

A Man Approved of God

by Carl Armerding

The sermon explores the unique approval of Jesus by God, emphasizing His miracles and the human heart's response to divine truth.

Duration: 39:00

Scripture: Jeremiah 17:9, Matthew 6:33, Acts 2:22-24, Hebrews 2:14-15

Topics: "Approval"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the power of the people, as represented by the word 'democrat' which comes from 'demos' meaning people and 'kratos' meaning power. He contrasts this with the power of the devil, who has the power of death but lacks authority. The preacher shares a story about a student named Joe Hunky who was held at gunpoint but responded with a powerful statement of faith, disarming his would-be assassin and leading him to Christ. The sermon emphasizes the importance of miracles, wonders, and signs as evidence of Jesus' accreditation and highlights the philosophy of life found in the statement 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.'

Transcript

Tonight, a few verses in chapter 2, Acts chapter 2, and beginning at verse 22. Acts 2, verse 22. I'm not attempting to give a series on the book of the Acts as a whole, but rather to call attention to some of the portraits of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we have them in this book.

Now begin this evening at Acts 2, verse 22. Ye men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, the man approved 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 pains of death, because it was not possible that he should beholden of it. You'll notice how Peter here introduces the Lord Jesus Christ. He introduces him as Jesus of Nazareth, and one can think of a good many other ways in which he might have introduced him.

For example, he might have called him Jesus of Capernaum, because we know that the Lord Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum, and Matthew actually refers to Capernaum in chapter 9 as his own city, but we never have him referred to as Jesus of Capernaum. He might have been called Jesus of

Bethany, because he frequently visited in Bethany with his sisters there, Mary and Martha, and also Lazarus. I'm sure he was a frequent visitor in that home, but he's never called Jesus of Bethany that I know of.

He certainly could have been called Jesus of Jerusalem, because he claimed that he was the king. We get this in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, when he speaks of himself as the king of glory, sitting on his throne of glory. Yes, he could have been called the man of Jerusalem, Jesus of Jerusalem, but we don't find anything like that here.

Instead we find a name which I suppose is the least complementary of all of them, because to tell anybody that he came from Nazareth was like telling somebody that you come from a very wicked place. Nazareth was a crossroads where the caravans passed through, and such crossroads are usually places of great wickedness. I suppose this is one reason why some of our cities which were crossroads, like the city of Chicago, for example, noted for its wickedness.

And again, we find a city like Los Angeles, where a lot of roads terminate. These become places of hotbeds of wickedness and iniquity, and such was Nazareth. So that when Philip wanted to introduce Nathaniel to the Lord Jesus, he says, We have found him of whom Moses and the law did write, Jesus of Nazareth.

And Nathaniel answers his brother Philip and says, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Now this is the name by which the Lord Jesus was known, and as a matter of fact he even confessed to this himself. You remember in the Garden of Gethsemane when they came to take him to crucify him, he said, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. He says, I am he.

He confessed to this. But to me this is one of the evidences of the profound grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he was willing to be identified with a wicked city like Nazareth. But I notice in contrast to this that we have this expression that he's a man approved of God.

Notice that. Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God. I don't know of any other place in the Bible where this is said of any other man.

We get some great men in the Bible. We have Abraham, who is known as the friend of God. What a lovely title, that for a man.

Yes, and that title has stuck to Abraham to this very day. Do you know if you ever went to visit the city of Jerusalem, you come to the West Gate, which ordinarily is called the Jaffa Gate, but the Arabs don't call it the Jaffa Gate. They call it Bevil Khalil, which means the gate of the friend, because the road that leads out of the Jaffa Gate goes down to where Abraham lived.

So that this title has stuck to him as the friend of God. He's spoken of as such in the prophecy of Isaiah and also in the epistle of James. But I don't read that he was approved of God.

The closest you could come to it would be a man like Job, of whom God himself said to Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there's none like him in all the earth, one that fears God and must choose evil? That was saying something about him. He was a perfect and an upright man, but yet this particular expression is never used of him that he's approved of God. You get a man like Moses, the meekest man in all the earth.

