

The Full Message of God's Salvation, Part 2

Acts 13:23-41

For those who are in the condition of spiritual deadness, it's fair to say that they might have trouble seeing clearly, right? Deadness affects your eyesight, it affects a lot of things, but particularly your eyesight. You can't see anything, those who are spiritually dead are in desperate need of clarity and that's what we find here, two parts to Paul's explanation of the Gospel. First clarity about Christ and secondly, clarity about the nature of divine salvation.

People to whom Paul spoke like most people today, they lack clarity about both. They didn't understand Christ and they didn't understand the true nature of salvation. Again, very much like people today, they don't understand Christ, and they don't understand what he came to do. Christ came not to elevate your following or give you more money or to make you even, preeminently happy. He came to make you holy, and that comes through travail and pain, and sadness, and sorrow.

That's why Jesus says, "Blessed, are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn." If we don't have a clear understanding of Jesus, we're not gonna understand anything. He is the one who came to make the Father known, John in 1:18, so if we fail to have clarity about Christ, we're not going to understand God. If we don't understand God, we don't understand his salvation, or any other spiritual truth for that matter. It all starts with clarity about Christ.

That's why Jesus own people didn't embrace him as Savior and king, but instead did the opposite. They rejected him and crucified him. They did so because they were spiritually dead, they were blind, they were unable to perceive who Jesus really is. Look at verses 26 to 28, "Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For, those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers."

Notice the present tense there, they currently live there, still living, the ones who crucified Christ. "They did not recognize him, nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath. And they fulfilled them by condemning him, and though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed."

Paul returns to the same thought in writing to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 2:8, he explained the spiritual deadness of those who crucified Christ, Jew and Gentile alike, all of them, he says, none of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. That's who Jesus really is, he's none other than the Lord of Glory. Their spiritual condition, which resulted in spiritual blindness is evident in the fact that they killed the very person God sent to save them. They killed their deliverer. They murdered their own savior; can anything be more bitterly ironic and as tragic as that?

Get this, these are no dummies. They're not uneducated people, these are intelligent, educated, accomplished people. Remember, Paul is speaking here in Pisidia in Antioch, which is a Roman colony. He's speaking here in a synagogue to Bible believing people. They had just finished reading the law and the prophets, that's a tradition they practice every single Sabbath day. According to verse 27, then they're just like the ones who were in Jerusalem, who do the very same thing. Those people also practice the tradition of, of Bible reading. They were Bible readers, they did their devotions. They were instructed by educated men, learned scholarly rabbis, and yet, they missed all that had been written about Christ in the Old Testament.

Just goes to show you, intelligence isn't the issue, education isn't the issue, mirror familiarity or even scholarly familiarity with the Bible, that is not the issue. What is the issue? The presence or the absence of spiritual life, that is the issue. They were so spiritually blind, not only did they fail to understand Jesus, but in their hurry to reject him as their Messiah, they acted in total contradictions to the Bible they read in the teaching that they had heard.

As is read in the Gospels, the High priest examined Jesus and in so doing, the Jewish Sanhedrin, the Jewish leaders, they totally ignored the jurisprudence that God gave to Moses. They utterly abandoned due process by delivering Jesus over to Pontius Pilate to have him crucified, they condemned an innocent man. They betrayed innocent blood, without equal, this is the greatest miscarriage of justice in all of human history.

Not just because of how blatantly they violated their own law, but more importantly because no one else in human history has ever been this innocent. Jesus, absolutely sinless, and they condemned him. Guilty of what? And yet, unwittingly, without knowing it, their criminal, murderous rejection of Jesus the Christ, fulfilled exactly what God decreed from the very beginning of time, from before time began.

What he revealed clearly in the Old Testament, Paul says in verse 27 that although they were ignorant and unwitting, those who crucified Christ actually fulfilled the prophets, when they condemned him. As verse 29 says, "When they carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree where they killed him, being fully culpable, guilty of their crime. They took him down from the tree and they laid him in a tomb."

It's a very precise statement, actually, so precise was their fulfillment of all that was prophesied about Christ in the Old Testament. That when his dead body was removed and brought down from that cross rather than burying his body in the ground, which is what they always did to the bodies of Jews who were crucified. Gentiles being crucified, their bodies were just thrown into a trash heap, just thrown on a rubbish pile.

