It was not possible that he should be holden of it

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Preacher: Prof J.Douglas Macmillan

[0:00] Now let us come to our text. It was not possible that he should be holden of it. And in these words we have the first post-Pentecost comment of the New Testament Church on the resurrection of the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The New Testament Church summarizes very powerfully one aspect of the New Testament Church's thinking on the resurrection of Christ.
I wonder if you have ever looked at the resurrection of Jesus from precisely this perspective. It was not possible that he should be holden of it.
Now that is what the Church believed. Peter is giving a statement of the Church's faith about the Christ who had died and had been raised of God and was ascended into heaven.
It is a statement of the Church's faith. Jesus was such a passion and his work was of such a character and such a nature.
[1:37] He was a man so accredited of God by miracles and mighty works and signs which God did through him.

And the Father's faith. And the Father's act of God by miracles and His work. And the Father's act of God by miracles and His work was so on the atoning work which He completed on the cross that it was not possible that the bonds of death should have been anything else but loosed.
As the text literally says, loosing of the bonds of death. It was not possible for death to hold him in its pangs or its bonds.
Now the words occurred in the second part of the first sermon the New Testament Church heard. The second part of Peter's sermon. Now in the first part of it, he set the events on which men were looking and about which men were so astonished. He set them into the context.
[2:48] The real context. I've always been struck by the fact that he begins off by saying, No, no, don't be mistaken. These men are only, they're not drunk because it's only nine o'clock in the morning.

It's very realistic, very practical, down to earth. Even in these days you didn't get fellows, usually, drunk at nine o'clock in the morning.
The guy who's drunk at nine o'clock in the morning is faggot. Now Peter's saying there's nothing like that that's here. These men are filled with the Spirit of God.
And he begins to interpret what is happening around these people in terms of prophetic scriptures. And he goes to the book of Joel. Peter knew the Old Testament well.
And he didn't neglect the minor prophets. And he says, This is what was promised. When Messiah came.
[3:51] And when Messiah had accomplished his work. And then he goes on to the second part of the sermon with which we are mostly concerned this morning. You men of Israel hear these words.

Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus the Nazarene. And in a brief, powerful utterance, very quickly he told the whole story in essence of the mission of Jesus.
Jesus. Now in the sermon about Jesus. Peter has one main line of argument. His sermon does what every decent sermon should do.
It has a main line of argument which men can follow with their minds. He's not just picking truths like apples off a tree and staring them out. He is a line of logical, consecutive, consistent argument.
This is the way the New Testament men preached. Minds were given to people to understand truth. And truth has a logical coherence.
[5:01] But in the main line of argument, I don't want to spend too much time on that. In the main line of argument, there are two little lay-bys.

Two parentheses. In which he stops to confirm and to illustrate his main argument from Scripture.

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And here we have the first one. The text is the first sentence in the first expository pause or parentheses that Peter makes.
As I say, it's like driving along the road and all of a sudden he goes into a lay-bike to stop and pause and let you think. And good sermons should do that too.
There is perhaps few things as useful as good illustration in a sermon. Don't be afraid of it.
Although, like Spurgeon said, don't build glass houses.
[6:06] He said, illustrations should be like windows. Letting light into the building that the sermon is creating. Finding good illustrations is very difficult.

Every preacher knows that. The very best ones, I think, come from Scripture. And that's what Peter is doing. He goes into Psalm 16.
The last verses of Psalm 16. And he's talking to people who knew Psalm 16 and the last four verses of Psalm 16 just as well as any free kirker does.
And anybody born and reared in the free kirker will know Psalm 16. Anybody who's used to singing of Psalms will know these verses.
Write on. The last six. God is of mine inheritance and cup the portion. The lot that fallen is to me he doth maintain alone.
[7:07] Before me still the Lord I said. You know them. So did the people Peter was pitching to.
They sang these Psalms in the synagogue in the worship of God. They sang them in their homes in family worship.

