

# Sermon for Easter Tuesday

## Acts 13:26-39

### THE WORD AND THE RESURRECTION

*Acts 13:26-39*

*Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead: And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.*

1. This sermon was preached by Paul in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia, where were gathered with the Jews some Greek converts. Wherever in a city Jews were to be found, there also were their synagogues in which they taught and preached; and many gentiles, coming to hear, were converted to God through the preaching of his Word. Undoubtedly it was by God's wonderful direction that the Jews were dispersed throughout the world among the gentiles, after the first destruction of Jerusalem by the Assyrians. Inasmuch as

this dispersion resulted in the spread of the Word, they were instrumental in securing salvation for the gentiles and in preparing the way for the world-wide preaching of the Gospel by the apostles. For wherever the apostles went they found Jewish synagogues and the opportunity to preach to a regular congregation, through whom their Gospel might be widely disseminated because of the many gentiles also in attendance. Had not these gentiles been already accustomed to the Jewish synagogues, they would not have listened to the apostles, nor even permitted them publicly to preach, strangers that they were.

2. Thus it is Paul comes into the synagogue on the Sabbath, a time when the congregation was wont to assemble and read the Scriptures. He and Barnabas being guests from the country of the Jews, Paul is besought to give an exhortation, or sermon, to the people, whereupon he rises and delivers a fine, lengthy discourse concerning Christ: how in the Scriptures he had been promised unto the fathers and to David the king, had been born of the seed of David and had received the public testimony of John the Baptist; how Christ was sacrificed by the Jews (Peter gives the same account in the preceding epistle lesson); how he rose from the dead and for some time showed himself alive; how he then commanded his apostles to publish to the world the new doctrine that God's promise to the Jews had been fulfilled; and how, by his resurrection, he brought to them the promised blessing, namely, the remission of sins unattainable through the Law of Moses and all their ordinances, but dispensed and imparted alone to faith in the Christ proclaimed.

3. As stated later in the text, there were, beside the Jews, many gentiles present at the preaching of this sermon, and at its conclusion they besought Paul to speak to them again between sabbaths. Accordingly, when he came to the synagogue the next sabbath, he found almost the whole city assembled. But to return to the first sermon: Paul says, "Brethren, children of the stock of Abraham" - or, native Jews - "and those among you that fear God" - who are gentiles. Now, though this could not but be a discourse objectionable and highly offensive to the Jews, Paul opens with tender and nicely chosen words meant to conciliate and to secure their respectful attention. He highly honors them by addressing them as the people chosen by God in preference to all the gentiles; as children of the holy fathers who had a special claim to the promise of God. But, again, he vitiates his pleasing impression when he proclaims to the Jews naught else but the crucified and risen Christ, and concludes with the statement that with nothing but Moses' Law and ordinances they ranked no higher in the sight of God than the gentiles.

## **THE WORD OF SALVATION.**

4. Paul's discourse is in perfect harmony with Peter's sermon. Peter speaks of God having sent unto the Jews heralds proclaiming peace; and Paul here says, "To you [us] is the word of this salvation sent." Notwithstanding the joy and comfort wherewith these words are fraught, they could not please the Jews. The Jews disdained the idea - in fact, it was intolerable to them to hear it expressed - that after their long expectation of a Messiah to be lord and king of the world, they should receive a mere message, and at that a message

rendering of no significance at all that Law and government for which they had expected, through that Messiah, exaltation and world-wide acceptance. Indeed, such an issue could only mean to them having entertained a vain hope.

5. Paul makes his teaching yet more offensive by not referring to the Gospel simply as the word of peace, as Peter does, but by giving it the greater and grander title, "the word of salvation"; in other words, a doctrine calculated to heal and save. No grander name could be found for the Gospel; for a message of salvation is an expression of God's grace, forgiveness of sins, abiding peace and life eternal. Moreover, these blessings were not to be bestowed upon the Jews alone; they were to be equally shared with the gentiles, who had no knowledge of God, of the Law, or of divine worship. The gentiles were thus to be made the equals of the Jews, leaving the latter without preference or special merit before God, and without advantage and lordship over the former in the world.