But God had commanded the Jews something special about their own people, in Deuteronomy 21:22-23, "If a man has committed a crime punishable by death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land, that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance." Jesus died as a

curse, a curse of God, curses of God as all who are hanged on a tree.

But the Jews knew that they had to bury the body of a fellow Jew, no matter how despicable, because he's cursed by God. But rather than being buried in the ground, body, Jesus' body was laid in a tomb in the ground of a tomb, again fulfilling the scripture. Surprising manner of the burial of this cursed man should have pointed the people back in their minds to the fulfillment of Isaiah 53. Again, the prophets being read every Sabbath.

We read that earlier in the service where it says in verse 9, "They made his grave with the wicked." That is, he was crucified between two criminals and yet, he was with a rich man and his death. That was fulfilled when his body was buried in the tomb of a very wealthy man. The brand new tomb, hewn out of a rock by Joseph of Arimathea. Jews and the gentiles, all of Israel conspiring within herself, and then collusion with the Roman overlords whom they hated, but they all came together to reject Jesus the Christ. None of them recognized him for who he truly was, the Lord of glory. It's an unwitting act of tragic, irony that they crucified their own salvation.

And yet all by God's perfect design, all according to his perfect wisdom, this became the means of their salvation, this is all according to his plan. As Isaiah prophesied, "We esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted," which he was. But, "pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, with his wounds we're healed, the Lord Yahweh has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He's cut off from the land of the living, stricken." Why? For the transgression of my people.

Is Jesus here an unwitting victim, conspiracy of sinful man and even God the Father in heaven, is he an unwitting victim? Not according to Isaiah this is God's doing, it's the will of the Lord to crush him to put him to grief. And then According to him, Jesus' own testimony, he's not a victim. He says, "I laid down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord, I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." That last line charge, "received from the Father," that shows that Christ the son of God submitted his will. He used the authority that he had over his own life to lay it down in submission to the will of the Father. It was the will of the Father to crush him. The will of the

Father, to put him to grief. And Jesus said, Yes Father, not as I will, but as thy will.

Brings us back to what Paul preached in Antioch. He told those who feared God, that the condemnation of Christ, the murder of Christ, for which the Jews and Gentiles are truly guilty. This crucifixion of Jesus fulfilled the will of the Father. Though they acted as free moral agents, though they did exactly what they wanted to do, there's a sovereign God above them, accomplishing his perfect will, according to his eternal decree.

We need to understand that about Jesus, we need to get Jesus right. And in understanding Jesus and the clarity of his purpose as savior, Paul then turns to provide further clarity about the nature of God's salvation. Recognizing who Jesus really is, that is how we're going to come to understand what God has actually done in the primary purpose of this Gospel. Yes, it's about saving guilty sinners. I'm so thankful for that, aren't you?

Yes, it's about eternal life. Yes, it's about living even now in the power of a resurrected life. But most fundamentally, most essentially, this Gospel is about the glory of God in redeeming guilty sinners. Because how can a just God who demands

full punishment for every single sin against his holiness; how can that just God justify the ungodly and still remain just?

This message of salvation it reveals the greatness of the God who can do that, the God who can save. That's fundamentally what the resurrection is about. The supernatural act of raising Jesus from the dead, that's what the resurrection is. But what the resurrection means is divine approval, and for that we look at verses 30 to 39. "The Savior God promised whom he sent has died on the cross. He is buried in a tomb, but God" verse 30 "raised him from the dead." That is, a point, is pointing to the historical fact. Look at verses 30-31, "God raised him from the dead," fact, "and for many days he appeared to those who had come up from a with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people."

There's a historic fact, the resurrection. There's an eyewitness, many eyewitnesses, and now they testify and witness to the people telling the truth about what they've seen?

Paul tells these people in Antioch, verse 31, that for many days he appeared to those who come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. In other words, there are eyewitnesses to this risen Christ. As we read earlier, they saw him, they touched him, they even ate and drank with him. This is an actual, literal bodily

resurrection. These witnesses, they didn't keep quiet about it either. They talked as you might expect, and they became, verse 31, his witnesses to the people, but notice that they didn't run off to the Far East to spin some new religion about some resurrected myth Messiah. They talked about it in the very city where Jesus died and where he was buried, that's bold.

