

Introduction

The resurrection of Jesus is the bedrock of every Christian's hope. If he was still in the tomb, if his body had decayed away, we would be completely without hope. But because God raised him from the dead, our hope is solid and secure from this time forth and forevermore. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, our hope is undimmed even by the increasing bleakness of our day. So I never tire of hearing the announcement of the angels to the women who came to the tomb early on the third day. "He is not here, for he has risen, as he said." Christ is risen indeed! I like to be reminded again and again. I want us to turn this morning to a text where we see that the people heard the wonderful news of salvation and wanted to hear it again.

[Read text and Pray]

I selected this text for this morning because it is one of the places in scripture that emphasizes the significance of the resurrection of Jesus to God's provision of salvation to those who believe. As always on this week, I have been more mindful than usual of the importance of the resurrection of Jesus. It is one of the aspects of Christianity that totally sets it apart. Followers of Jesus alone proclaim a savior who died but was raised from the dead.

I also selected this text because of how emphatically it ties Jesus to David. As we have been studying the life of David, I have been emphasizing how he in so many ways prefigures Christ Jesus. In this text we see that not only did David prefigure Christ, he also spoke prophetically of him.

As we noticed in the reading, the bulk of this text is a sermon preached by the Apostle Paul. The sermon was an introduction of the gospel to folks who had not heard it before. And once they heard it, they begged to hear it again. It is the most important message anyone will ever hear. It is imperative that those who hear respond with faith. Those who scoff at it will perish. But those who believe will be forgiven of sins and freed from God's righteous wrath. For most if not all of you, this morning is not the first time you will have heard the message. But as the old hymn says, "I love to tell the story, for those who know it best seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest. And when, in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new song, 'Twill be the old, old story, That I have loved so long." So this morning, let us examine how the Apostle Paul told the old, so-called, "story." In preaching the message of salvation, he shows that it is according to God's plan; it is the keeping of promises; it is the fulfillment of prophecy; and it calls for a response of faith.

This salvation is . . .

I. A Plan Executed in History.

As Paul unfolds the message, he connects with his audience. They include Israelites as well as non-Israelites, but all of them were worshipers of the God of Abraham. They were Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. In verse 16, Paul addresses them as "Men of Israel AND you who fear God." Down in verse 26 he designates them as "Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, AND those among you who fear God." They will be familiar with the history then which Paul recites for them. He begins with what they share as common ground.

"God chose our fathers" is a reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was clear that God had a plan when he called Abraham. He made a covenant to bless Abraham and reward him greatly. His offspring would be as numerous as the stars. He told him that through Isaac he would be the father of a multitude of nations and kings would come forth from them. His descendants would inherit the land of Canaan. As Paul points out, that came after their stay in Egypt where they became a great host of people. In mighty power God brought them out of Egypt and put up with them through their time in the wilderness.

At last he brought them into the land of Canaan, having destroyed seven nations in the land. Then came the time of the judges until Samuel the prophet. The people asked for a king and the LORD gave them Saul. We all know how that turned out, don't we? God replaced Saul with David, a man who would do the will of God. Up to this point the audience would be right there with Paul. Here is where his message introduces the

audience to wonderful news. The news is that God has brought a Savior to Israel. He is the descendant of King David that he promised.

Paul's recitation of Israel's history would have his audience shaking their heads in agreement. And they would be familiar with indicators of a messiah, a king to come and save the people. Now Paul introduces them to him by name. The savior is Jesus. He has come. He was introduced by John who paved the way for him.

From the beginning Paul's sermon establishes the fact that the coming of Jesus is grounded in the plan of God which he executed over time in the course of actual history. The Bible is such a phenomenal book! It is grounded in the context of history. It asserts itself as an accurate record of actual events, of people and places over the span of thousands of years. As a whole the Bible is not an allegory or a fantasy story. It is a historical record of specific people and acts of God toward and through them. The Bible emphasizes that what it recorded actually happened. Gabe Fluhrer states that "The Bible has a concern for history that no other religion has ... And if you seek high and low in other religions, there is not the same emphasis on facts [and] historical reality all in the service of convincing us of the truth of what God is telling us." (From message called "For Sure: Evidence for the Resurrection" aired on Renewing Your Mind)

God's provision of salvation is not a state of mind. It is not a mental exercise. It is not a crutch to better cope with the perplexities and afflictions of life. His provision is of a real savior who in the flesh of a human body was a biological descendant of Abraham and David. His coming was the culmination of a divine plan for salvation executed through time and real persons and actual events. Jesus' death and resurrection are factual events without which there can be no actual salvation. It is as John wrote as John wrote in his first epistle, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life . . . that which we have seen and heard we proclaim" (1 John 1:1-3). Accordingly, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14).