6. Thus early in his discourse Paul grows blunt and severe, kneading Jews and gentiles into one lump. Indeed, he plainly tells the Jews that the Law of Moses did not secure to them the favor of God in the past and would be equally profitless in the future; that through the Gospel message, and only so, they, and all gentiles as well, were to be delivered from sin, death and the power of the devil, and to become God's people, with power over all. Yet he presents no other tangible token of the great boon he calls salvation and blessedness than his preaching alone. Now, one may say: *"The word I hear, and Paul I see, a poor human being; but this salvation - grace, life and peace - I behold not. On the contrary, I daily see and experience sin, terror, adversity, suffering and death, until it seems as if in all humanity none are so utterly forsaken by God as the Christians, who hear this message."*

7. But this is precisely the precious doctrine to be learned if we are to be God's children and sensible of his kingdom within us, a doctrine beyond the knowledge and experience of the Jews with their Law and of the gentiles with their wisdom drawn from reason - this it is: our salvation stands in the word Paul here declares of Christ, a word which, in name and reality, is a word of salvation and peace; for salvation and peace are the blessings which it offers and imparts.

8. God has sent this word, Paul says. Its origin and conception is not with man. It is not the edict of the Roman emperor, nor the command of the high-priest at Jerusalem. It is the Word of the God of heaven. In it he speaks. He will have the message preached by poor human beings as a power unto happiness and salvation, both in name and reality. Such the Law never was. Paul says (Rom 1, 16): "I am not ashamed of the Gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." And God himself has bound up with it our salvation when he manifests himself in the voice heard from heaven at Jordan, saying of Christ, "This is my beloved Son" - who is to be heard.

9. God desires Christ's Word to be heard. Otherwise expressed, his command is: "Here ye have the Word of peace and salvation. Not elsewhere may you seek and find these blessings. Cling to this Word if you desire peace, happiness and salvation. Let befall what

may, crosses, afflictions, discord, death - whether you be beheaded, or fall victim to pest or stroke, or in whatever manner God may call you home - in it all, look only upon me, whose Word promises that you shall not die, what seems death being but a sweet sleep, aye, the entrance into life eternal. Christ says (Jn 8, 51): "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my Word, he shall never see death." Note, it is the keeping of the Word on which Christ lays stress. "Keeping" is holding fast to the promise, feeling and all senses to the contrary, doubting not the truth of the message heard. For he who promises is not man; it is the Lord of heaven and earth and all that in them is, who has to this moment controlled and preserved the same. One hundred years ago, what were you and I and all men now living but absolutely nothing? How and from what was creation effected when there was nothing to start with? *"He spake and it was done" - that was created which before had not existence - declares Psalm 33, 9, quoting from Genesis 1; "he commanded, and it stood fast."*

10. Being the Word of God, the Gospel is an entirely different thing from man's word, no matter though it be spoken by a mere man or even a donkey. Therefore, let there be, now or henceforth, discord, terror of sin; the menace of death and hell, of the grave and corruption: come upon you what may - only press to your heart this Word that Christ has sent you a message of salvation - of redemption, of triumph over all things; and that he commands you to believe it. Then you will perceive that he, as your God and Creator, will not deceive you. What are death, the devil and all creatures as a match for Christ?

11. The glory of Christ's message, then, here called by Paul *"the word of salvation,"* is much greater and higher than would have been the promise of all the kingdoms, all the riches and splendors of the world, yes, of both heaven and earth. For what could they benefit if one possessed not the Word of salvation and eternal life? With all these, when assailed by sins, or by the distress and danger of death, one must still say, "Away with all the blessings and joys of the world, so that I may hear and have altogether the message of salvation sent by Christ." You must hold fast to it and know that it alone gives eternal peace and joy; that it must receive your faith in spite of all apparent contradiction; that you must not be governed by your reason or your feelings, but must regard that as divine, unchangeable and eternal truth which God has spoken and commands to be proclaimed. Such is Paul's exhortation addressed primarily to the Jews to accept this message as sent by God and as being the bearer of wondrous blessings.

