cross. And when he preached that, Jews got saved and Gentiles too. And how much the apostles made of this, that Jesus of Nazareth was approved of God, but rejected by men, we must not adapt our preaching to the world.

Moving with the times, I don't know about that. It's the same message eventually, whatever kind of persons you meet, whoever they are, it doesn't matter in the end. It's the preaching of the Nazarene crucified and raised again and glorified that's going to save any man, no matter who he is or what kind of person he is.

This is the gospel, which ultimately will bring that man to salvation. Why then not preach it from the very start and God by his grace and in his sovereignty will reach the hearts of men with it. And so in the strongest of language, these early preachers, they preached that Jesus of Nazareth, God had approved him, but you have rejected him.

And that was their preaching. But then of course, it didn't stop there. How much they made brethren of the resurrection of Christ.

And how little do we preach the burial on the resurrection? Well, it's not that we don't believe it. We wholeheartedly believe and without hesitation, we all affirm the burial and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. But I know that we preach about the resurrection.

I know that we preach him as risen, but I think there is perhaps a little more need for preaching the fact that he was buried and preaching the fact, expounding the truth of his resurrection and proving the resurrection, mind you, because the resurrection can be proven according to Acts chapter one. Many infallible proofs have been given us of his resurrection, and here is something to which the young believer can keep getting back again and again. And if ever you meet an infidel, and if you deem it wise to get into conversation with him, and there are many things he doesn't believe, then you take him to the resurrection of Christ, a proven fact.

He is alive from the dead, and if the resurrection is proven, then everything else is proven with it, and the apostles constantly averred that Christ was risen. The man who was approved of God and rejected by men, crucified, slain, hanged upon a tree, is now alive from the dead. And that's what they preached, and that was the gospel that turned the world upside down in those days and brought so many to Christ.

The preaching of a rejected, but a risen and eventually a glorified Savior. Now when you come then to the other references to Jesus of Nazareth in connection with Stephen and Saul, this time it's not so much the emphasis that he was approved of God on earth and rejected by men, but rather now it is this other emphasis, same truths, same great facts, but perhaps a little differences of emphasis, and what they are interested in now is that Jesus of Nazareth, rejected by men, is approved of God. He's in the heavens.

God has exalted him and enthroned him, and if earth has no room, heaven has made room, and if earth has cast him out, heaven has taken him in, and heaven has exalted the man whom earth despised. So the truths are the same, but the truths of the early part are that he was approved of God, but men rejected him. Now the truth is that men rejected him, but God has approved him, and he's in the heavens.

And so we come to the case of Stephen, and that takes us on to Saul, because Stephen and Saul are inseparably linked together. And Saul is introduced, of course, just as Stephen is dying. Now the eighth chapter of the Acts, or the seventh chapter of Acts, is sad reading, but nevertheless it's full of glory in a very interesting way.

There are actually three references to the glory. If the word is not there three times, it's there twice, and the glory is certainly referred to three times in some way in connection with three men. There are three men who see the glory in Acts chapter 7. Now chapter 7, of course, is very closely linked with what we read at the end of chapter 6. They say, when they're charging Stephen, they say, we heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth, this Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the place, and that was the charge against Stephen.

He had preached this Jesus of Nazareth. Now Stephen embarks upon his apology, as we call it. I don't know whether that's the right word or not, but anyway that's what we call it, Stephen's apology, Stephen's defense.

And he begins, he gives a great history of the nation, and he introduces two men, and then he himself becomes a third, the three men who actually get a sight of the glory. Now he begins with Abraham. He calls him our father Abraham, and he says the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham.

But then when you go further down the chapter, he introduces Moses, and Moses is in the wilderness, and he wanders at the sight, and he draws near to behold it, and he, like Abraham, he gets a sight of the glory of the God of the burning bush. So Abraham gets a sight of the glory, and Moses gets a sight of the glory, and before the chapter ends, Stephen gets a sight of the glory as well. But notice the difference, and here

are the differences.

Abraham got the sight of the glory at the beginning, the beginning of his, you might say, of his spiritual career. If we were using it in our language, we'd say at the beginning of Christian life. Right at the beginning of his experience with God, he got the sight of the glory.

It's the sight of the God of glory that calls him out. That's what brought Abraham out from idolatry. But that's not when Moses got it.

Moses got it after 40 years there at the back side of the desert, and I suppose that now, well, Moses is 80 years now, and here he is now at the back side of the desert and in the wilderness, and he gets a sight of the glory right, you might say, in the very middle of his career. But Stephen, Stephen's race is run, and his life is ebbing out, and it's right at the very end, in the last few moments, that he gets a sight of the glory, but it's the very same glory. So here is a man at the beginning, and a man in the middle, and a man at the end of life, and it's a sight of the glory that each of them get to help them in their peculiar, particular circumstances.