If anyone could disprove the resurrection as a myth and believe me the Jewish leaders had every motive, motive to do so, they would have disproved the resurrection immediately by producing the body. Leadership didn't do that, they knew from the start they didn't have a body. Matthew 28:11 says, "Some of the guard that was assigned to guard Jesus' tomb. They went into the city and they told the chief priests all that had taken place." And believe me, they're quaking, they're quivering. They know that the sentence of death is over their head for losing the body.

When they'd assembled with the elders and taken council, they gave us a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers. And said, "tell the people, his disciples came by night and stole him away," while they, "while we were asleep." If this comes to the governor's ears will satisfy him, keep you out of trouble.

So they took the money, did as they were directed. This story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

Of all the ways to explain away the fact that Jesus' tomb is empty. To deny that he rose from the dead, this is probably the best of all the failed attempts. It's still insufficient and absolutely absurd on so many levels. Roman guards die for falling asleep on watch, or for letting a bunch of fishermen steal the body, that they're ordered to guard from a sealed tomb or even further die for taking money to lie for the Jews.

First, the women, Cephas, twelve, more than five hundred brothers, James, the Lord's brother, all the apostles, last of all the apostle Paul. They all saw him, they all preached the resurrection, they all knew it to be true. That's a historical fact. Secondly, though, what does the historic fact mean? There's the history, there's the fact, but what is, how do we interpret the facts? What is the theological meaning of the resurrection?

That's there in versus 32 to 39? Paul says "We bring you the good news of what God promised to the fathers. This he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus. As also it is written in the second Psalm, 'You are my son. Today I have begotten you and as for the fact that he raised him from the

dead no more to return to corruption.' He's spoken in this way, another promise. 'I will give you the holy sure blessings of David,' and therefore he says also in another Psalm, 'You will not let your holy one see corruption.'" Why? Because he made these promises.

He won't let him see corruption, for David, after he served the purpose of God in his own generation, he fell asleep, he's laid in with his fathers. He saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. To sum all that up, in a concise way, here's what Paul is saying. Here's the meaning of the resurrection, God has kept his word, God has kept his word. Verses 32 to 33, "What God promised, this he has fulfilled." God is the subject of both those verbs, both promise and fulfillment. God is there from start to finish and it all depends on him. That is the significance of the resurrection, that is what resurrection means.

God has kept his word. Kept his word to who? To us, yes, us. There's more than that, but at least us, "What God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus." Promises that God made to Abraham, to his offspring, to David, extending all the way to those who are of

Abraham and of David by faith. But that promise isn't just to us.

Paul makes us even more fundamental than that, he points to the promises God made repeatedly to his own son. Paul quotes from three Old Testament passages there, starting with Psalm 2:7 to 8, which says "I will tell of the decree." This is Jesus, the Son of God, preincarnate Christ speaking. He says "I will tell of the decree the Lord said to me, you are my son. Today I have begotten you." Passage continues as God says, "Ask of me, I will make the nations your heritage. The ends of the Earth, your possession."

Look, God made promises to the preincarnate Christ, he made the promises to the Son and he is not going to allow the eternal Son to be cut off by death, because the nations in the end of the earth are to be his possession. He must live to rule. Paul then quotes next from Isaiah 55:3, again reinforcing the fact that God's not going to allow his eternal begotten Son to be cut off by death and then explicitly this Psalm 16:10, "Messiah says you will not abandon my soul to Sheol. You will not let your holy one see corruption." This isn't referring to David, who is the author of Psalm 16, David died.

Same thing Peter pointed out in Acts 2:29 quoting the same psalm, Psalm 16. He interpreted it this way while filled with the Holy Spirit, he said, "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried and his tomb is with us to this day.

Melinda and I were in London some years back, we were walking around Westminster Abbey. When we saw the tombs of many famous people in England's history, kings like Edward the Confessor and Edward the First, brilliant Isaac Newton, African explorer David Livingston, and all the rest. People can travel to London and see all those tombs of all those famous people. Just like everyone in Paul's day could go to Jerusalem and visit David's tomb. Not true of Jesus, he whom God raised up did not see corruption. There is no body in the tomb to go and visit because God raised Jesus up from the dead.