12. Next, he proceeds to remove their chief stumblingblock, the thing of greatest offense to them. He warns them against the course adopted by them of Jerusalem, who had the Word of salvation from Christ himself, who read it in the prophets every day, who should have had no trouble perceiving that the prophets testified to Christ and that there was complete harmony between their teaching and that of Christ and the apostles, yet would not understand. Because Christ came not in the manner they desired, they condemned the very One whom they read of in the Scriptures as appearing with this Word of salvation, the time of whose coming had been pointed out, leaving them to know it had long since arrived and they had no reason to wait for another. They understood not the Scriptures because their minds were completely hardened and dominated by the fixed idea that

Christ should reign as a temporal king. So thoroughly was the whole Jewish nation impressed with this belief that the very apostles had no other conception of Christ's kingdom, even after his resurrection. As John says (ch. 12, 16), they did not understand the Scriptures until Christ ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit came. So long as there hangs before one's eyes this curtain - the carnal fancy of a temporal kingdom for Christ, an earthly government for his Church - the Scriptures cannot be understood. As Paul says of the Jews (2 Cor 3, 14), the veil remaineth in the reading of the Scriptures. But this lack of understanding is inexcusable. That is gross and wilful blindness which will not receive the instruction and direction imparted by the apostles. The Jews continue to rave against the Gospel; they will hear nothing of the Christ, though even after crucifying him they receive the offer of repentance and remission of sins at the hands of the apostles.

13. That Paul should make bold to tell the most prominent men and rulers of the whole Jewish nation - the heads of God's people, pillars of the Church, as we would say that not only the common rabble, but likewise they themselves did not know and understand the Scriptures committed to them; aye, that, not content with such ignorance and error, they had themselves become the individuals of whom they read, the murderers and crucifiers of the Son of God, their Saviour - this was a matter of grave offense indeed! Offensive indeed was it to have this accusation brought against them, a people among whom God had ordained his worship, his temple and priesthood, and for whom he had instituted a peculiar government, giving the high-priest power to say, Do so or you will be put to death. Deut 17, 12. And of them were the glorious and great council of the seventy-two elders originally ordained through Moses (Ex 18, 25-26), the council called the Sanhedrin. They ruled the entire people and certainly knew right and wrong according to their law. Was there not reason here to tear Paul to pieces with red-hot pinchers as a seditious character, a public blasphemer, speaking not only against the Jewish government but against the honor of God himself; daring to accuse all the princes of the nation of being in error, of knowing nothing of the Scriptures, even of being murderers of the Son of God? The Pope and his crowd lack the credentials of such glory and endorsement by God. They have merely reared a system of self-devised doctrine and idolatry, which they still defend. Hence, whatever censure and condemnation we heap upon the Pope and his crowd is small in comparison to the thrust Paul dealt the Jewish leaders.

14. Note, Paul does not stand back for anything. He teaches men utterly to disregard the hue and cry of the offended Jews that they were the high-priests, teachers, rulers in a government ordained by God and commanding the obedience of the people; that teaching disobedience to them was equivalent to teaching disobedience to parents and to civil government, yes, to God himself - something in the nature of the case not to be tolerated. Yet Paul fearlessly does so teach, as an apostle of God and in fulfilment of God's command. How much more would Paul oppose our popish deceivers who, without the authority of God's Word, boast themselves heads of the Church and of the people of God, at the same time neither teaching nor understanding the Scriptures, but offering their own drivel as God's commands!

15. But what cause has Paul at heart that he dares so boldly condemn the judgment of these exalted officials? It is this, according to his own statement: There is One called Jesus Christ, of whom the prophets, in fact the entire Scriptures, speak. Him the Jews refuse to know. He is higher and greater than the high-priests and the rulers, greater than the temple or the whole city of Jerusalem. And the Jews know his coming means their passing, and their obedience to him as Lord and Supreme Ruler. Therefore, they are inexcusable in their rejection of Christ. Of no avail is their evasion, *"God has given us the dominion and the supreme power, and has commanded obedience to us in equal degree with obedience to parents."*

16. The fact that an individual is a lord or a prince, a father or a mother, a child or a subject, administers authority or obeys it, will not excuse him from being baptized and believing in Christ. For Christ is sole and supreme Lord over all kings, princes and governors. True, we should be obedient to parents and to civil authority, but not to the extent of disobeying the Lord, him who has created and subjected to himself emperors and magistrates equally with the lowliest of men. But the gentlemen and lords at Jerusalem, like those of our day, were unwilling to permit obedience to any but themselves. From such conditions arises the present dispute about ecclesiastical authority. To go counter to it in obeying God's command - this the ecclesiasts unjustly call disobedience and sedition. But such must be our course if we are to be loyal to our Lord and theirs, whom they deny.

