

The Salvation of the Gentiles, Part 4

Scripture: Acts 10:36-43

Code: 1737

1973

As you are well aware, this Easter season commemorates the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ...The resurrection is the greatest event in history. It is not just the greatest event in history to Christians. It is the greatest event in history period. It's only that some people haven't recognized it as such. The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ came into the world to die. He Himself said, "For the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many." He came to die. He also came to live again. In John chapter 2 verses 19 and following, He said to the leaders of Israel in the temple, He said, "Destroy this temple. In three days, I'll raise it again." At the home of Mary and Martha, He said, "I am the resurrection and the life." On another occasion, He said, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

Jesus Christ came to die for sin, for our sin, and he came to rise again for our life; and for the Christian, Easter is no different than any other day. It's just a calendar contact to refresh our minds of that which is our very life. The world talks about Easter at Easter. The Christian talks about Easter all the days of his life...for the life we live isn't even ours. It's Christ resurrected living in us. Easter is not a historical event to me. It's a way of life. For some of you, this is resurrection Sunday on your calendar. For most of you, it's just another resurrection day in your life.

What makes the difference? Why is Easter to some people a calendar event and to other people a way of living? The difference is that some people have personalized the resurrection. Some people know about it. Some people live it, and, really, it all boils down to whether or not you have appropriated the death and resurrection of Christ for your very own. In fact, for those of us who know about Easter, and we know what it really means, and for those of us for whom every day is resurrection day, the world's commercial Easter is almost offensive. It's almost like a kind of a crass, a pathetic intrusion into the reality of resurrection life. It's sort of the world jumping on the bandwagon when they really don't even know what it's all about; and I say this very honestly, if Easter is something to you once a year, then it is nothing to you; and you're coming to celebrate Easter is like taking a corpse to a party...because you don't know what we're celebrating.

But I have good news for you. I have been sent by God today. You know, there was a man who came from God, and his name was John...and I have been sent from God to give you the best news you've ever heard, and the news is this: because He lives, you can live; and you don't need to go through

Easter like a corpse at a party about life. You can live, and Easter can be a way of life for you as it is for me and for most of us who are gathered today in this place; and so I come with great joy, and I'm thrilled to make this announcement; and I'm not even gonna make it in my own words. I wanna preach you a sermon that is gonna be one of the best sermons you ever heard in your life, because it isn't mine. I'm gonna take it right from Peter, and it isn't Peter's. He got it from God.

Turn to Acts 10 in your Bibles. For some of you, Easter isn't really what it's meant to be, but it can be. You can know the resurrection in your experience every day. You can know what it is to really live, to be alive to God; but in order to be alive to God, you must hear the message. We come to Acts chapter 10, we've been studying the Book of Acts; and in the wisdom of the Spirit of God, He preserved and guarded our study so that when we landed on this particular resurrection day, we would be talking about the resurrection; but that's not unusual for God to set the timing for our messages. He did the same thing last year when we were studying the Gospel of John. Came to Easter Sunday and landed on the resurrection, too. And so the Spirit of God has a very special message for us today, and it's the message that Peter gave in the house of a man named Cornelius, to him and to his household. Lemme give you a little background. The Book of Acts, one of the most important books in the New Testament, is the only historical book in the New Testament in the purest sense of the word. It records for us the growth of the church from its birth to its first early years. Jesus Christ has already died in the chronology of the New Testament, been buried, risen again, ascended to Heaven. Having ascended to Heaven, He sent His Spirit back to form His church and to live in His church and to dwell in His church.

This happened in the 2nd chapter of Acts. The Spirit of God came. The church was born; and then from Acts 2 through 10 where we come today, the church has been growing. People have been coming to Christ. People have been coming alive with resurrection life. First of all in Jerusalem, there was a tremendous moving of the Spirit of God, and people were saved, and they acknowledged Christ, and they came alive; and then they reached outside Jerusalem; and Jews who were living in Greek-speaking countries, who had come to Jerusalem for feasts and certain...certain such important things, they were entered into the church by faith in Christ. Then the church reached out to half-breed Samaritans, half Jew, half Gentile. They heard the Gospel. They believed. They were placed by the Spirit of God into the church; and, as we come to the 10th chapter of Acts, the last great extension of the church takes place. It has reached Jerusalem's Jews, the Hellenist Jews, the Samaritans, and the last step is the uttermost part of the earth. It is to reach the Gentiles; and in the 10th chapter of Acts we find the salvation of the first group of Gentiles.