And they knew. And Peter was laying hold of knowledge they had. And he was using that knowledge to interpret amazing, unbelievable events.
And then he says that man Jesus the Nazarene. This was our text for a minute or two on Wednesday evening last. The man Christ Jesus.
The real humanity of Jesus. The apostles weren't afraid of it. Nor must we be. But there's more than humanity to Jesus. This man Jesus was a man accredited.
Not just approved. But accredited. Proved to be. All that God required of his man. And he was accredited by God.
[8:07] Through mighty works. Miracles and so on. And then Peter says. This man was delivered to death. By the determined counsel.

And foreknowledge of God. Now do you see what Peter's doing here? He is bringing the eternal God. The one whom these Jews believed in and trusted.
And owned as their God. He's bringing his purpose. Into those events. With which they are so familiar.
And then he says. He died at the hands. Of men without law. Literally. Not just wicked men. But lawless men.
Gentile men. Men who didn't have the law of God. Handed. Over to them. By you Jews.
[9:06] He's quite blunt. He brings God in. He brings in the fact of the Gentiles. Who have no law.
And he brings in the fact that. Israel who had the law.

And who. Who professed to serve God. And who should have recognized the Messiah. If anyone ever did. They had handed. This man over. And you see what Peter does.
He merges into one great declaration. Two truths. About the cross. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. And they're very important. He merges into one declaration.
Two truths. About the cross. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was. The ultimate. In sin. By wicked hands. Lawless hands. You took him.
And you crucified him. But if it was the ultimate. In sin. It was also. The ultimate. In grace. Because around. The hand. The hand. The hand.
[10:02] And some of the manuscripts. Apparently. Have hands there in the singular. Around the hand of the Gentiles. And the hand of the Jews.

Was the everlasting purpose of God. The determined. Counsel. And full knowledge of God. And then he goes on to see how.
This Jesus. That they had crucified. God had raised him. It's a different connotation. Although. That connotation may have been in our text. Of last Sunday morning.
From. Acts 3. And 25. The one whom God had raised up. From the midst of Acts 3. 3 and. And. 26. God having raised up.

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The resurrection may have been implied there. But it was mostly that God had raised one up among them. But here quite clearly. It is the resurrection. God has raised him up from the dead. [11:06] He has loosed the pains of death. Because he couldn't be whole. It was not possible. That he should be whole. And there's a thrilling time. In the mind. And in the words of. The soul.

Of the speaker of these words. Not possible. Can you listen to. Can you listen to the accent. In which Peter must have said this. It was not possible. That he. Should have been holding.
A bit. A bit of content. In the word it. Death. A thrill.
That no one could ever capture. In the way he must have said he. Because you see. In the last. Few weeks.
There's been a revolution. In Peter's mind. And understanding. And an amazing truth. Has dawned on him. And he can hardly keep still. He hardly knows.
[12:05] How to contain himself. You see. Peter had spent three years. With this Jesus. And he had learned to love him. And for three years. He had interpreted him.

On the same level. As he interpreted. His fellow disciples. Only. The category had had to be higher. He was an amazing man.
And eventually. He was such an amazing man. That he must. He surely must be. The Messiah. And specially related to God. And all the years.
That Peter had spent. In the company of Jesus. Must have been flooding. In his mind. You know. You can't. Spend three years.
Spiritually attached. To someone. Living and working with them. Without remembering. Every nuance. Of the things he said. And what amazing things. Jesus did say.
[13:05] You couldn't have. Accompanied with Jesus. And not remembered. The marvellous things he did. Peter said them all. In just three words. Signs and wonders.

