

But God Raised Him from the Dead

2 Samuel 7, Acts 13:29–33

In recent weeks we have been considering the apostle Paul's sermon delivered at the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. It is an example and paradigm of his preaching in Asia Minor, part of modern-day Turkey. Here is the kernel of Paul's message in a hitherto-unreached part of the world. In recent weeks we have considered what it means to be a man or woman after God's own heart, like David, whom God raised up. We looked at the life and ministry of Christ's forerunner John the baptist, who became a martyr at the hands of wicked king Herod. And we considered the biblical principle "great privilege, great responsibility" as we looked at the Jews and God-fearers who made up Paul's audience, men and women to whom God's salvation had been sent, but through spiritual blindness they did not know him, or understand the voices of the Prophets which were read every Sabbath. And so the Jews condemned the Lord of glory and cried out to Pilate, "Let him be crucified." Jesus was taken down from the tree—the cruel cross, an instrument of torture—and laid in a tomb for three days and three nights.

Our text this morning begins with the words taken as the title of today's sermon: "But God raised him from the dead." Here is Christ's glorious resurrection—a theme familiar to every Christian. There could be no more more dramatic and life-changing words than these—"But God raised him from the dead." These words call to mind another dramatic "but" in Ephesians 2, verse 4. Paul had been speaking of the spiritual death that is a part of the human condition. He says, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ." In that text, as the great preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones explained it, man is spiritually dead, utterly without hope, on his way to everlasting perdition, but now he is made alive together with Christ. What made the difference? *God!* Is this your story too? You were spiritually dead—on your way to hell—but God intervened and made you alive together with Christ. You did not deserve it. You did not even think to ask for it. It was all by grace. You were heading one direction, but God intervened and turned your life around. You were on your way to hell, but God turned you around, and put you on the way to heaven. What made the difference? *God!* God made you alive when you were spiritually dead. You had no hope, humanly speaking. You had no ability to save yourself. But God intervened. "But God!" God made all the difference.

So it is in our text this morning. The body of Jesus lies in a tomb. He had been crucified on a cruel Roman cross. Huge metal spikes had been driven through his hands and feet. The Roman soldiers were experts at crucifying hapless criminals. They did it often. As Aaron has pointed out in adult Sunday school, the Romans crucified a lot of people deemed to have committed capital crimes. Crucifixions were usually carried out along well-traveled roads. The crosses holding up the bodies of the condemned were put up in public spaces for all the world to see. They were intended to be an example to a people ruled by their foreign overlords. They were designed to keep the populace in fear: *obey or else!* Jesus was put to death in a public space—crucified between two thieves. As one of them observed, the two of them deserved to die, but Jesus had done nothing wrong. He had not been pronounced guilty of any crime. Pilate himself had distinctly said, “I find no fault in this man.” Yet the crowds wanted blood. They were crying out for his crucifixion. We cannot expect that our fellow-citizens will save us. Are our would-be rulers calling for universal vaccination? Are not voices in the government and media whipping up frenzy with the constant cry, “a pandemic of the unvaccinated”? Are there not opinion leaders calling for taking away privileges from those that refuse the jab—don’t let them travel, don’t let them get on airplanes, don’t let them go to college, don’t let them go to concerts, theaters, don’t let them go to public events, don’t let them even go into a grocery store to buy food. Is not food essential to life? Is not denying people access to food a calling for their death? Is human society to be divided from henceforth into two classes—those who have the right to live and those who must die? Is not forcibly penetrating a human body with a needle and injecting a foreign substance an act of violence against a human person? Is it not a violation of bodily integrity? Does not a person have a God-given right to be lord over his own body? To make medical decisions for himself? To decide for himself if and when he should get a vaccine? To decide, yes, my health is such that I need this vaccine, or to decide, no, my health is such that I do *not* need a vaccine (or in my judgment I believe that a vaccine would be harmful to me)?