17. In the matter of salvation, Caiaphas or Pope, Caesar or king, avails naught; none avails but Jesus Christ. *"Him,"* says Paul, *"the rulers of Jerusalem, the Holy City, have killed. Though ye were ordained by God and given authority, God no longer regards you, because ye reject Christ. Ye have become great blockheads, blind leaders, understanding not at all the Scriptures. Yet ye should and would teach others, just as Moses and the prophets have pointed to this Christ promised to you and to all the world for salvation and solace. Persisting in your blindness, ye have brought him to the cross, though finding in him no cause for condemnation. Surely, he did you no injury; he deprived you of naught, neither money, goods, honor nor power, but has brought you all good - even salvation - if ye will but receive him. But ye made yourselves the very ones who fulfilled the Scriptures ye daily read - those who put Christ to death and brought to pass the fact that he rose from the dead (though without thanks to you or to Satan) and became a Lord commanding the obedience of all creatures. *"We shall no longer regard what ye, or all the world, have to say of our preaching Christ; it is all the same to us whether you rage or smile. For we boast the Lord, the Son of God, made Lord over all the fathers through his resurrection. It is his will that we preach of him, and that all men believe. Since ye refuse him, your God-given privilege ceases, which, however, was granted only until the advent of the Messiah. We must withdraw from you, renouncing your authority and priesthood, and Jerusalem itself. We tell you plainly that we cannot and will not obey you in opposition to the will of the Lord."**

18. Mark you, in order to make the Jews Christians, Paul had to preach that Christ was already come; that he was no longer to be looked for. He was obliged to bring home to them what they had done to Christ, they the rulers and chief of those bearing the name of God's people and entrusted with the Law and the order of divine worship - he was forced to do so that they might perceive their sin and quit their boast of having the true Law and worship, having nothing whatever wherein to glory before God. For, though possessing the Law of Moses and having heard often enough the Word of God, they would not recognize and receive the Messiah sent by God in accordance with his promise, but condemned him and became his murderers. In view of this fact, what does their boast about being Abraham's children, God's people, possessors of the prophets, and the Law and the priesthood, amount to? These privileges only magnify their sins, only make their guilt the more grievous, before God. Not as blind, ignorant heathen, but as a people who have, and should know, the Word of God, they wilfully put to death God's Son. Thus we have the first part of Paul's sermon.

### **THE RESURRECTION AND FAITH.**

19. The second part deals with the resurrection of Christ and its power through faith. This is the goal Paul has in view when he tells them that they have slain the Christ, thus effecting their condemnation by God and forfeiting whatever glory they possessed as Jews, gaining shame and wrath before God in its stead. To be still delivered from such condemnation, and to obtain justification and salvation, as he expresses himself toward the end, it is necessary to hear and believe the word concerning the selfsame Christ. Moreover, inasmuch as they with their leaders have refused to receive and recognize this Messiah when he preached and wrought miracles in person; now, that he is invisible and absent in the body, they are called upon to receive him whom they themselves have crucified unto death, and to believe that he is risen from the dead as Lord over all, according to the testimony of the apostles. The dreams of the past they are now utterly to forsake, and their expectations of a Messiah still to come and elevate them with their Law and manner of worship to fame, riches and position, and to spread abroad their Moses and their priesthood in all the earth. They must now thank God for being placed on the same footing with the gentiles, in that they may come with them to the Word of salvation for the purpose of obtaining God's favor, remission of sins and life eternal.

### **OLD TESTAMENT TESTIMONY.**

20. Paul supports his discourse on the resurrection of Christ with many strong Scripture texts. There is no doubt that he dwelt on these at length and preached quite a sermon, which, however, has not been recorded here in full, but only in part. The apostle's purpose was to point us to the Old Testament Scriptures, that we might there make diligent study for ourselves of how forcibly the prophets have spoken concerning Christ, his works and his kingdom.

21. The first text Paul cites is from the Second Psalm, which treats throughout of the Messiah and his reign, as even the Jews at the time when wisdom still prevailed had to admit. Christ's own words are: "I will tell of the decree: Jehovah said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." Paul says he is here quoting from the First Psalm, though in all editions, old and new, this psalm comes second in order. But the apostle does not have reference to the technical arrangement of the psalms in a book, but to the order of his quotations. The thought is: "*First, I will prove it from the psalm,*" or, "*First, as written in the psalm.*" just as the preacher of today says, "I observe, first," or, "It is written, first, in the psalm," whether the psalm be the first, second, twentieth or thirtieth, he not having reference to the order of the psalm but to the order in which he cites it.