Mighty things. And yet there were things. That must have. Dundined into his mind. And absolutely filled his heart. And you see.
He would remember other things too. He would remember his own reactions. He would remember. In his mind there. There would be. The time when Jesus said. Get thee behind me. See. There would be the moments.
When he had denied. This Jesus. With the oaths. And curses. Of the waterfront. And then. There would have been. The amazing sense. Of the compassion. And the grace.
Of Jesus. And the forgiveness. Of Jesus. And the understanding. Of Jesus. And the way Jesus. Had restored him.
[14:04] To a place. Of self-respect. And said to him. Peter. Go and feed my sheep. And go and feed my lambs.

And spend your life for me. Peter. Peter. And it was all. Filled with a glow. The glow.
Of knowing. That this Jesus. Was not only man. He was God. And that this Jesus. Had not only died.
He had risen again. His only days. His only weeks. Out of the most amazing experience. And he would remember you see.
Every event. Every word. Every miracle. Every mighty did. He would remember it all. But he would see them. From a new perspective. To remember.
[15:02] How he had felt. In the transfiguration. Up there on the mountain. With Jesus. Oh. He said. Lord Jesus. Master. It's good to be here. With you.

And with Moses. And Elijah. Let's make three little tabernacles. Oh. Let's stay here. And then. Looking back at it. When he was an old man.
And when he had known. The fire of tile. One thing about the transfiguration. Stood out. For him. Oh. He says.
We were high witnesses. Of his majesty. And that's the sort of spirit. That's filling his mind now. The majesty. What was the majesty.
For a Jew. The majesty. Belonged only to one. The God. Who inhabited eternity. Go through the psalms.
[15:57] And you find out. Who the Jew held. As king. There was only one. Who was gurgled about.

With power. And whose glory shone in majesty. He was the living God. And now. That is Jesus for Peter.

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In a sense. Everything he remembers. About Jesus. Must now be colored. And tinged. And interpreted. By the fact.
That he is an eyewitness. Of the risen majesty. My friend. That's what Christian testimony is.
By faith we too. Are eyewitnesses. Of the majesty. Of the majesty. Of Jesus. Now what comes.
[17:06] To mind. For Peter here. Is this. Such a one. Couldn't possibly. Be held by death. Such a one. Was bound.

To be raised. We can be bold. And say that. Now I want to do. Quickly. Three things. With our text. In the time that remains to us. I want us to. See how Peter.
Brought the reality. Of Jesus resurrection. To a passage of scripture. For interpretation. He took his declaration.
To the psalm. For interpretation. And then he made an application. Of the truth. To his hearers. Let's look at that.
Quite quickly. Now the declaration. Let's. Before we leave it. Look at it in the broadest. Possible way. Peter is seeing things. By the Holy Spirit.
[18:02] As he had never seen them before. Peter's affirming. That God. Was bound. And I use that word deliberately.

He was bound. To raise Jesus from the dead. The character of God was involved. The justice of God. The equity of God.
The righteousness of God. And the character of Jesus was involved. Divine equity. Divine justice. Divine rectitude.
Meant that it was not possible. For death to keep its hold of Jesus. Now. Now. Not first of all. It was not possible. Not first of all.
Because of the. The. The incipient power. The inherent power. That was there. In Jesus himself. The New Testament says. That's partly why it was.
[19:00] But it wasn't the thing that made resurrection impossible. Nor was it. The. The. The deity of his person. That made. A resurrection inevitable.

Wasn't that either. Although that's part of it. Do you know what it was? It was. First of all. The fact. That there was righteousness.
On the throne of God. What I'll call. God had righteousness. And it's because of God had righteousness. That it was not possible.
For Jesus. To be left in the bonds of death. What do I mean by that? Bring two things together. The righteousness with which God. Will always judge. The ultimate issues. Of life and death. And the total obedience.
[20:08] That the man Jesus. Had rendered. To the revealed. Will of God. And these two things. Guarantee resurrection.