To think of a collection of books (as the Bible is) so concerned with factual history, it would be completely inconsistent for this book to assert the high mark of its message as fact while it was only imagination. Some who disbelieve the resurrection as an actuality conjecture that Jesus did not actually die but went into a swoon or into a coma from which he revived. Others theorize that the disciples had a sort of group hallucination by which they became convinced he was alive. Still others assert that the disciples stole the body and hid it and then claimed that he was risen from the dead. Perhaps, suggest some, Jesus had a twin that no one saw until after he was crucified, then he showed up and the claim was that Jesus had risen. None of these suggestions satisfy to explain what happened to Jesus.

The transformation of the disciples from before the resurrection to after it is a historical testimony to debunk all of these suggestions that the resurrection was not actual. When Jesus was arrested and crucified, they scattered; they ran for their lives. Before the crucifixion, big, burly, and bold Peter swore up and down with cursing to a servant girl that he did NOT KNOW Jesus. But after the resurrection he boldly proclaimed the gospel on the day of Pentecost. After the resurrection, he stood boldly before the council and declared that there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. Later he spoke to that same council and declared in opposition to them, "We must obey God rather than men." Finally Peter, along with other apostles, suffered beating for preaching Jesus. When they left the presence of the council, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name, and they kept on preaching.

If the authorities wanted to stop the preaching of the disciples, all they had to do was to produce the body of Jesus. They knew where the tomb was. The only satisfying answer to why they did not produce the body is that they were unable to find it. The conclusion to which we must come is that Jesus REALLY died and TRULY in the flesh rose again. His life and death and resurrection were planned by God and executed in actuality in real time. And the salvation which the scriptures proclaim is just as real as the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

This salvation is . . .

II. A Promise Kept by God.

That this salvation was the plan of God all along is demonstrated in that it was promised and prophesied. Paul asserts in his sermon that God's promises were kept, and the prophecies were fulfilled. Let's look first on the emphasis of promises kept.

Take a look at verse 23. Paul was referring to David. And there he says, "Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, AS HE PROMISED." God had indeed made promises. They were made to David and his offspring and through David to Israel to provide a place of safety and rest for the people of God. That promise gained clarity through the prophets. According to Isaiah, a particular descendant of David would be a special child who would be born and on whose shoulders the government would rest. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end. He would establish and uphold the throne and kingdom of David. Then again Isaiah spoke of a shoot from the stump of Jesse upon whom the Spirit of the Lord would rest, who would judge with righteousness, and bring peace.

The first promise of such a one was made in the garden of Eden in the aftermath of sin. The promise was that an offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. These are all promises which the Lord has kept in sending Jesus the son of David.

This salvation is . . .

III. A Provision According to Prophecy.

In sending Jesus, God was not only keeping promises, he was bringing about the fulfillment of detailed prophecies. They foretold specifics about the lineage and life and about the death and resurrection of Jesus. In fact, said Paul, these prophetic utterances are read every Sabbath in the synagogues. What the Jews heard every week, however, they did not understand. For this reason they failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah that he is. And failing to recognize him, they rejected him. As John MacArthur writes, "Those who are ignorant of the written word will inevitably be ignorant of the Living Word" (Acts 13-23, p. 23). These folks were privileged to have access to the word of God. And they were responsible to know it. How much more we who have multiple copies in our possession.

Think for a moment about some of these prophecies. The savior would be the seed of woman says Genesis 3:15. He would be born of a virgin according to Isaiah 7:14. He would be born in Bethlehem says Micah 5:2. He would be introduced by one crying out in the wilderness (Isaiah 40:3-5). The one who cried out was John and the one he introduced was Jesus. According to Isaiah 61 the Savior would be anointed with the Spirit and proclaim release to captives. Isaiah 35:5-6 indicates that the Savior would heal the blind, the deaf, and the lame. The savior would enter Jerusalem on a donkey's colt as we saw last week in Zechariah 9:9. He would be betrayed by a close friend according to Psalm 41:9. John pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Jesus fulfills all of these. But the people missed it.

