

An Easter Sermon of St. Paul.

Text: Acts 13:26-41

Suggested Hymns:
88, 95, 92, 97, 103

- 1) St. Paul Points To The Dark Background Of Sin
- 2) St. Paul Displays The Brilliant Light Which Comes To Us From The Resurrection Of Christ.
- 3) St. Paul Appeals To His Hearers Not To Receive This Glorious Grace Of God In Vain.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Acts 13:26-41, ²⁶ *“Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. ²⁷ “For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him. ²⁸ “And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. ²⁹ “Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb.*

³⁰ *“But God raised Him from the dead. ³¹ “He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. ³² “And we declare to you glad tidings -- that promise which was made to the fathers. ³³ “God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’ ³⁴ “And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: ‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’*

³⁵ *“Therefore He also says in another Psalm: ‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.’ ³⁶ “For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; ³⁷ “but He whom God raised up saw no corruption. ³⁸ “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; ³⁹ “and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.*

⁴⁰ *“Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: ⁴¹ “Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your*

days, A work which you will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you.” (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we are celebrating that glorious festival of the Church called Easter. All of us know why this festival is celebrated. Even little children can tell us that. It is to commemorate the triumphant resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

However, Jesus is not the first one whose body was raised from the dead. The first example of somebody raised from the dead was when Elijah raised from the dead the son of the widow in 1 Kings 17:17-23. The second example is in 2 Kings 4:18-37. This is when Elisha brought the son of the Shunammite woman back to life.¹ The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead was also therefore known to the children of God in the Old Testament.

The very fact that God gave eternal promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob proves conclusively that they were to live forever, since God is not a God of the dead, but of the living.

We read in Matthew 22:29-32, ²⁹ *Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. ³¹ “But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ³² ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”*

Moreover, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others of the Old Testament speak of the resurrection. We read in Isaiah 26:19, ¹⁹ *Your dead shall live; Together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; For your dew is like the dew of herbs, And the earth shall cast out the dead.*

And in Ezekiel 37:12, *‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And in Daniel 12:2, ² And many of those who sleep*

in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Job, when in utmost distress, confessed his firm faith in the resurrection of the dead, ²⁵ *For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth;* ²⁶ *And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God,* ²⁷ *Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!* ²

But although this doctrine was revealed to God's children of the Old Testament, the event which we are celebrating today, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, had not as yet occurred.

Today we enjoy a significant advantage over God's people of the Old Testament because we know of the actual resurrection of Jesus Christ who is going to raise us from the dead.

Therefore we have a special day set apart for the commemoration of this resurrection. The apostles were well aware of this advantage of the Christians of the New Testament and mentioned it in all their sermons and writings.

Above others St. Paul proclaimed it in joyous and victorious tones. Many Easter sermons have been preached on the 15th chapter of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. But our text for today also contains such An Easter Sermon of St. Paul. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. St. Paul Points To The Dark Background Of Sin.

St. Paul begins the Easter sermon contained in our text, in which he proclaims salvation, with a sad word, because he first shows us man's sinfulness and utter depravity. He tells us, *those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, ... did not know Him.* They knew that *"No man ever spoke like this Man!"*³ They knew that no one else had ever healed the sick, given sight to the blind, and raised the dead. They knew much about Jesus. They even had spies following His steps. The trouble was that they did not want to know Jesus for what He was. They refused to accept His testimony of Himself. They even tried to stone Him when He gave them an unequivocal answer as to His origin and person.

Jesus blamed them for not knowing Him when He said in Matthew 23:37, ³⁷ *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who*

are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"

They would not even have needed Christ's testimony to recognise Him as the promised Messiah. St. Paul says in our text that they knew not ***even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath***. Many prophecies were read in the synagogues, and thus the characteristics of this Messiah should have been familiar to every Jew.

For example Deuteronomy 18:15, ¹⁵ ***The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.*** And Malachi 3:1, ¹ ***"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts.*** ⁴

But they wanted a different Messiah. They did not know the prophets because they had formed their own ideas as to what the Messiah should be and thus rejected the Messiah as He was, and as the prophets had portrayed Him.