So the church began and founded by our Lord when He sent His Holy Spirit has exploded in a few years, to the extension that now into Gentile territory, and the design of our Lord Christ that we would first be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then the world has come to pass, and so, as we come to the 10th chapter, Peter is about to preach a sermon to a group of Gentiles which will result in their salvation and their being brought into the church. Now, the message to the Jews was Christ

crucified, risen, and coming again; and the act of faith receives it. The message to the Samaritans, exactly the same. The message to the Gentiles, exactly the same. The message to you, no different.

As we come to the 10th chapter, we begin in verse 34, really, in our study with the sermon of Peter. Lemme give you just a brief look backwards in the chapter. God knows what a monumental event this is, that the Gospel be extended to the Gentiles; and so God has done the preparation. Cornelius is a pagan by all definition. He has been raised apart from the law of God. He has been raised...that is, the written law. He has been raised apart from Judaism. He does not know the transcripts that have been granted to men from God, because they were placed in the care of Israel; but he lived up to the light that he had in his conscience and in the world around him. And, incidentally, Romans 1 says that, "The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

He goes on to say, "That which may be known of God is in them and around them, and if they don't understand it, if they can't see God from their conscience and the world about them, they are without excuse." And so God gives to every man across the earth knowledge that He exists, and if a man will apprehend that knowledge, live up to that knowledge, then God will move in with more light. People always say, "What about the heathen?" We talked about this last week. What about the people in pagan countries who never have the Bible, who never hear these things? Believe me, God is a just God. God never makes a mistake, and God is a loving God; and if a man in any kind of a situation lives up to the light he has, God grants him more light. Cornelius was such a man. He had attached himself somehow to Judaism, because he saw, in Judaism, the God that he knew in his heart to be the true God; and so God began to work on him.

In the first 20 verses of Acts, we found the sovereign call, how God prepared the heart of Cornelius. In the verses 21 to 33 that followed, we saw the submissive will. We saw how Cornelius was so ready and so eager to know salvation. God did his part. Cornelius was available, and God and Cornelius got together. Now, all Cornelius needed to hear was the simple proclamation. He just needed an explanation. His heart was ready. God had sovereignly done His work. He was prepared soil. All he needed was the seed to be planted, and here comes Peter. Peter is God's chosen vessel to dispense the facts of the Gospel to Cornelius, that he might be saved and added to the church.

As we come to verse 33 of chapter 10, Peter is at Cornelius' home. Cornelius is sitting with his household. This is what he says, "Now...in the middle of verse 33...therefore we are all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." He says, "All right, Peter, we're all here. Now you tell us what God knows we need to know." Here was a man who wanted salvation. In fact, before Peter's sermon ever was completed, Cornelius had believed, received Christ, and Peter got stopped in the middle of his sermon. He was so ready. He says, "Now preach." And as we come to verse 34, we come to the sermon of Peter. It's a very simple sermon. It's just as clear and concise as it could possibly be, and I don't wanna embellish it very much. I just wanna preach you Peter's

sermon.

Now, like all good sermons and all that Peter preached, it has three parts. It has an introduction, a main theme, and an invitation, conclusion. Let's begin by looking at Peter's introduction. Verse 34, "Then Peter opened his mouth," and the term there as we saw means that he was about to say something very important, a very weighty saying. "And he said, 'Of a truth or truly I perceive,'" and this really means, "I am beginning to understand, that God is no respecter of persons." Now, as a Jew, Peter had been reared all his life to feel that God had a special love for Israel, and that God liked Israel better than He liked anybody else; and this died hard in the breast of a Jew of his day; and to extend himself to Gentiles was extremely difficult; but God had prepared him with a vision, and in this vision that he had seen earlier in the 10th chapter, God had begun to break down this kind of attitude and this kind of prejudice, and so Peter says, "I am beginning to understand that God is not partial to people. God doesn't play any favorites culturally, religiously, racially, but God is no respecter of person."