But we cannot expect that our fellow-citizens will save us from bloodthirsty mobs. Just as the crowds were crying out for Jesus’ crucifixion at the hands of the Romans—crowds that earlier that same week had been crying, “Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest”—so our fellow-citizens today that in recent years have been polite and considerate, patiently waiting behind us as we stand in line at the post office, waiting to buy stamps; stopping their cars for us as we walk across an intersection; allowing us, if we have only an item or two, to get ahead of another shopper with his full shopping cart—these heretofore friendly crowds could suddenly turn against us and demand our death. Truly, as the Bible says, vain is the help of man.

Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. The almighty God alone is our shield and defender. Apart from our covenant God we have no hope, humanly speaking. The crowds that within a week's time turned against God's Messiah could just as well turn against us. Christian, don't put your hope in man but put your hope in God.

So it was *man* that put the Lord of glory to death. The Roman governor Pilate had said to the crowd gathered before him, calling for Jesus' blood, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!" Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let Him be crucified!" Pilate pressed them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!" When Pilate saw that he could not prevail, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." All the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children." As we saw last week, though they found no cause for death in him, they demanded of Pilate that he should be put to death. The sovereign Lord of all was put to death, his body was taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb. The body of Jesus lay in a tomb in the side of a hill cut out of solid rock. There he lay, lifeless, for three days and three nights. There his body would have lain from that time forward over the centuries, as the bodies of Adam, Abraham, David, Isaiah, Daniel, Malachi, as well as Pharaoh, Goliath, Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, the Roman Caesars, Napoleon, Hitler—as the bodies of us all, without a Savior. "But God raised *him*—Christ—from the dead."

"But God!"

Think of that! In the case of Christ, God raised him from the dead! Utterly amazing! Out of all the millions and billions of fallen sons and daughters of Adam who have died and returned to dust over the centuries, only one—Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah of Israel—has been raised to life, never to die again. "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward, they that are Christ's at his coming." Christian, the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, which held the lifeless body of the Lord of glory for three days and three nights, is empty. Jesus is alive. Christian, your Lord and Savior is alive! We do not worship a dead man's memory; we worship a living Savior. As the angels said to the women on that first day of the week so long ago, "He is not here, but is risen!" The tomb that held the body of our Lord is empty. God raised him from the dead, never to die again. He rose from the grave. He ever liveth to make intercession for us. Christian, your Savior is now in heaven bodily, sitting at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for you.

Your Savior is praying for you even now. He that keepeth Israel will never slumber or sleep. He is praying for you now when you are in trouble. He is praying for you when you are discouraged. He is praying for you when you don't know which way to turn. He is praying for you whether you are awake or asleep. He will be praying for you at the hour of your death. When you are weak and helpless, as the life is draining out of your body, he will be there, on the throne, interceding for you. Your mighty Savior will look out for you. It will not matter if you are well-known or unknown, it will not matter if the world thinks you are really somebody or if you are a nobody, it will not matter whether you experience the adulation of the crowds or the derision. It will not matter whether you are well-liked or hated. If you belong to Christ, your Savior watches over you. He has defeated death. Death could not hold him in its grip. "He arose a victor from the dark domain, and he lives forever with his saints to reign. He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!"

Here is the man who could say, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

Here is the man who could say to the Father, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled."

Here is the man who is "able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

Amen! Hallelujah!

Consider with me four observations concerning our text today—four points made by the apostle Paul as he spoke to the Jews and God-fearers in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia.

1. A divine miracle

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was plainly a miracle. There is no other way to describe it. Here was a human body, fully human, the seed of the woman, a man who inherited his human nature from his mother Mary. Here was a man like no other, "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary" (Apostles' Creed), "who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man" (Nicene Creed). Here was the God-man—fully God, yet fully man, the Lord of glory now in human flesh. He came to this earth to save his people from their sins. There was no other way to save them than to take upon him our humanity. The Lord of glory was made man. He had human blood in his veins. He had a heart pumping in his chest.