You get a man like David, the man after God's own heart. You get a man like Daniel, a man greatly beloved. You get all of these descriptions in the Old Testament, but here is one is unique.

And this is something we're trying to emphasize in these little talks that we have from night to night, is the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I can't think of any better references to point to this evening to show how God approved his son when he was standing in the waters of baptism and other people were being baptized at the same time. Baptized because they were sinners.

They were accepting the baptism of John the Baptist, and fancy our Lord Jesus Christ coming down into a crowd like that. No wonder John says, No, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And the Lord Jesus had to say to him, Suffer it to be permitted to be so now, for so it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. And so he suffered or permitted him.

But John did it against his own feelings to baptize the Lord Jesus. And what a choice moment for the world to say, Why, he's just like everybody else. When you go and proclaim the sinlessness and the perfection of the Lord Jesus, they point to a scene like this and say, Why, look here.

He never made any such claim for himself. And just at that moment what happens? God opens the heavens and says, This is my beloved Son in whom I have found all my delight. Yes, God was approving his Son.

Yes, you say, sometimes it's very easy for us to behave nicely when we're in a crowd like the Lord Jesus was in, and we know we're superior to them. But how about it when you get into a place where you're a little higher up? All right, let me take you to one of the highest scenes depicted in the Gospels. Our blessed Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration.

There he is. And here are Moses and Elias who appear with him in glory. And what does God say? This is my beloved Son in whom I have found all my delight.

And he adds these three words which he didn't add at Jordan, hear ye him. Yes, he was approved of God. Approved of God.

But I think there's something else here besides this. As a matter of fact, this word approved that you have here in Acts 2.22 might have been rendered accredited. He was accredited of God.

And you'll notice there are three things mentioned here in connection with his accreditation. He was accredited by miracles and wonders and signs. Miracles, things that you could see.

Wonders to stir your emotions. Signs to make your appeal to your intellect, because every one of these works of his was significant. And you turn to a book like the Gospel of John, for example.

And John gives you a wonderful array of the miracles of our Lord, different from any other of the Gospels. We get, of course, the miracles of our Lord in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but never such an orderly presentation as you get in the Gospel of John. Take, for instance, when our Lord turned the water into wine at Cana of Galilee.

That was the beginning of his miracles. Then in chapter 4, we have the healing of the nobleman's son. In chapter 5, we have the healing of an impotent man at the pool of Bethesda.

In chapter 6, we have him feeding the multitude with the loaves and the fishes. And in the same chapter, we have him walking on the water. In chapter 9 of John, we have him opening the eyes of a blind man.

And in chapter 11, he raises a man from the dead who had been dead four days--Lazarus. Here's an array of miracles and wonders and signs, and there they are. And St. Paul tells us in the first chapter of Romans that this was the way God marked out his Son as the Son of God.

He was marked out as, or declared to be, the Son of God with power by the resurrection of such as were dead. The margin of your Bible puts it that way. He was marked out as the Son of God.

He was approved of God. Well, you say, yes, but why put so much emphasis on this? It may surprise you, dear friends, that the devil puts a lot of emphasis on this, and I'm just going to ask you to keep your bookmark here in Acts 2 now, and please turn to 2 Thessalonians 2. 2 Thessalonians, the second chapter, and verse 8--or verse 7, rather. 2 Thessalonians 2, and verse 7. For the mystery of iniquity, or lawlessness, doth already work.

Only he who now letteth or hindereth will hinder, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming. Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power, and signs, and lying wonders.

Does Satan put any emphasis on this? He does. He realizes that if he's going to produce a counterfeit, and he will one of these days, in presenting the Antichrist, he's going to have to match this. Many people may poo-poo the ideas of the miracles as they have them in the four Gospels, but Satan never does.

Satan says, I've got to have something to match that. And when he brings forth the Antichrist, it will be one with power, and signs, and lying wonders. And according to our Lord's own words in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, where he tells them that the false Christ and false prophets will arise, showing wonders and signs, so that if it were possible they'd deceive the very elect.

That's how clever it's going to be. You know, for a world that is asking for evidences, this is something. They've already had it.