The righteousness. Of the throne of heaven. And the obedience. Of the man on earth. When these two meet.
If God. Is God. Jesus cannot. Be left. In the grave. Do you see it? That's what Peter is saying. Now he's saying. A very bold thing. And that's why he halted. For argument. For demonstration. And he goes to Psalm 16. He's actually quoting it. Not directly from the Hebrew scriptures.
But from the Septuagint. The Greek translation. Of the Hebrew scriptures. And there's one or two words. Which are slightly different. But the truth. The lasting truth.
[21:11] And the tone. And the spirit of the Psalm. Comes through absolutely. As is given to us here. Now. Psalm 16. Look at verse 25. Here in front of us. I foresaw always.

David speaking. The Lord before my face. I ever kept the Lord. In front of me. Never took my eyes off him.
Obedience. There is the leading characteristic. Of the life of Jesus. I do always. The things that please him.
Father. I have finished. He was the only man. Who could ever say it. I have finished. The work. Thou hast given me to do. That's the characteristic of Jesus. And it's picked up in that sound.
I foresaw the Lord. Always before me. You see. For he is in my right. On my right hand. But I should not be moved. Now we come on to interpretation.
[22:15] Why does Peter. Bring his declaration to this psalm. And he proceeds to give his. His reason. For. The interpretation he's just given. Now this psalm.

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Speaks not. First of all of David. Because David's tomb is with them. It speaks. Of Jesus. Of Messiah. He says that David was speaking.
Prophetically. By the Holy Spirit. And. In this psalm he says. We have an unfolding. A revelation of the things. That made the resurrection of Jesus.
Necessary. Let's use the word. Guarantee. In this psalm. We have a revelation of the things. Which guaranteed. The resurrection of Jesus. And this is what he brings out.
The triumphant. Joy. Of the singer. We can't call it anything else. The sheer. Triumphant joy. But thrilling through. The verses.
[23:14] Of the song. That Peter quotes. Listen to them. Just listen to them again. My heart is glad. My heart was glad. My tongue rejoiced.

And my flesh also. Rests in confident hope. There's the psalm. Then in verse 28.
The psalm goes on. Thou hast made known to me. The paths of life. The ways of life. Or literally the paths of life. Thou shalt make me.
Full of gladness. With thy countenance. Thy countenance really is just. A Hebrew phrase. For the presence of God. So there's two parts of the song.
My heart was glad. My tongue rejoiced. My flesh rested in hope. And the next part. You have made me. You have made known to me.
[24:11] The paths of life. You will make me. Full of gladness. In your presence. And he's quoting. You see. The first ones come from.

Verses 8 and 9. Of psalm 16. And then. The last one comes from. Verse 11. And there's something in between. There's verse 10. Of psalm 16. In between.
We've left that out so far. Now let's bring the three parts together. There's the first part of the song. My heart was glad. My tongue rejoiced. My flesh also rested in hope.
There's the last part of the song. Because you've made me. You've shown me the ways of life. And you've made me glad. In your presence. What's in between? Do you notice what's in between? It's there.
In verse 27. Why? Why? Was his tongue glad? Why did his flesh rest in comfort?
[25:18] Because you will not leave my soul in hell. Or in Hades. The place of the dead. Neither will you suffer your holy one. To see corruption. So. You see. The first assurance of the singer.

Now Peter. It's almost as though Peter is. Is remembering. Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem. And the strange contradictory things that Jesus had been saying.
And the first part of the song. Was a song of gladness. In the face of the grave. And in the face of death. And the darkness. That.
Because of which. Men were all their lifetime. Subjective to bondage through fear. As the writer to the Hebrews says. Death. And the eternal realities that are over beyond the grave.
And Peter could remember. How Jesus. On the verge of it all. Said strange. Things to them. My joy.
[26:20] He spoke of. In the other room that night. My peace. He had said. My peace. I leave with you. And he was on the way to a cross.