In fact, Paul uses the very same phrase, Romans 2:11, he says, "God is no respecter of persons," and that is not anything new. That's throughout the Old Testament. God regards not men, the Old Testament says. That is, God doesn't make concessions to smart men as over against unintelligent ones or rich ones as over against poor ones. Or a certain race against another race. God is impartial. What's Peter saying? Peter's saying, "Cornelius, I know you're a Gentile, but lemme tell you this. Salvation is available." That's his point. Salvation is available. That's the first point, and that's what I'm here to announce to you today. It's available. I don't care who you are. I don't care what your strata. I don't care what your attitude is at this point, what's your culture, what's your background, or what is your race. I don't really care about any of that. Salvation is available. Paul said, "For I'm not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto everyone that believes. The Jew, it came first, but also to all the Gentiles." And so the Gospel is for all men. In 2 Peter 3:9, Peter said, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise." That means God keeps his promises as some men count slackness. People are slack. People don't keep their promises. God does, but He is long suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. The argument of 2 Peter 3 is, "Well, the scoffers come along and say, "Where is the coming of the Lord? Why, you keep saying the Lord's coming, and the world's a mess. Why doesn't He get here? Ah, He must be impotent."

Peter says, "No, He doesn't come because He's impotent. He doesn't come because He's merciful, and He's waiting to give men an opportunity to respond." It's mercy, not impotence, because God wants men to come to salvation; and the term there is, "He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to pass." Across the barriers, across the board, salvation is available. It's not for super-religious people. It's not for strange kinds of fanatics. It's for all men everywhere who respond.

Now look at verse 35, and he carries the same thought further in his introduction. "But in every nation," and, boy, if you could only imagine what a concession this is for Peter to make. "In every

nation he that fears God and works righteousness is accepted with Him." Now, that is not saying you're saved by works. What it means when it says is accepted with Him is it means God looks favorably on him. For example, when God looks around the world, He sees a pagan somewhere. Maybe in a corner where there is no information about the Scriptures at all; but He looks into the heart of that pagan, and that guy is living up to the information he has written in his conscience. Romans 2 says that, "Every man is born with enough conscience about God to be able to see God's eternal God headed power. In other words, you can know God just from what He's written in your heart.

Romans 1 says you can know God from what He's done in the world. Anybody can see the world and not see God isn't looking very well; and so this...the testimony of Scripture is that men have the knowledge of God built into them, and anywhere, if a man lives up and fears God as He is revealed to him, and does his best to do what is right, as he understands God, God will look favorably on that man. That doesn't mean the man is saved. That means that God looks favorably on him. Watch, and then God will give him the information he needs to be saved.

Cornelius was a good man. He feared God. He worked righteousness the best he knew how, but he was not saved. Chapter 11 indicates that to us, as we shall see in our future study. Cornelius is not yet saved, though he has lived up to the light he has. The principle is simple. Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, said Peter, but the name of Jesus Christ. A man could live up to all the light that God gave him, but he wouldn't be saved until he learned Christ and received Christ. There's no salvation any other way. You say, "Well, what about the guy who does the best he can? Will God teach him about Christ?" Absolutely.

John 7:17, Jesus said, "If any man wills to do His will." If a man really wants to please God, the God that he understands in his conscience and in the world around him, "he shall know of the doctrine...said Jesus...whether I speak of Myself or not." In other words, Jesus said that God'll give him more light. God will reveal the truth, and that's Cornelius. Cornelius had lived up to the light he had, and here came Peter with the rest of the light...and God is impartial. Cornelius was a Gentile, but God withdraws Himself from no seeking heart. Jesus said, "Him that cometh unto Me, I'll under no circumstances turn aside." Doesn't matter who you are...

When man sinned, he fell away from God, in total, all men; and when he fell away, a gulf intervened; and that gulf is as bottomless as hell and as black as a moonless midnight; and that gulf, throughout its yawning depths, is populated by demons, howling against man; and the genius of man and the goodness of man and the contrivance of man could not span that gulf; and so man remained cut off from God; and in the midst of hell's high carnival over man's lost condition, Jesus Christ left His home in glory, came to this world; and, at the cost of His own life, Jesus Christ flung a bridge across the gulf; and the name of the bridge is salvation; and for centuries now sin-wreaked humanity has been

stumbling across that bridge into the arms of a loving God; and at no time has God ever distinguished race, culture, mentality, or any other thing...So Jesus Christ is the only way to God. I don't care how good you are, you're still on the other side of the gulf, unless you cross the only bridge, who is Jesus Christ. And so here's Cornelius; and he's so ready; and Peter says, "Salvation's available, Cornelius. You lived up to all the information you had, and here I am to give you the rest." That's always how God works.