I've said this to again and again to people. Well, why don't you have some evidences like they had? I said, you've had it. You've had it.

The evidences are there. But one of these days there's one going to yield to that desire for this evidences, and they'll fall for it, according to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. But thank God for a protection from this, because the only ones who will be exposed to this, according to 2 Thessalonians 2, are those who have refused to receive the love of the truth. Let's read the next verse there.

With all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they might all be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. I've read this at some length this evening, dear friends, in connection with this verse in the Acts, because I wanted you to see, if you've never seen it before, what emphasis Satan himself puts upon this very thing that the Holy Spirit is bringing before us in Acts chapter 2 concerning our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who was accredited of God by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him, says the Apostle among you.

But in spite of all of this, what happens? Let's go back to our chapter to see what happens. If these things really convinced people, you never would have had this next verse written in the book. But look at this.

In Acts 2 verse 23, him being delivered by the determinate counsel, or handed over. That'd be a good paraphrase of that verse. God says, All right, I'll hand him over to you now.

I've accredited him, I've approved him, I'll hand him over to you now. This is what he does. But he does it with perfect foreknowledge, knowing exactly what they're going to do with him.

That's what this verse means. He handed them over according to his determinate counsel and foreknowledge, and ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. As though the Holy Spirit of God would emphasize what they did, what was really in the human heart, in spite of all this evidence that was here.

My dear friends, when men stand before the bar of God in the coming day, they'll have no excuse to offer. No excuse to offer. Here was all the evidence.

And they not only refused to believe the evidence, but they crucified the Lord of glory. This is what they did. This is the human heart.

You know, sometimes people, knowing the background that I've had, because some of my early background was in the United Presbyterian Church, we lived right next door to it, United Presbyterian Church. My father and mother were in fellowship with those known as brethren, but the meeting hall was a long distance off, and so on Sunday afternoon we were allowed to go into this Sabbath school, as they called it, and there we learned some of the great doctrines of the Christian faith. When I was a boy twelve years old, I had gone through the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

And among other things that were brought to my attention in these studies was the total depravity of the human heart. You know, that was a big word for a twelve-year-old boy. The total depravity of the human heart.

But dear friends, you don't have to know your heart very well to know that that's exactly the case. And that Jeremiah spoke the truth when he said, The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it? Who can know it? Who can diagnose it? God only can.

And here's a demonstration of what's in the heart of man. I remember working for a man back in the state of New Jersey. I worked there for in a machine shop, had charge of the engineering department, and I often spoke to my superiors about the Lord Jesus.

Both of them were atheists. And one of them said to me one day, he said, You talk about the crucifixion of Christ and the cross of Christ. He said, Don't you know that that belonged to the barbarous ages? He said, People don't do things like that anymore.

I looked at him a moment. I said, Do you know what, sir? He said, What? I said, If the Lord Jesus Christ were to come to Bloomfield, New Jersey today and present himself to you, you'd be the very first one to say, Get rid of him! Away with him, crucify him. He said, Do you think so? I said, I know it.

I know it. He blanched at the words and turned on his heel. He had no answer for it, because down deep in his own soul he knew that that was the truth.

He couldn't stand the presence of a holy man like this, this man approved of God. And you know, dear friends, this is the very man by which God is measuring men today, as we said the other night. Yes, when it says in the Scripture, All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, the implication is that you are being measured by him in whose face the glory of God is seen.

God is measuring men by this standard, and not one of them measures up. He says, All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. They don't measure up.

And if they don't measure up, there's no hope for them at the judgment seat, unless they've trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. Unless they've made, shall I say, their confession to the very judge who will judge them and send them off to a Christless eternity. This is it.

But now let's look at the Lord again. In the last verse of our lesson tonight, verse 24, Acts 2 and verse 24, Whom God hath raised up. This is the third thing that the Holy Spirit says God did to him here.

First it says God approved him. Secondly it says God delivered him over. And now it says God raised him up, having loosed the pains of death.

Do you ever think about that? What are the pains of death? Well, you get one answer to that question in the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, where the Apostle Paul, with holy sarcasm, stands over an open grave, as it were, and says, O death, where is thy sting? That's one of the pains of death. The sting of death is sin. That's one of the pains of death.