The very people therefore who should have recognised this Son of David as the Messiah, ***"did not know Him,"*** — they rejected Him. Thus, verse 27c, ***have fulfilled [the prophecies] in condemning Him*** is the saddest of all words in human history. They fulfilled the very prophecies, which had been written about Jesus, the Messiah. For example, Isaiah 53:2-3, ² ***For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.*** ³ ***He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.***

And Zechariah 12:10, ¹⁰ ***And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced.*** ⁵ Yes, They put Him to death

This is indeed a stern reproof and condemnation of the blindness and depravity of the Jews, and we may well be grieved at this example of man's sinful heart. But how do matters stand with us? The Lenten season lies behind

us. Have you shown that you know Jesus, that you know the voices of the prophets, that you know the meaning of Lent and of Christ's crucifixion? Were you faithful to your Saviour during the season just passed?

Did you learn to say with all the fervour of your heart, *Ah, my sin caused all the woe That Thou, Lord, hast suffered?*⁶ If not, then this word of God is fulfilling itself in you as surely as in the Jews in Isaiah 29:13, *these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me.* Then, too, another word will fulfil itself in you, Matthew 7:21, ²¹ *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.* You are still in a class with the Jews, who, though they “knew” Him, yet knew Him not. This reproof applies to you as an impenitent sinner.

The picture which St. Paul paints here of the hearts of the people who put Jesus to death, is a picture of your heart and mine, as it is by nature. This, then, calls us all to repentance, since all of us were guilty of Christ's death, *He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.*⁷ Yes, thank God, for the truly repentant, St. Paul has that glorious message which must fill us with true Easter joy.

2. St. Paul Displays The Brilliant Light Which Comes To Us From The Resurrection Of Christ.

What is that glad word of assurance which St. Paul proclaims to us? Our text says, ³⁰ *“But God raised Him from the dead.* This Jesus, despised, rejected, and crucified as a criminal, God raised from the dead. He was actually dead. There is no doubt about it. His side was pierced. Friends buried Him, and they certainly would not have buried Him alive. Friends prepared to embalm Him. His enemies took every precaution to keep Him in the grave.

But the Father raised Jesus from this death. Thus He showed His approval of all that His beloved Son had done and definitely aligned Himself with His work. By raising Jesus, He guaranteed every word that Jesus had spoken to be true. Jesus is the Son of God. We read in Romans 1:4, ⁴ *and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.* We can rely on His Word to the uttermost.

But lest there remain even a shadow of doubt in the minds of any one St. Paul points his hearers to the prophets to show that in Christ also the Old Testament was literally fulfilled.

Our text says ³² ***“And we declare to you glad tidings -- that promise which was made to the fathers. ”*** ³³ ***“God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’ ”*** ³⁴ ***“And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: ‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’ ”***

³⁵ ***“Therefore He also says in another Psalm: ‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.’ ”*** ³⁶ ***“For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; ”*** ³⁷ ***“but He whom God raised up saw no corruption. ”***

Verse 33 is found in Psa. 2:7. If Jesus is the Son of God, then He is true God and could not remain in death. The second prophecy to which St. Paul refers, v. 34, is a quotation from Isa. 55:3. Here God promises His people to make an everlasting covenant with them by giving them the sure mercies, or blessings, of David. The blessings and promises which God had given to David could be realised only in the triumph, the resurrection, of God’s Holy One. The final passage, v. 35, is quoted from Psa. 16:10.

St. Paul declares that this could not refer to David since he died and saw corruption, that therefore it is a prophecy of the true Messiah and finds fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth. For this reason St. Paul says, ³² ***“And we declare to you glad tidings -- that promise which was made to the fathers. ”*** This is glad news because it means that the last vestige of doubt must disappear that Jesus is the Messiah.