The failure of the Jews to grasp and understand the scripture led them to oppose God and reject the savior God had promised and for whom they were looking. He came to his own people and his own did not receive him. Indeed, they demanded his brutal execution on a cross. And their demand was granted. In Paul's sermon, he continues to add to the number of prophecies fulfilled by Jesus. Here he is specifically focused on those related to Jesus' crucifixion. The Jews themselves in their ignorance of scripture ended up contributing to the fulfillment of specific prophecies concerning the coming savior. Paul says that they carried out ALL that was WRITTEN of him.

Here is a little survey of prophecies we are talking about. The crucifixion was foreshadowed while Israel was wandering when the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people causing many to die. When the people admitted that they had sinned, the Lord's remedy was for Moses to make a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. Everyone who was bitten, when they looked upon the serpent, they would live. Jesus then prophesied (John 3:14), "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him might have eternal life." The twenty-second psalm also depicts just such a death with many of the details. "They make mouths at me; they wag their heads." "Dogs encompass me; a company of

evildoers encircle me; they have pierced my hands and feet; . . . they divide my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots." Psalm 53:3 indicated he would be despised and forsaken. He would be given vinegar and gall according to Psalm 69:21. The executioners would break no bones (Psalm 34:20). But they would pierce his side according to Zechariah 12:10.

Each of these details is recounted for us in the New Testament. Jesus was crucified, lifted up on a pole. His feet and hands were pierced. The soldiers divided his garments and cast lots for his tunic. They offered him vinegar mixed with gall. Observers mocked and scorned him. They wagged their heads. They surrounded him. But they broke none of his bones. It is the point of Paul to communicate to his audience that truly Jesus is the Savior. His rejection by the Jews even to the details of his crucifixion fail to disprove he is messiah. Rather the mind-boggling number of fulfilled prophecies demonstrates that without a shadow of a doubt Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah. Jewish rejection in fact confirms him to be the Christ.

And not only was his death prophesied, so was his resurrection from the dead. God raised Jesus from the dead as an actual and historical fact. It is the supreme attesting proof that Jesus is the Son of God and his provided Savior and Messiah. Christ appeared to his followers on numerous occasions probably more than are recorded in the New Testament. And Paul says it is these very people who are testifying that Jesus is risen from the dead. Paul asserts that by raising Jesus, God has fulfilled what he promised.

Here are in fact three promises fulfilled. First, the Lord had spoken prophetically in Psalm 2:7 saying, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you." That word refers back to the covenant-promise the Lord made to David in 2 Samuel 7. And listen to this. The Lord spoke to David saying, "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will RAISE UP your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom . . . I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son." It is in this sense at the resurrection that Christ has been begotten. Paul is asserting that in the resurrection God has fulfilled his promise to RAISE UP David's offspring to the place of sonship as king over all. The resurrection is seen as the coronation of Christ. So in this way the resurrection of Jesus itself was promised. You cannot be God's king without being raised up.

Promise number two that is fulfilled by the resurrection is cited by Paul from Isaiah 55:3. It is the promise that God's people would receive the holy and sure blessings of David. This would be impossible if the servant of the Lord through whom these blessings were to come is dead. Only a living Messiah can actively be a channel of God's blessing.

Promise number three comes from Psalm 16. "You will not let your Holy One see corruption." It is an assurance of David based upon a divine promise that the body of his descendant to come would not decompose. Paul argues that David clearly did not have himself in mind because he in fact died, was buried, and saw corruption. He underwent decay. His body decomposed. No one ever asserted that David had been resurrected. As with David, Jesus also died and was laid in the tomb. But in contrast to David, on the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead. If he had not been raised, we would have had to conclude that the baby born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth, the one called Jesus, could not be the messiah, the savior. But since he is, his resurrection from the dead seals it.

What then? That is where Paul goes next. This salvation is . . .

IV. A Pardon to be Proclaimed.

After the reading of the law and the prophets as was the custom in the synagogue, those who seemed to be important visitors to the gathering were offered the opportunity to share a message. Given that opportunity, Paul stood and began to preach. He proclaimed God's salvation. He centered in on the death and resurrection of Christ. It was planned. It was promised. It was prophesied. And upon the basis of Christ's work, he now presses upon the people the magnificent essence of the salvation Christ Jesus has procured. He preaches to the people pardon. Look down at verse 38. Paul heralds his message. "Let it be known to you, therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you."