And your Lord and mine bore this on the cross of Calvary. This wasn't pains of death. And we get a wonderful list of these things in the second chapter of Hebrews.

Let's turn to Hebrews chapter 2 for a passage, just to see how the Spirit of God brings together these pains for us here in this remarkable chapter in Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 2, verse 9. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death. The suffering of death.

Made a little lower than the angels. A little further down in this chapter we find out what this means, when He was made a little lower than the angels. You get it in verse 14.

Just cast your eye down to verse 14 for a moment. For as much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same that threw death. You see, he had to become a man to die.

God can't die. Oh, I know some of the hymn writers put it that way, but God doesn't die. God can't die.

The Lord Jesus had to become a man to die. Because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He had to partake of flesh and blood that threw death. He might destroy him that had the power of death.

He made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death. And what a death. Oh, friends, we think of how easily some of our loved ones have slipped away.

Yes, I guess I've sat by the bedsides of as many if not more than most of you put together tonight, of men and women who have passed over the line from this life into the next. For ten years I was honorary chaplain of a Methodist sanatorium in the city of Albuquerque, New Mexico, serving without remuneration--that is, financial remuneration--just for the privilege of talking to dying men and dying women about the Lord Jesus. And some of those deathbeds were lovely.

They were positively lovely. Oh, to see a saint's face light up with the light of glory as they were about to enter the presence of the Lord, it was tremendous. I used to come home from these experiences lifted up in my soul.

There was something about this that was grand. Yes, I've also seen the other side of it. I've seen three atheists leave this life, and I never want to see that again.

I shall not go in to speak of that. But my Lord didn't face that kind of a death. The kind of a death He faced, dear friends, was a horrible thing.

Oh, one can almost hear Him again saying this to the Father as He anticipated the cross. He said, Oh, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass for me. How we thank God for those words which follow nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done.

The suffering of death. Not only the cruelty as inflicted upon Him by man, but oh, to be forsaken of God. Friends, we talk about the pains of death.

There they are. But let's go on with our scripture there, Hebrews 2.9. We see Jesus, who was made a little old in the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that he by the grace of God should taste death. The taste of it.

Bitter. That's one of the pains of death. The taste of it.

And our Lord tasted death for everything. It says so here. Imagine, dear friends, what it meant to take upon Him the load that was His, as we were hearing Sunday morning from the first chapter of John, This is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

That was the load. What a load was Thine to bear alone in that dark hour. Our sins in all their terror there.

God's wrath and Satan's power. You know, some of these old hymns, they're wonderful in their theology. There they are.

Tasting death. And then you come down here to that fourteenth verse, on which we've already looked at. But let's look at the fifteenth verse for a moment.

And deliver them who through fear of death. That's another pain, isn't it? That's another pain of death. And the Lord Jesus took all of this.

And God, we read in our text of tonight, loosed the pains of death. Not only did He bring His Son through all of this, but I take it, beloved, when He says He loosed the pains of death, He has made it possible for you and me as believers in Him to no longer fear death. To no longer think of it as suffering.

To no longer think of it as being horrible. To think of it as that which ushers me into the presence of my blessed Lord, should He tarry a while longer. Oh, friends, yes, He loosed the pains of death.

He took the sting away from me. He took the pain away from me. He took the horror of it away from me.

You know, sometimes these doctors, when they give you a checkup, and they don't know too much about your religious faith, they're almost afraid to tell you. Like the doctor who gave me a checkup last month. I believe he's a Christian.

He's an elder in a Presbyterian church in Dallas. Very fine character. I think he was almost afraid to tell me certain things, you know.

But finally I said to him, Doctor, I said, You don't need to hold back anything. I said, This holds no terrors for me. This holds no terrors for me.

Why should it? The psalmist himself knew what he was talking about when he said, Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Why? Because the conqueror of death is right there at his side. Oh, my dear friend, if you're here tonight as a visitor, as a guest, and you've never had the joy of believing this, I trust that this little homely exposition of this verse, having loosed the pains of death, may register somehow in your mind that you'll never forget it.