What could have brought Abraham out from Ur of the Chaldees? Only a sight of the God of glory. The God of glory appeared, and such was the impression that that made upon Abraham, that he didn't know where he was going, and he didn't know anything about his prospects really, but he knew that God had called him out, and he left Ur of the Chaldees, and he went out to a land that he didn't know, and he didn't know much detail about the path that he was to tread, but God had called him, and he had seen the glory, and that was it. Oh, I trust that in some measure we have all started like that.

There is nothing really that will wean us from the world like a sight of the glory, and someone has put that into poetry, and they have given us those lovely lines that most of you know so well. He called me out. The man with garments died.

I knew his form, my Lord, the crucified. He showed himself, and oh, I could not stay. I had to follow him, had to obey, and right at the very beginning, Abraham gets a sight of the glory, and that calls him out.

He turns his back upon his country, but Moses needs it not for the same purpose. He's already left. Moses has already started, but here's a man now, and God has something for him to do, and what better encouragement and incentive for a man about to embark upon this ministry than a sight of the glory? And Moses trembles at the sight of the glory, and draws near and sees the holiness of it all, and these are the circumstances in which the man is commissioned for his ministry that is yet to come.

There is nothing that will drag us out from the world like a sight of the glory, and there is nothing that will equip us for ministry like a sight of the glory. And then when we come to the end, here is Stephen, and you see they charged Stephen with this. They said, he preached this Jesus of Nazareth.

I think they must have said it in rather a scornful kind of way, this Jesus of Nazareth. But when Stephen looks up and sees the glory of God, and sees Jesus standing on the right hand of God, he gives him his lovely title, and he says, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Lord Jesus.

How this must have rent them as they listened to him. They had charged him with preaching Jesus of Nazareth, and here he is, unrelenting to the very end, and now look what he's calling Jesus of Nazareth. He's calling him the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus. And it's a sight of the glory that helps him to die, just as a sight of the glory had helped Abraham to live and Moses to serve. It's the sight of the glory that helps Stephen to die.

Three men who get a sight of the glory at different stages in their lives. Now what about Saul? He's there, and he must have heard Stephen cry, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. He must have been there when they charged Stephen with preaching this Jesus of Nazareth.

Saul, a young man, very promising in Judaism, head and shoulder above his contemporaries, and in many respects, I suppose, a very gifted young theologian. And here he is now, and he's standing. We sometimes try to picture him standing arrogantly, heavy with his arms folded, you know, and his legs apart.

And there he stands witnessing, and the others come, and they leave their clothes at his feet while they do the dastardly deed, and they stone Stephen to death. Well, it might very well be that that affected Saul more than any preaching. And I'm sure we are right in saying that Saul of Tarsus never got over that.

He never forgot that. And still, he says later on, he says, I thought, he said, that I ought things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. He uses that again.

Things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. But then, when one day on the Damascus road, about his terrible business, he's stricken down. Now, you don't get this information in chapter nine, where you get the story of his conversion.

But he'll give it to you in chapter 22, when he's telling the story of his conversion himself. And here's what he says. Tells about being stricken down.

And then he says, who are the Lord? And in chapter 22, the voice from heaven says, I am Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus of Nazareth. Did Saul's mind immediately go back? I wonder, did he remember in a conscience that was in turmoil, how they had said at the trial of Stephen, we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place.

They had looked on Stephen at that time, and seen his face like the face of an angel. But now Saul sees more than that. He sees some of Jesus of Nazareth.

But then, when he's telling of the glory of Jesus of Nazareth, exalted in the heavens. And he's stricken down blind. And what a sight is this.

Here is the proud, arrogant Jew. And he's blind, and broken, and humbled. His pride is gone.

His sight is gone. All his confidence is gone. And he very humbly says, Lord, oh, you say, Saul, that's what Stephen called him.

Now that's what Saul has learned to call him. And he humbly asks for guidance. And says, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? What a change in this man.

Persecutor, arrogant, blasphemous. And now he's broken down completely. And humbly asking Jesus of Nazareth for guidance.

What a tremendous change in circumstances now. And it all just goes to show to us the greatness of the exaltation of the despised Jesus of Nazareth. Now I know that the apostles and disciples preached him in

many other ways in the Acts of the Apostles.

But I have found it interesting to see this little line, that seven times in the Acts, Jesus of Nazareth, that is the way in which he is presented. And one whom we have seen in past evenings as the perfect servant, and as God's beloved son, and the delight of the Father's heart. Here he is, Jesus of Nazareth.

And I repeat again as I close, it seems to fall into two categories. He's on earth, approved of God, but rejected by men. Now he's in heaven, rejected by men, but approved of God.

And it is our great joy this evening to be linked with the man still rejected by men, but still approved and exalted in the heavens. May the Lord bless this word. Shall we pray?

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