I'll never forget stumbling through a...town in the Andes in South America where the streets were mud, and the sewers ran outta the houses, down little gullies into the middle of the little dirt street. Unbelievable place. Mud huts inhabited by people and animals in the same hut. Little thatched roofs, way up, 20,000 feet into the Andes. Walking along a little road with a missionary and looking about and seeing the little children in the mud and all the filth and the things that were there that were so foreign to my own understanding, we then stumbled onto a clearing, and I began to hear a song; and I...it sounded like a lotta people were singing; and then I begin to say to myself, "That sounds like What a Friend We Have in Jesus. And I didn't understand the words, but the tune was familiar, and so I wandered over to the back of the church, and he said, "Look in." And here was a little church, and I stuck my head in the door, and there was no room for me to step in. They were standing up wall-to-wall bodies from front to back and side to side, and they were singing What a Friend We Have in Jesus. Now, those people were so far and so remotely removed from anything that we could understand. They were so cut off from the testimony of Scripture given to Israel and to many of us; but somehow God, in His own timing, had gotten the Gospel to prepared hearts; and in recent years, a revival had broken out to the extent that they told me they were gonna have to build more churches in the next few years than they'd ever built in the history of any work in that area of the world.

God will always meet the seeking heart, believe me; and you'll find as you travel around the world...I'll never forget running down the streets of Jerusalem and running into a little Arab boy and beginning to talk to him. He spoke enough English to tell me that he, too, had met Jesus Christ. All around the world, I don't care where it is. Whether it's on a university campus or in a prison, or whether it's with the brilliant or the uneducated, whether it's the rich or the poor, you'll find the barriers have been crossed; and Jesus Christ is real to people; and that's all he's saying here. "I don't care who you are, what your background is, salvation's available." Cornelius, Gentile or no, it's available.

The second thing that Peter says is so interesting. It's not only available, then he moves to his theme. His introduction is salvation is available. His theme is salvation is in Christ. It's great to know it's available. The next thing you wanna know is what is it, how do you get it, where is it; and he says it's in Christ. The only one, people, who can provide you with resurrection life is Jesus Christ. Why? He's the only one that ever raised from the dead. Hardy says, "I only wanna know two things. Has anybody ever cheated death? And, two, did they make a way for me to do it?" He said, "If I can find that man, that's what I wanna know." He look around, and he checked 'em out. Buddha's tomb occupied. Mohammed's tomb occupied. Jesus' tomb empty. He said, "Somebody cheated death." Then he said,

"Did he make a way for me to do it?" Then he read the Bible, "Because I live...what?...ye shall live also." He said, "That's what I wanna know."

There's no salvation in any other, because there's no resurrection in any other than Jesus Christ; and so Peter begins to preach about Christ; and he begins in verse 36. "The Word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (who is Lord of all) - that thing I say you know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached." Now what is he saying here? Look with me at that for a moment. What's he saying? He's saying, "Here I am to announce to you salvation is available." Now he says, "It is by Christ Jesus. There is no other way." He said, "This is the Word which God has sent." You know, God's been giving messages for a long time. Unfortunately, people aren't always listening. You can't crawl outta your little box and discover God. You can't reach God by your own design. You're natural, and He's supernatural, and by the very definition of terms, the natural cannot escape to understand the supernatural. So we're stuck. So since we can't escape into the supernatural, the supernatural reduced itself to us, and God speaks to us in our world...

And what did God have to say? Well, God in sundry times and diverse manners in time past spake unto the fathers by the prophets. He spoke in the Old Testament, and in His last days, He has spoken unto us by His Son. God said something in the Scripture, and He said something in the person of Christ. What did He say? What did God say?

Look at verse 36. "The Word which God sent unto the children of Israel." Incidentally, God used Israel as a vehicle, not as an end. God didn't unload His grace on Israel. He simply used Israel as a channel. They were ineffectual, however, and God cut a new channel, which is the church; but God had only chosen Israel to be a tool, a witness for Him; but what He wanted to say was, "There is peace by Jesus Christ." And the point is this - man is at war with God. You're born into this world in conflict with God; but God sent a Word. God revealed His mind. God revealed His will, and His will was that men know peace with Him.