He, the darling of heaven, undertook for us the mission of coming to a sin-cursed earth to die for the sins of his people. "The wages of sin is death." Christ

died for our sins according to the Scriptures. He was buried. But on the third day he rose from the dead according to the Scriptures.

During his earthly ministry Christ had raised people from the dead. He interrupted a funeral to give the son of the widow of Nain back to his mother. The body of the young man was being carried out to burial. He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. He was her only means of support. But the Lord had compassion on her. He said to her, “Do not weep.” Then he touched the open coffin and spoke to the corpse. He said, “Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.” And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. Imagine the shock that ran through the crowd. They had assembled to assist a widow grieving over the death of her only son. The last thing they expected was to see the dead sit up and begin to talk. What did he say? The scriptures are silent.

A week ago I talked with an OPC minister who had been gravely ill with Covid. He was hospitalized and near death. He told me that he had died, and God had brought him back. Only God knows, but this man of God is convinced that God brought him back from death. He is still on oxygen. He is training himself to go up and down stairs again. He is not giving up. He is convinced God still has a job for him to do. But this man who lay in the hospital helpless, being cared for by doctors and nurses—a man who could not speak but was having oxygen pumped into his lungs—this man now speaks, and his speech is the praises of God “who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.”

Then there was the man Lazarus of Bethany, who died and was buried, whose body lay in a tomb four days. Jesus walked many miles from the other side of the Jordan, climbing up, up and up, up the steep road on the way up to Jerusalem. Bethany was a village on the southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives, about two miles east of Jerusalem, on the road to Jericho, down along the Jordan River. You know the story. When Jesus got to Bethany, many Jews had gathered to comfort the two sisters who were bereft of their brother. Jesus spoke to one of them, Martha, and said, “Your brother shall rise again.” Then Mary came out. She said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus got to the tomb, he commanded, “Take away the stone.” The crowd was shocked. Open up a grave—no way! But Jesus spoke the words, “Lazarus, come forth!” and the dead came forth, still bound hand and foot with grave clothes.

The son of the widow at Nain and the man Lazarus were raised by the life-giving word of Jesus. These men were brought back to life but later died again, probably of old age, and their bodies lie, even now, in their graves awaiting the final day. But Jesus is different. He rose from the dead, never to die again, and because he lives, we, too, shall live also. Hallelujah! Never before nor since in the

history of the human race has there been a miracle like this. When God raised his Son Jesus from the dead it was a divine miracle. Secondly,

2. Good news

It was good news. Notice the words in our text, “We declare to you glad tidings.” The word in the original is εὐαγγελίζω, I announce to you the good news. This word is composed of two roots, one meaning *good* or *beautiful*, and the other meaning *I announce*. In our Bibles it is rightly translated “We declare to you glad tidings.” Can there be any gladder tidings than this? We, sons and daughters of Adam, were dead in trespasses and sins, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But the God of heaven took notice of our fallen condition and sent his Son, the Messiah, to deliver us, his people. As a matter of fact, the God of heaven took notice of our fallen condition way back in eternity past, before he created man, before Adam ate of the forbidden fruit and brought death and destruction upon the human race. God sent his Son, the perfect Savior. Born of the virgin Mary, he lived and died, the just for the unjust. Was it not fitting that Paul and Barnabas, visiting the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, should say, “We declare to you glad tidings”? The death and resurrection of Jesus are the gladdest tidings that could ever be shared. We, fallen sons and daughters of Adam, dead in trespasses and sins, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in this world, are saved by Christ. Saved to the uttermost. Nothing else is needed. We are saved by grace, through faith, for good works. That is the gospel, the good news—news that should be shared. There can be no better news. Third,

