



IMPOSSIBLE?

Acts 2:22-36

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Swept up by Pentecostal fervor, Peter stands up, raises his voice, and addresses the crowd with the first Christian sermon. “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem...” So powerful were his words, over three thousand converted to the faith that day. In the midst of his reverie, Peter painted amazing images: “The Spirit will pour out on all flesh... The sun shall turn to darkness... You will not abandon my soul to Hades.” But as I studied this passage, none of them caught my attention. Upon the first reading I passed right by it. “God raised him up...because it was impossible for him to be held in death’s power.” Impossible?

Hyperbole has become so overused these days that such statements often don’t sink in. Which of the following is truly impossible: A) The sun won’t rise tomorrow B) You will win the lottery C) American Idol will be replaced by reruns of Gilligan’s Island D) Jesus could be held in death’s power? Peter was telling us that there was *no way*, no conceivable possibility, that Jesus could remain in that tomb. We would have a better chance of waiting for Brownian motion to align all the molecules in a book on the same vector and cause it to levitate, something that will take between a Google and googolplex years. Trust me, that is a really long time.

On what basis did Peter make such a bold claim? I set out to analyze the persuasiveness of his inductive argument which I, and all parents, do at home every week. For example, last Christmas my daughter Liz made this argument: “There is one cookie left. I am a svelte young lady. Dad is a little plump around the middle. Therefore, I deserve the cookie.” Her argument did not persuade me, despite the fact the premises were true. I thought my argument was much better. I responded, “Dad bought the cookies. Liz has had twice as many as me. Therefore, Dad is a generous benefactor and deserves the cookie.” However, Wendy entered the fray and denied the truth of my premises. “You did not buy the cookies. I haven’t had any and *I made* them. Therefore, I deserve the cookie.” Her argument, while the most persuasive, lost out. While we were debating, Matthew snuck in and ate the cookie. Now that we’re all hungry for cookies from this apocryphal story, let us

analyze Peter’s argument. First we must identify the premises.

Peter asserts the following:

- David said “You will not abandon my soul to Hades.”
- This statement could not have been about David, since everyone knows where his tomb is
- God swore an oath to David that an ancestor would be on his throne
- Jesus is David’s ancestor
- God was with Jesus as attested by the deeds of power he did among them
- Thus, it was Jesus that David was talking about
- You witnessed God raise Jesus up
- Therefore, it was impossible for Jesus to be held in death’s power

If you accept Peter’s premises, his argument is persuasive. However, I believe there was much more to Peter’s assertion, so I wanted to explore the implications of his claim. If something is impossible it is because it contradicts certain facts or laws of the universe. Peter’s statement suggests that Jesus remaining in death would violate the very structure of the universe.

If Jesus were to remain dead, it would mean:

- God’s image in us could be destroyed
- God could lose
- God’s love was not unconditional
- evil had won

It would mean no God, thus no creation, therefore non-existence. Ergo, *Impossible!*

It was impossible because for God only that which is good is possible and all that is good comes to pass because that would be good, let us call it the “sum of all good,” much like Feynman’s the sum of all histories. Feynman, that free-thinking physicist asserted a hypothesis about the paths of particles called the sum of all histories. Take that photon of light which has just reached your eye. You may believe it went from point A – that lamp overhead, to point B – your eye, but according to Feynman that photon has taken not just

one path to your eye but *every possible* path to your eye. For God, not just one good thing comes to pass but all possible good takes place. For God “possible” simply means that coming future. And it was good that Jesus be raised from the dead. For *All things* work together for good for those who love God.

Let us look to Peter’s argument. Since it was impossible for Jesus to remain in death, if you and I remain in Jesus it will be impossible for you to be held down.

And by following his will, by living out his love, we will become one of those infinite paths of goodness God will take to bring the power of life to the world. That old saying “Might makes right” is reversed. Because of the sum of all good that which is right will always prevail thus “right makes might”. Right cannot be held down.

It was impossible because it is the nature of love that it cannot be destroyed. This means, for you and I, two thousand years down the road of time this event can bring life, true life to this dying evil world with the power of love. Think about the stories of martyrs of the faith who, even in death, continue to bring life to the church. That ancient theologian Tertullian wrote, “The blood of the martyr is the seed of the church”. Think about the power of life through the deaths of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King. Perpetua was martyred in 203 A.D. yet, still today, Christians are inspired by her courage to remain steadfast in the faith. Before her execution her father tried to convince her to renounce the faith. She replied,

Father, said I, Do you see (for examples) this vessel lying, a pitcher or whatsoever it may be? And he said, I see it. And I said to him, Can it be called by any other name than that which it is? And he answered, No. So can I call myself nought other than that which I am, a Christian.

Through these deaths, the seeds of their *lives* grew even stronger. That is the power of life – that in the face of its greatest enemy it becomes strongest.

It would be impossible, because Jesus *is* life. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the *life*”. Through Jesus all things were created. Jesus encapsulates the very spark of life which will and must break through. Despite the evidence of endless cubic miles of lifeless space, despite the fact that the only life we know of in this universe relies on a razor thin crust of soil, despite

the force of death and decay that takes *every* human life, it was impossible because Life is Stronger than death! Picture the moss and vine that swallow dead stone over centuries with life. Jesus is the force of life that, over time, will swallow all death with his life-giving power. South Africa was long entrenched in Apartheid. But, despite its reality, even back in 1955 Archbishop Desmond Tutu believed in this principle.

Goodness is stronger than evil; Love is stronger than hate; Light is stronger than darkness; Life is stronger than death; Victory is ours through God who loves us.

Tutu is a prime example of someone stepping into the eddy of God’s will and being drawn to a new day and the breaking through of goodness and life.

From Peter’s statement we have concluded:

- That evil will lose
- That life is stronger than death
- The all possible good comes to pass
- That love triumphs all
- That the world will be restored, reconciled, and redeemed.

That is the power of the resurrection: the power of the source of life, Jesus Christ. All these wonderful truths deduced from the seemingly simple statement, “It was impossible for Jesus to be held in death’s power.” Isn’t theology grand! Amen.