You know, we look around our world, and we get...we read the papers, and we read about a peace in Vietnam, and then the next thing we know, we're fighting a war in Cambodia; and we begin to say to ourselves, "Where does it all end?" And we, finally, if we know anything about the Bible, we say it ends in the coming of Christ and not before, 'cause the Bible says there is no peace to the wicked. There'll never be peace between nations, never; because nations are only groups of people, and there's no peace between people; and sadly to say, there's no peace within the individual heart. Witness the psychological bonanza that's going on today; and the reason there's no peace in the individual heart is because men don't have peace with God, which means that they're out of flow. They're in a world going against the grain...they're running on a treadmill backwards. No wonder they can't be comfortable. No wonder they can't be at peace. They're going against the grain.

From the time a man is born into this world, he is born in sin. He is in rebellion to the moral law of God, which flows in the universe. He's smashing continuously against the moral law of God; and, consequently, he is not at peace with God, and that reflects in his own life; and he's not at peace with himself. And if he's not at peace with himself, he's not gonna be at peace with his family; and if he can't be at peace with his family, nations aren't gonna be at peace with nations; and so all you have in the macrocosm is an extension of the microcosm.

All you have in the big world, the lack of peace, is a reflection of the little things in your life as individuals that you cannot resolve peacefully...There's no peace. Men are trapped on a gulf with a chasm in between they can't bridge, and a chasm filled with the devil and his demons, howling and hissing; and they don't have any peace in their hearts; and they're living against the grain of the ethics and morality, which God has built the universe upon; and, consequently, they know no rest; and God bursts into their scene; and He says, "I have a message, and my message is peace. Would you like to be at peace with God? Have the peace of God in yourself and be at peace with men?" That's His message.

Resurrection life is a life of peace. When you come to Jesus Christ, the old war life dies. The old rebellious life dies, and you rise in a new life at peace with God. I'll tell ya, just to be alive in this universe, living the life of God, living in the flow of the universe, living according to God's standards and in the life of God. Absolutely revolutionary. Total change. That's God's message to the world. Peace.

Why does a man wanna live in rebellion against God when he can have peace with God? Why does a man wanna live in rebellion with himself when he can have peace with himself? Why does a man wanna live in rebellion with his family and his friends when he can have peace? It's all available. In fact, that's what we're here to tell ya. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, listen to these verses. "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself." In other words, He's made peace with us. We were cut off. The gulf was there, but Jesus threw the bridge down and across it we came, and we made peace with God. He says, "He has reconciled the world to Himself by Jesus Christ. To wit, God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself."...

Say, "How did He do it?" "Not imputing their trespasses unto them." You see what God did? God took care of our sins in Christ; therefore, we can have peace with Him. The thing that creates the friction is sin. God has a flow of holiness. We smash it up with sin; and, consequently, there's no peace. There's only turbulence. As we come to Christ, the holiness of Christ becomes ours, and we get in the flow. There's no more turbulence. We're at peace with God. Even though we still sin, it's covered by the blood of Christ. It's forgiven instantly and cleansed, and it's as if it isn't there, and the Lord says, "I will remember it no more."

And so the message is peace, and then Paul went on to say, "That's our message. We beg you, be at peace with God. It's available." He says in verse 36, "Preaching peace by Jesus Christ." There's no other way, people. I would love to stand here and be able to say you could believe anything you want. Go to heaven. Anybody in the world, I don't care if they're Muslim, or if they're in some kind of cult or occult or if they're Buddhist or whatever they are, they can believe anything they want, as long as they're sincere, they'll make it. But that would be a lie, and I will not say that. It is not so. There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ, but don't you worry. In any of those pagan countries, if a man is really living up to the knowledge of the true God within him, God'll give him the light that he needs to come to that full knowledge of Christ; but there is no other way.

So God here is the real preacher. "The Word which God sent unto the children of Israel." He's the real witness. Peter says, "I'm just repeating what He said." And then I love that statement at the end of verse 36. Catch it, would you? "He is Lord of all." You know what that means? That means about five things, and I'm just gonna share a couple thoughts. There's so much in there. "He is Lord of all." What does that mean?