And if there is a doubting Thomas who says: *“This is all very true, but did any one see Jesus alive.”* For such a person St. Paul has the words of eye-witnesses. ³¹ ***“He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people.”*** ⁸ Here is the glad news of Christ’s resurrection from the lips of people who actually saw Him, spoke to Him, and touched Him.

It is glad news that God raised Jesus from the dead. It is glad news that in Jesus the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah are fulfilled. It is glad news that reliable eye-witnesses testify that Jesus rose and is living. The meaning of all this is summed up in the supremely joyful words, ⁸ ***“Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins.***

Christ’s glorious resurrection spells pardon, justification, and forgiveness of sins for all people.⁹ You are ***“justified from all things.”*** Our text says, ***“and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.*** We read in Romans 8:33-34, ³³ ***Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.*** ³⁴ ***Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.*** Your pardon is complete. Rejoice in this wonderful Gospel.

But who has this forgiveness? The answer is, ***“everyone who believes.*** We read in John 3:16, ¹⁶ ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*** How simple the way of salvation is! How glorious the Easter-message, which points us to a living Christ, upon whom we can stake our hope of salvation, saying: He has done all for me; there is my ransom.

3. St. Paul Appeals To His Hearers Not To Receive This Glorious Grace Of God In Vain.

Just because salvation is so simple, the apostle must add a word of warning. It is a common saying, *What we work for we appreciate; what is given to us freely we often despise.* How serious the heathen take their religion because they are told that they must save themselves! On the other hand, how great the temptation to become indifferent towards that blessed Gospel of our risen Saviour because it offers us full and free salvation without money and without price!

Against this St. Paul warns ⁴⁰ ***“Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you:”*** ⁴¹ ***“Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you.”***

He is telling us, I have brought you all these proofs showing that Jesus of Nazareth is risen from the dead and is the true Messiah and therefore your Saviour, in whom you have full pardon for your sins. There is nothing you need do but trust in Him, and your salvation is assured.

Now beware lest you despise this Word of Salvation; otherwise the word of the prophet Habakkuk 1:5, will be fulfilled also in you. There God prophesied that He would use the Chaldeans as a scourge to punish the iniquities of the people. This punishment from God would be so horrible that the people of Habakkuk's time would be loath to believe the prophecies which spoke of it in detail.

Just so, St. Paul indicates to his hearers a dreadful punishment which would come upon them if they rejected this risen Saviour, such a punishment as they would consider unbelievable. Of this punishment Jesus has spoken of in Luke 19:42-44, and Matt. 24:21. This prediction was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. That punishment of the Jews, however, is but one instance of God's wrath upon the rejecter of His Christ.

Is not the same thing happening to the world today? The miracle of Christ's resurrection is rejected by many people, and the unbelief of many modern ministers on this Easter Sunday is hidden behind fine music and meaningless words. Certainly, then, St. Paul's word of warning is timely for our day and age.

Rejoice, therefore, that despite your sinfulness, the word of this salvation has been sent to you. Rejoice and thank God that in this Word He shows us so clearly that Jesus of Nazareth is the true Messiah. Rejoice and be glad that this Jesus lives, who says in John 14:19, ¹⁹ *"A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also."*¹⁰

Rejoice that you can say, trusting implicitly in the risen Saviour, whom Paul preached, ⁵⁵ *"O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"* ⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.* ⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* ⁵⁸ *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*¹¹

Yes, thanks be to God, who in the living Christ gives us the victory over all the enemies of our soul, and who thus makes it possible for us to live a happy and joyful life here on earth, and fearlessly to face the dark vale of death; for in the risen Christ we can already see the dawning of our own resurrection. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ See also 2 Kings 13:20-21

² Job 19:25-27

³ John 7:46

⁴ See also Genesis 49:10

⁵ See also Daniel 9:26, Zechariah 11:12

⁶ Hymn 59 v 3

⁷ Isaiah 53:5

⁸ See also Matt. 28:16; Acts 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:5-7

⁹ Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:17, 20

¹⁰ See also John 11:25-26

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 15:55-58