22. But how does Paul make this text prove the resurrection of Christ? It is truly a strong statement, and no doubt the apostle fully explained it, amplifying it beautifully and well. The psalm refers to that Messiah, or King, who shall reign in the Jewish nation, among the people; for the writer says plainly, "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion," or Jerusalem. The King, then, must be true man like other men. Indeed, the psalmist adds that the kings and rulers of earth shall rage and persecute him, which could not be unless he reigned upon earth.

23. But this verse also makes the King true God, for here God calls him his own Son, begotten of himself in his divine, eternal essence and majesty. He is, then, not an adopted Son, but the true Son of God by birth. Being man, however, just like others, he must, in accord with his human nature, die; indeed, he must suffer crucifixion and death at the hands of the lords of the world. But, again, if he be also the begotten Son of God and therefore true God, he cannot, even according to his human nature, remain in death; he must come forth from it, must triumph over it, becoming Lord of life and death forever. Here is an indivisible Being, at the same time a Son of the virgin of the house of David and of God. Such cannot remain in death. If he enter death, it must be to overcome and conquer it, yes, to slay it, to destroy it; and to bring to pass that in him as Lord shall reign naught but life, life for all who receive him. This subject is elsewhere more fully expounded.

24. But the succeeding text cited on the resurrection - from Isaiah 55, 3 - reads yet more strangely: "I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David," which in the Hebrew is: "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." The prophet has reference to the promise made to David in Second Samuel 7, concerning Christ. In the preceding verses of the chapter, Isaiah most tenderly entreats and invites the whole world to receive the promises of salvation, for thereby shall the poor, the wretched and the afflicted obtain the great treasures of joy and salvation. And immediately following the verse quoted, he speaks of the Messiah, the promised seed of David, as given to the Levites for a "witness" in other words, a preacher sent by God - and for "a leader and commander to the peoples." The thought is of a King and Ruler differing from Moses and his priests and exponents of the Law; a ruler differing from every other lord, ruler and king, from David and all worldly rulers whatever, subjecting everything to



himself. Not that this Leader should set up a new temporal government, or extend Jewish authority among the gentiles, but that both Jews and gentiles should receive him and believe in him, obtaining the fulfilment of that promise he here terms a covenant of the sure mercies of David. This covenant, God says, he enters into and keeps, a divine, sure covenant: through Christ shall be given whatever blessings God's mercy shall bestow, with remission or blotting out of sins, redemption from death and life eternal.

25. Now, if the Christ of this covenant is true man and, as the promise to David is, of David's flesh and blood; and if he is to bring eternal mercy, he must likewise be God, such gift being in the province and power of God alone. This being true, he cannot remain in death, although he may suffer death by reason of his human nature; he must of his own power rise from the dead. Only so can he raise others and give them everlasting life; only so can he truly be called eternal King of grace, righteousness and life, according to the sure promise of God.

26. Therefore, wherever the Scriptures speak of Christ's eternal kingdom, and of everlasting grace, they point out this article of the resurrection of Christ. No doubt, the apostle in explanation of the text from the Second Psalm quoted other Old Testament passages; for instance, Psalm 110, 1: "Jehovah saith unto my lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool"; also verse 4: "Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent: Thou art a priest for ever." In these passages God has promised to give us Christ, him who was to sit at his right hand - that is, have the omnipotent, divine power possible only to an eternal Lord and King - and at the same time to have his kingdom on earth, at Zion - or Jerusalem; and who was, moreover, to be a priest forever, being taken from among men and like unto them, even in his ability to die, yet at the same time continuing a priest forever, thereby forestalling the necessity of remaining in death and grave.

27. The third passage cited by Paul is taken from the Sixteenth Psalm, which is in reality one of the Messianic psalms. This is the psalm Peter in his first sermon on the day of Pentecost more fully explains, drawing from it the irresistible conclusion, so apparent in his own words, that Christ indeed has died; not, however, to become victim to decay in the tomb, but, proof against mortal destruction and hurt, to arise on the third day.

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