That means that Peter's saying to these Gentiles, "Hey, He's my Lord. He's your Lord. We're one." Not only that, it says, "He is Lord." You know who Jesus was? He was God in a human body. He is Lord. He's not a man. He's Lord. Not only that, He's Lord of all, which means that there is no other Lord. If anybody has a Lord at all, it is Him. There is no other Lord. "He is Lord of all." God said, "I'll have no other gods before Me." That's the same statement. "He is Lord of all." Jesus Christ is Lord, and if anybody, anywhere on the globe, anytime, is a child of God, it is because he knows Christ. That's the only way. He is Lord what? Of all. There is no way that a man can enter into peace with God other than Christ. "He is Lord of all." Doesn't say He's Lord of those who heard about Him. If anybody knows the truth, they know it because they know Him.

Now, verse 37 says, "That thing, I say...That is the information about Christ...You know. It was published throughout Judea, began in Galilee after the baptism which John preached." He says, "This isn't anything new to you. Cornelius, you've heard the Word." Cornelius, they were in Caesarea, which is a little town down by the coast where the Roman government had its headquarters, and so it was just a few miles, 40 or 50 miles from Jerusalem. It was in Judea, so he says, "Cornelius, you know. You've heard all about Jesus. The Word has been scattered all over the place, throughout all Judea and Galilee. The information is available. You know about it."

And I say the same thing to you today. You know about Jesus Christ. You wouldn't be here. You've heard of Christ. You, perhaps, have spent some years of your life in the past in a class in a Sunday school, or maybe you've even gone to church from time to time, and you know about Christ. I mean the world in all of its crass commercialism at least propagates Jesus Christ every Christmas and ever Easter; and they're sort of locked into that commercially; and it's to our advantage, I suppose, in the

long run. God always uses the devil's activity for His advantage; and so you know about Christ. You may even think of Jesus Christ, yes, died on the cross, rose again. You know all that.

Now Peter says, "Lemme just pinpoint the information that's specific, and that's all I wanna do." You know about Christ. I'm just gonna do what Peter did. Lemme show you some specifics. He says, "Now it all began after John the Baptist." John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament prophets, and, incidentally, the greatest of them. He was announcing the coming of Christ. He was baptizing Jews. Jews would come, believing in the coming of Messiah. He was preaching Messiah's coming, and he was calling out of people from Israel who would purify themselves and get ready for the Messiah, and their baptism was a symbol of their purification, getting ready for Messiah.

Then one day as John was getting the people ready for the coming of Messiah, the Messiah came. Jesus wandered down to the Jordan River. John turned to Him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God was taketh away the sins of the world." And John faded out. Later John said, "He must increase, and I must decrease." John faded away, and Jesus Christ came to the fore, and the spotlight of the world was turned on Him; and to begin His ministry, He was baptized by John in that Jordan River; and verse 38 tells us what happened.

"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power." Believe me, people, the Holy Spirit and power always go together. It says that God anointed Him. You remember that immediately His ministry began, He was baptized. The Spirit of God descended upon Him. God was saying, "This is My Messiah." God set Him apart as the Redeemer, the King, the Anointed One; and God said, "Thou art My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," and He anointed Him with power as the Spirit of God came upon Him, and He was set for the work which He had been called to do.

You know, that work is described for us in Luke 4. Jesus of Nazareth - Nazareth was a kind of a crummy little town in Galilee, and everybody thought nothing good could come outta there. It was part of His humiliation that He came from there. But in chapter 4 of Luke in verse 18, He was teaching in Nazareth where He'd grown up as a boy; and, of course, He Himself said, "A prophet is without honor in his own country." They never thought anything good could come outta their town, especially that little kid who belonged to Joseph.

He got up one day in the synagogue, and this is what He read, from Isaiah 61. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me." This was a Messianic prophecy. He was reading. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, the great coming of the Lord."

Now, this was a prophecy of Messiah, and the people listened. They thought, "Oh, He's reading about our coming Messiah," and He closed the book, and He gave it to the minister, and He sat down, and the eyes of all that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him, and then He began to say - and this is what He said. "This day is the Scripture fulfilled in your ears." He said, "I am that Messiah, and I have come to preach the Gospel, to heal the brokenhearted, to set the captives free," and all those other things. He was anointed by the Spirit of God as the Messiah. So we find in Acts chapter 10 that it says, "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power."