3. Fulfilled prophecy

Paul goes on to say, “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.’” Here Paul cites Psalm 2, the second Psalm. This is the Psalm where “the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.’” The kings and rulers of the earth reject the rule of Christ. They want to rule themselves. They resent the rule of Christ. They want to claim unlimited power for themselves. But here, in our text today, Paul asserts that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of Psalm 2. “God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus.” Here Paul uses a different word for “raised” than he used in verse 30. It is a synonym. Is he speaking now of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, or is it another raising, something more general, as in “the Lord raised up judges,” “the Lord raised up a deliverer,” “the Lord raised up prophets,” “the Lord raised up his Son Jesus, and sent him to bless you”? Is Paul speaking now of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, or is it another raising: God raised up Jesus to be Israel’s Messiah? The

commentators are divided. Paul appeals to Psalm 2, “You are My Son, today I have begotten You,” which seems to speak of God’s raising up a Messiah to Israel, Israel’s king—a declaration of his divine kingship. In any case, Jesus was raised in both senses: God raised him up as Israel’s Messiah, when the Jews were languishing under Roman rule, and God raised him up from the dead, bringing his body forth from the tomb.

In our Old Testament text God speaks to David, king of Israel. He tells him, “When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son” (2 Sam. 7:12–14). The coming Messiah was to be God’s Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords before whom every knee should bow. The resurrection of Christ from the dead was proof that he was indeed “the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made,”¹ Israel’s rightful King, now risen from the dead, ascended up to heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father. The resurrection of Christ is fulfilled prophecy: “God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus.” Lastly, consider

4. Historical proof

The way we prove something in philosophy is through logic. The way we prove something in science or medicine is through experimentation and testing. The way we prove something in a court of law is through witnesses and cross-examination. The way we prove something in history is by examining the witnesses: are they reliable, are they telling the truth, do they have something to gain from what they are asserting?

Here, then, is the resurrection of Christ. It is clearly a miracle. None of us personally saw the Savior rise from the dead. It is certainly not an everyday occurrence.

We can believe in the law of gravity. We can believe that an item dropped will fall to the floor. It happened yesterday. It happens today. It will happen every day of our lives. On the other hand, millions of people have died. People have been dying ever since Cain murdered his brother Abel. It is appointed unto men once to die. Every one of us has an appointment with death. For my friend Mick, the OPC minister who almost died with Covid, it hasn’t happened yet. For you and me it hasn’t happened yet. But it will happen. Nature itself teaches us that. So what do we do with the resurrection of Jesus after he had lain in the tomb three days and three nights? Did it happen? Scripture says it did. Paul asserts in our text that “God

¹ Nicene Creed

raised him from the dead.” Can we have confidence that it occurred? Notice that Paul appeals to witnesses—eyewitnesses who could verify and attest that they personally saw the risen Christ.

Fifty-two years ago on July 20, 1969, the Apollo 11 spacecraft landed on the moon. Commander Neil Armstrong became the first human ever to step onto the lunar surface, followed shortly thereafter by lunar module pilot Buzz Aldrin. The world watched the event on TV. I, too, watched it on a 25" TV in an auditorium at Schroon Lake, New York, along with hundreds of young people. I remember the event well. The image of Buzz Aldrin standing on the lunar surface, Neil Armstrong and Planet Earth reflected on his visor, is forever etched in my mind. Yet there are people who are convinced the lunar landing never really happened!

There will always be doubters, but the way that historical events are proven is by witnesses. Are they eyewitnesses? Are they competent? Do their statements agree? Did they collude? Did they have something to gain by making their claim? Scholars, whether Christian or non-Christian, agree that the resurrection of Christ is the most attested event in the ancient world. Paul speaks of this in his sermon when he says that Christ “was seen for many days by those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his *witnesses* to the people.”

Yes, dear one, Christ the Savior has come. He lived, he taught, he was regarded by friend and foe to be a great teacher. Never man spoke like this man. He went to the cross and died, not for sins which he had committed but for the sins of his people. He was buried in a tomb. But the third day he rose again for our justification. All who put their trust in him are saved eternally. This is the gospel.

Here, then, is the resurrection of Christ, a divine miracle, good news—the best news ever—fulfilled prophecy, and its historical proof. Look to Christ. Look to him alone for salvation. He will never let you down. He will save you. Amen.