He fulfilled his word not just to the fathers, but to Jesus who believed what God told him when he said, by the Holy Spirit, through the pen of David, "You will not abandon my soul to Sheol. You will not let your Holy One see corruption." Jesus, the Messiah believed God's promise; God fulfilled his word; God raised him from the dead and the question today is, do you believe? Jesus believed, he believed God's word. Paul has

believed God's word. All of us sinners in need of salvation, we believe God's word, do you believe? Versus 37-38, notice this, this completes the meaning of the resurrection for those who fear God. This provides us with further clarity about the nature of salvation.

This is how God, the just one, holy, can justify the ungodly. Let it be known to you, therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed, by the law of Moses. Forgiven and set free. That's the Gospel. This is such good news to those who were in Antioch, they heard Paul preach. They grew up studying the highest exposition of law given to mankind. The law of Moses, written by the hand of God, but that law had no power to free them from the penalty, power, and presence of sin.

That's why you've heard of these rich people who want to be cryogenically frozen and science will catch up to the fact that their bodies can be reanimated and they can live forever. Bad idea, you know, why? Because the same heart they go down with is the same heart they'll come up with. They'll corrupt themselves and this world again. Those who fear God, those who long to be delivered, who long to be justified by God, declared by the Holy

God who sees all things declared forgiven and judged to be righteous.

Christ accomplished that through his perfect life, atoning death, and most notably from his resurrection from the dead. God has done Romans 8:3-4, what the law could not do. "By sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh in order the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us." You see there in Acts 13:39 how everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. What's translated there in the ESV is freed, is the word *dikaioo*, which is usually translated justified. The translators are here emphasizing the practical benefits of justification, which is freedom.

Paul, though, is speaking about the more fundamental legal reality of justification. It's the same thing taught from cover to cover in Scripture, starting as early as Genesis 15:6, which says "Abraham believed the Lord and God," counted, "counted it to him as righteousness." That's why Paul can say believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. You believe Christ, your sin is imputed to Christ, and he's punished. His righteousness is imputed to you, and you are blessed. God declares you righteous.

That's why God's testimony in the doctrine in the resurrection is so vital to the gospel folks. And why we need to proclaim this to others, why we need to explain it clearly whenever we share the Gospel. Just as God promised to raise Jesus from the dead, a promise that Jesus believed. And then God raised him from the dead. So also, you and I, if we will believe the promise of God, we too, will be raised from the dead, just like our Lord.

"If you confess with your mouth, Jesus Lord," Romans 10:9. "Believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Saved from the penalty of sin, just like Abraham the father of all who believed our faith will be counted to us as righteousness, Romans 4:24. It'll be counted to us who believe in him, who raised Jesus from the dead as Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses. He's raised up for our justification.

Having been saved from the penalty of sin, which is God's eternal wrath, were being saved from the power of sin. We're no longer under sin's dominion because we're dead to sin. Romans 6:11, "We're alive to God in Christ." That means one day, when we follow Jesus into resurrection glory, we have the hope, the certain sure hope that we will be forever free from sin's

presence entirely. "For this is the will of my Father," Jesus said in John 6:40, "that everyone who looks on the Son and believes on him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Folks, that is good news, that is very good news, and it is sealed by divine guarantee in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The gracious God points us to salvation, in his one and only son, and to reject him is an eternal offense against divine kindness. God declared Jesus to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness, by his resurrection from the dead. So all those who fear God, all those who acknowledge their sin who embraced Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they and they alone will be saved.

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is the divine seal of approval, it is the stamp of his approval, it is the gavel falling and saying justified, not guilty, but righteous. And that encourages and motivates us by an internal living hope. Providing us with certainty, with unwavering confidence, and absolute hope. That is the resurrection folks, that's what we celebrate today.

Let's close in a word of prayer. Our God and our Father. You have certainly set apart your son, Jesus Christ. As the one



and only Savior. We love you, we thank you for this gospel that saves us, and we do call upon all those who do not know you, been reconciled to you by faith in your Son. We call on them to believe, to repent of their sin and put faith in you. We trust you, we love you, we thank you for this time of the year that we can set apart to worship you because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's by him that we are saved and give glory to you in his name. Amen.