

If I asked one of you to stand up right now and share a message of encouragement, how many of you would know what you'd say immediately? How many of you would suddenly become very interested in the floor, the walls, or your phone just so I wouldn't ask you? That might be because you don't want to stand in front of a large group and talk, it also might be because you don't figure to have anything to say.

The custom was for visiting teachers to be asked to speak during synagogue worship in the early first century. Paul was passing through a town called Pisidian Antioch. He was a teacher. He also was doing what he normally did when he came to a town during his mission work. He'd go to the synagogue and wait to be asked to speak. Paul knew exactly what he wanted to share. He didn't hesitate. In the first lesson we get to hear a segment of what he shared that day. It's a small part of a bigger sermon that Paul proclaimed.

We're in what is basically the second part of Paul's three part sermon. In the first part Paul reviewed some early history of the Israelite people, God's people. He looked back to Egypt, the forty years in the desert wandering, and David. From there he jumped over a lengthy amount of history and stated his main point. From David **"God brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised."** In the third part Paul declared clearly that **"through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you."** The message of salvation was for the Israelites. Jesus had been sent for them. But Paul also threw open wide this message of salvation and showed it was for Gentiles as well. God welcomed non-Jews just as much as Jews.

Every Sabbath day at the synagogue among Jews, like on our Sunday, a section from the Law of Moses and a section of the prophets were read. This was God's Word being read to the people. A couple of decades back during the time of Jesus in Jerusalem, the Jews of that time were hearing that same Law of Moses and words of the prophets. Each week they would listen to the repeated promises God made to them about a Messiah. They were waiting for this Messiah. They were primed for this Messiah to come. Yet when the Messiah came they didn't recognize him. **"The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath."** They were ignorant and failed to see God's promises coming true. God's promises were coming true through them. Because they failed to understand they ignorantly fulfilled both the message of salvation and the words of the prophets.

Ignorant people often think they're getting a free pass. Somehow because they claim they didn't know or they weren't aware they can't be held responsible. Could we try that with the police or with the boss? "You meant 8:00 was the start time of the work day, not 8:24?" What if we tried it with a teacher? "I didn't realize that was the homework due today. I wish I'd known you were expecting us to bring in our permission slips signed today." We've tried these excuses before. We've claimed ignorance, but we fooled no one. Ignorance isn't good. When that ignorance is about God it can be deadly. "God says what about hatred and lust? I can't even look at a person not my spouse with improper thoughts. What about the person who has really been mean to me, if I hate them I'm definitely a sinner?" Even when we're doing something right or something we consider right, even outwardly looking good things, if they're misguided we sin. The worst truth is that even in our best moments our sinful nature means we're sinful.

Recount what Jesus did while he was on earth, in Jerusalem, especially during his final hours. These misguided and ignorant Jews who saw Jesus as a threat went searching for charges against him. They struggled to find some because when they examined Jesus' life they found it surprisingly clear of wrong doing. In fact they found no sin. **"Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed."** Jesus stood falsely accused of crimes he never committed. The punishment was execution. Jesus was taken to the cross, a tree of wood on which he was crucified. He hung there, died, and was laid in a tomb. Everything was happening as the words of the prophets predicted. Jesus was letting the ignorant actions of the Jewish rulers, Pilate, and the soldiers become part of the actions that saved the world.

Jesus allowed it all to happen to him. For good reason too. He stood before Pilate, declared guilty for our sins though he had none so that you might be declared not guilty. He hung from the cross suffering the worst pain and death as God dying for the sins of the world so that you would be free of sinful ignorance. Buried in a tomb his body was confined to fulfill all predictions about this Messiah so that your sins would be confined there too. Paul asks his audience to relive those days. You remember it as well. Call to mind what Jesus did. It isn't just facts. It's good news. Jesus' taking guilt, dying on the cross, and burial are good news which save you.

Paul shows what people did to Jesus. But Jesus would not have endured any of it without his willingness to participate and let them. And no matter what those people did who crucified Jesus that doesn't leave us free of guilt. Our sins put Jesus on that cross too. Our sins made it necessary for the author of life, the Good Shepherd of the sheep, to come to this world and free us from our sins. The people crucified Christ, took him off the tree of the cross, and buried him. Our sins too were there, causing this to happen, fulfilling the promises.

God raised Christ Jesus from the dead. It's just that simple. But it says so much. This isn't the only time Paul talked resurrection. It isn't the only time Jesus' followers talked of his resurrection. The testimony regarding Jesus and what he did and accomplished necessarily included the resurrection. It was central to Paul's message of encouragement. People put Jesus to death. God raised him back to life.

The Jewish leaders thought their Jesus problem was over. **“But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.”** By resurrection God’s Son received the stamp of approval for his work from God. There’s good news for all in that, there’s good news for you in that. Even while the world might stomp all over God’s promises as if they haven’t happened, everything promised to be done for human beings was completed in Jesus. Every single one of your sins was left behind in Jesus’ empty tomb because your sins were paid for and gone. Your substitute came taking God’s wrath to himself and removing fear you might have of God as judge. Jesus satisfied that wrath by living and dying. In the resurrection God showed his love for you and showed Jesus is your Savior, your Redeemer, your Shepherd King.

Think what this good news means? **“What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus.”** Not only from the dead, but raising Jesus up to be the Savior. We aren’t ignorant. God promised and God delivered. You’re saved, your sins are forgiven, and you have life because Jesus is Christ. Cling to his promises because God kept them all. God did what he promised he would do. Paul quoted Psalm 2, **“You are my Son; today I have become your Father.”** That Old Testament promise points ahead to Christ. It tells the promises of God who always planned on showing his grace and sending his Son. Then one day when all was right God brought Jesus forward to set him up as your Shepherd. He had him do everything necessary to save you. He did it, and you’re saved.

You live in the truth of that salvation. The Word of God and the sacraments are your proof and constant encouragement. When life gets you down you read the Word to be strengthened. Christ shines through into your life. When feeling the brunt of sins you come to the Lord’s Supper to receive Christ’s forgiveness for you in a personal way. By faith in Christ brought about by the good news you are sure God’s promises are for you. You have forgiveness. You have life with God because Jesus has been raised from the dead.

I won’t call anyone forward to say anything this morning. But don’t think you wouldn’t have something to say. You could do exactly what Paul did for a word of encouragement. You could tell what people did to Jesus. Review his life, his perfect life. Talk about his death, his suffering, the payment for sins. And you could tell what God did. Proclaim the resurrection that has so taken over your heart in faith that this resurrection isn’t just something that happened to Jesus, it is something that will happen to you. You can speak that way, with that confidence, with that hope. You have words of encouragement too regarding Jesus the Good Shepherd and Savior.