But let's just look at the last clause for a moment or two there in Acts 2, coming back to the second chapter of the book of the Acts again. I'm sorry to make you jump around so much, but I'd like you to see these scriptures as we're looking at them. But let's look at the last part of that 24th verse.

Because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. The word here translated holden has been rendered by such men as Mr. J. and Darby and others. He should not be held by its power.

He should not be held by its power. And this is one thing we had back there in the second chapter of Hebrews. I should have told you to keep that place so that you could look at it easily again.

Well, I'll just read it for you in Hebrews 2, because there we read about one who had the power of death. That's another thing again, isn't it? Look at this. He says here in verse 14, Hebrews 2, 14, For as much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death.

That is the devil. You know, if that last phrase hadn't been added, we might have guessed who this might be, but there's no doubt about it. But you see, the devil has the power of death.

That's remarkable, isn't it? When I tell you that we have in the original language at least three words which are translated power in the New Testament. We have one, for example, in the first chapter of John. To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the children of God.

The word there translated power is really authority. He gave them authority to become the children of God. In Romans 1, we have another word.

The gospel of Christ is the power of God, and you no doubt heard preachers telling you, and correctly so, that the word there translated power is the word from which we get the word dynamite. That the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation. But we have still another word, and that's the word used here in Hebrews 2. It's the word kratos, which we incorporate in such words as aristocrat, plutocrat, democrat, and so on.

That last syllable in those words is the idea of power. The plutocrat is the man whose riches give him power. The aristocrat is the man whose position and goodness give him power.

The democrat, of course, speaks of the power of the people, and so on. Demos for people, kratos for power. The devil has this kind of power, the kind of power that a bandit has when he sticks a gun in a man's side and says, this is it.

He's got the power of death, but he hasn't any authority. This recalls a story of a lad we had at Moody Institute when I was connected with that wonderful institution for some seven and a half years. We had a student there by the name of Joe Honkey.

Joe is with the Lord now. But Joe went down to the south side of Chicago to fear-fulfill an engagement. And on his way home that night late, he had to stop for a red light with his car.

And as he did so, a man jumped in the car, slammed the door, and put a pistol in Joe's side. He said, this is it. Drive over to the curb.

So Joe did. When the light changed to green, he drove over to the curb and this pistol sticking in his side. And Joe simply looked at his would-be assassin and said, for me to live is Christ, to die is gain.

As much as saying, fella, if you kill me, I am the winner. This so disarmed this bandit, he'd never heard the like of it. He said to him again as he pulled his pistol away, he said, what's that you say? He said, for me to live is Christ, to die is gain.

Joe talked to him a little bit more. He says, where are you going? The fella says, I'm going wherever you're going. He took him to Moody Bible Institute and got him a bed for the night.

Talked to him about the Lord Jesus and led him to Christ. What was the secret? He didn't fear him that had the power of death. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Friends, that's the most wonderful philosophy of life that I know of. And it's all ours tonight through this man accredited of God. Oh, I trust these few verses, as we've looked at them tonight, have enhanced your appreciation again of the Lord Jesus.

I hope that somehow something has registered with you tonight, which has made him more precious. And in closing, I would like to have you sing with us a hymn which has been very precious to me all my lifetime. I learned it first in German.

It's hymn number 305, which in English says, Fairest Lord Jesus. But nations, O thou of God and man the Son, thee will I cherish, thee will I honor. Thou my soul's glory, joy, and crown.

Number 305. Shall we rise as we sing? Thank you that the way as the man whom thou whom thou couldst accredit. We thank you, O Lord Jesus Christ, that thou hast already proved all that thou art to our hearts tonight, because we know and love thee, because of all that thou hast done for us.

We love thee, because thou hast first. And Lord Jesus, we pray that we may manifest our love toward thee in the lives we live for thee. And grant, Lord, that people coming in contact with us may see some of these beauties, some of these wonderful things that we've been talking about, reproduced in our lives as we walk in thy footsteps.

So, Lord Jesus, bless thy word, we pray, and speed us now to our respective abodes, we ask in thine own most precious name. Amen.

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