Sin. This is humanity's greatest problem. We sin in deed, word, thought, and attitude. We sin by doing what God prohibits. We sin by failing to do what God commands. The Jews knew their problem was sin. The entire sacrificial system instituted by the law of Moses was designed to deal with people's offenses against holy God. The temple sacrifices communicated to the people the need was for atonement. But vast numbers of Jews and their teachers and chief religious leaders believed and taught that man was made right with God by strict adherence to the law of Moses and the traditions of the rabbis. Their message was that it depends on human effort to try and do all that God commands.

Now anyone who honestly considers themselves in light of God's law will be overwhelmed with despair. There is no hope because, frankly, we sin all the time. Our evil is inward as well as outward. And the breaking of even one law makes a person a lawbreaker. No matter how hard we might try to obey God's law, we will constantly find ourselves breaking it. The situation is hopeless before a holy God who according to his own words will not leave the guilty unpunished.

Trying to be right with God through attempting to keep the law is a labor in vain. It is like trying to keep one's feet firmly planted in mid-air. It will make one weary and heavy laden. It will lead to despair. In contrast, Paul's message of salvation was a message of pardon based upon Christ's work. What people need to be right with God is not to try harder, dig deeper, intensify their determination. What people need is forgiveness. And that is what Paul proclaimed. He was preaching to the people that they could be forgiven and freed from what they could not be freed through the law of Moses. Forgiveness means freedom from the debt of sin. It also means freedom from the burden of an impossible attempt to make yourself right with God through obeying laws and rules. What a relief!

Now the question was HOW to be forgiven. The answer is to believe. Everyone who believes, said Paul, is freed from the curse of the law. Christ by his death and resurrection took that curse upon himself and won. He overcame and through faith in him, sinners are granted forgiveness. They are set free. They are delivered from the curse, delivered from sin's penalty and power.

Paul himself had been a legalistic Pharisee who once trusted in his own efforts and lineage to be right with God. He himself had come to realize that right standing with God comes not on the basis of one's own efforts but through trusting in the person and work of Christ. He wrote the Philippians, that everything he once trusted in about himself he now counted as loss. He wrote, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness of God that depends on faith."

There is no greater message a sinner could hear than this one. And it is the only message of salvation. There is salvation in no one else. Christ is the way, the truth, and the life and no one comes to the Father except through him.

There is also no greater mistake anyone could make than to turn his back on this offer of salvation. Paul concludes with a warning. The glory of this work of God surpasses comprehension. And you scoff at it at your own peril. If you resist this message God will resist you.

Two kinds of people are here today. First there are those who already have experienced forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus. Let us rejoice today in the risen Christ by whom we are saved. Second, there are those who are not believing in Christ for forgiveness of sins. That is the way everyone is born. I will stress to you what Paul stressed to his hearers back in the day. This is a great and magnificent provision which God has made. I urge you to believe. Turn to Christ and trust in him and receive the gift of forgiveness. I must warn you who scoff at this message. If you scoff at this message and refuse to believe, you will perish under the mighty hand of God. Oh that rather you would believe.

Conclusion

The people were NOT EAGER to leave the synagogue that day. They WERE eager to come back again the next Sabbath and hear more. This was not what they had been hearing from the Jewish leaders. They were hungry for truth and longed for hope. And that is what Paul had preached to them. So they begged to hear more the next week. Many began following Paul and Barnabas who urged them to continue in the grace of God.

Grace is what Christ's death and resurrection are all about. Grace is when you get mercy you don't deserve in place of the judgment you do deserve. Grace is when you depend on what God has done to make you right with him instead of on what you might do to try to make yourself right with him. Grace makes all the difference. And once you have heard the message of grace, you will want to hear it again and again. If you rest in God's grace it will be the song you sing day after day.

Amazing grace how sweet the sound!
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found.
Was blind but now I see.

Tw'as grace that taught my heart to fear
and grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed.

Through many dangers toils and snares
I have already come
Tis grace has brought me safe thus far
and grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
bright shining as the sun
We've no less days to sing God's grace
than when we first begun.