He said. My joy. Will be in you. Things like that. And this singer.
Looking towards death. With that marvelous song. My heart was glad. My tongue regressed. My flesh rested in confidence. And then the last part of the song.
You have made me glad with your presence. Before your countenance. What words come to us. Do you know what comes to my mind?
Now. With these words. The last words of the song. The assurance. That we have from the risen exalted savior. In the book of revelation. That there shall be no more curse.
[27:28] But that the throne of God. And of the lamb. And of the lamb. Shall be in it. And his servants shall serve him. And they shall see his face. Why does the risen Christ assure his people of that?

Because it was his own experience. He went towards the grave. With a song of redemption in his heart. Down into the darkness. Of Hades.
And then from the far side of the grave. Peter heard the song again as it were. The redeemer of God's elect people.
Still with a song of praise in his lips. Thou hast shown me the pathway of life. And in thy presence fullness of joy.

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Let me say it again. He assures his people. Of their eternal glory. Because of his own experience. Because the servant. The servant of all servants.
[28:33] Went from the place of the curse. To the throne of the father and high. And for him.

For him. The servant. There is no more curse. But the sovereignty of God's throne is in it. And he shall serve him.
On behalf of his people. Forevermore. And he will see his face. And the heart of the man Christ Jesus rejoices.
And you and I. Have a share in that rejoicing. And a share in that glory.
For where he is. We shall be also. Do you see it? That's what this psalm is about. My heart was glad. My tongue rejoiced. My flesh shall dwell.
[29:30] Thou hast made known unto me the ways of life. Thou shalt make me full of gladness. With thy countenance. Now between these. There was something else.

Not just. Not just. The darkness of Hades. And of death. And all its threat.
There was something prior to that. There was this. I. Always. Set the Lord before me.
And because I always set the Lord before me. I shall not be moved. For the Lord.
Is on my right hand. The place. Of power. And it was because of that.
[30:31] Because Jesus. Always set the Lord before him. Always was interested in obeying God. It's because of that. That he approached the grave with a song.

And because of that. Death could not hold him. Now that. Is the Jesus. Or is it.
Who will be remembered. At Christmas. Sadly one fears not. Sadly one fears that all the.
The tinsel. And the commercialism. And the false emotionism. Has buried that Jesus again. My Christian friend.
My Christian brother and sister. Don't allow. This Jesus. To be buried on you. Jesus is risen. There's the thrilling truth.
[31:35] Of the resurrection. And this is the Christ. And it's the only Christ. That you and I. Rejoice in. And we have the right.

To rejoice in his birth. As well as his resurrection. In fact. The apostle Paul. And it's recorded later on. In fact. The apostle Paul actually uses.
The same psalm. To speak of the birth. As well as the resurrection of Christ. But let us remember. And let us. Pray God for grace. To demonstrate. To the world around us. That we serve. One who was dead.
But is alive again. And he is alive again. Because death. Could not hold him. And if you are trusting in this Jesus. And if you put your faith in him.
[32:38] As Peter went on to exhaust these people to do. Repent. Believe. Be baptized. Follow the savior. That's what baptism means.

If you do those things. My friend. He is yours. And he is yours. In all the power. Of his resurrection. And his ascension.
And his divine savior. Let us pray. O Lord. O gracious God. We thank thee this day for Jesus.
For such a Jesus. As thou hast given us. We thank thee for the reality of his manhood. The man of Nazareth. And we bless thee. For the marvel of his deity.
And for the combination of both. We thank thee. That he died in our room instead. That his humanity made that possible.
[33:37] And we bless thee. That that humanity had been brought into perfect obedience. In every thought and word and deed. To the divine mind and the divine will of the father.

Representative of Godhood. And we thank thee that he is risen from the dead. And that he is. Able to save. Unto the uttermost.
All that come unto thee through him. Because he ever lives. To make intercession for them. We thank thee too. That on the basis of his ascension. The Holy Spirit has been poured forth.
And we pray that he. May work in our hearts. And in the hearts of those around us. In the hearts of our children. And our families. And our friends. And our acquaintances. Our city and our nation.
To the ends of the earth. Hear our prayer. Part us with thy blessing. And keep us in thy love. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

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