He began His ministry in the power of the Spirit. Now what did He do in His ministry on earth? Very simply it says this, and I love this. "Who went about doing...what?...doing good." Could He ever do anything else? Did He ever have any capacity to do anything but good? No, "He went about doing good." You know, that's a lot unlike most would-be messiahs who spend their time in philosophical speculation. He spent His time in just plain old doing good; and some of the things that He did that were good are illustrated. Look at this. "And healing all that were oppressed of the devil."

Now you know something? There is a conflict in the universe between God and Satan, and Jesus came into the world to enter into that conflict and resolve it. The first thing that happened after Jesus anointed - He was anointed at His baptism. Immediately, He was led in the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, and He went into conflict with Satan, didn't He; and Satan tempted Him; and the conflict began; and for all the ministry of Jesus Christ, for three years, He was in conflict with Satan; and right up until the Garden, He struggled and sweat great drops of blood, as it were; and He got to the cross; and Satan threw all hell against Him at the cross; and He was still in conflict with Satan to the very end.

Jesus came into this world, the Bible says, to destroy the works of the devil. He went about doing good, and Satan went about the world doing evil, so they were in conflict from the time He got here. I wanna make a footnote here for just a minute. It says, "Who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil." You say, "Is all disease related to the devil?" The answer is yes. Now everybody that's sick isn't demon-possessed. Every time you get sick, that doesn't mean a demon is oppressing you; but all illness is related to the devil. You say, "Why?" Because it is all a part of the system of this world which sin has created.

For example, if you have no Satan, you have no sin, right? If you have no sin, you have no death. If you have no death, you have no decay. If you have no decay, you have no disease. So if you have no Satan, you have no disease. What are you saying? I'm saying this. Sometimes sickness is direct demon possession, but always sickness is a result of Satan's curse on the earth. For example...God wanted to test Job, but who actually made Job sick? Satan did. You say, "What about Paul? Paul had an infirmity of the flesh which the Lord had given him." Yes, you know what Paul called it? "The messenger of Satan sent to buffet me." All illness, directly or indirectly, is related to Satan and to the principle of sin in the world. So when Jesus came into the world, He immediately started fighting against Satan's system; and one great way to fight it was to destroy the power of disease and death;

and you know some of the time that Jesus was here on earth, He actually called people back from the dead after Satan had already captured 'em.

So He entered into conflict with Satan; and He did amazing miracles; and it was apparent to everybody what the end of verse 38 says, "God was with Him." It was obvious. It was obvious that God was active in Him. In fact, Nicodemus came to Him by night and said, "We know that Thou art a teacher come from God." Why? "'Cause no man could do the things You do except God be with Him." It was obvious that God was in Him, that this was God in the body of a man doing miracles, and He was powerfully resisting Satan's rebellion and fighting against Satan.

It's a fantastic thing to realize that the battleground for God and Satan is the universe, but the thing was resolved on the earth. Jesus Christ fought against Satan, and He won, and it didn't look like He did. Look at verse 39. Peter says, "And we are witnesses of all the things that He did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem." Stop right there. Peter says, "I'm not just telling you hearsay. We all saw this." We, probably referring to the apostles. "We...we know He did these things. He went about doing good and healing all oppressed of the devil." The word oppressed is a Greek word used only one other place, in James 2. It means tyrannized. Totally dominated.

But he says, "We saw all these things. These people oppressed of the devil. We saw Jesus Christ heal them. We saw Him crushing Satan's only power." Satan's only got two things he can use, really, disease and death. Decay and death, and Jesus, all through His life, was just smashing Satan's disease power. Satan had one other great power, the power of death, and he tried to use it on Jesus; and it says at the end of verse 39, "Whom they slew hanging on a tree." Can you imagine a civilization of people that would crucify a man who went about doing what? Good. Can you imagine that?

You know, for a little while, they acknowledged the good that He did; and in John 12 verses 12 to 17, Jesus came riding into the city; and, you know, it was Passover time. Everybody was thinking about a deliverer, because Passover commemorates deliverance from Egypt and Moses and all that great act of God; and deliverance was in the air; and they had just heard that this Jesus, who had always claimed to be the Messiah, had raised Lazarus from the dead after four days of being in the grave; and they thought this may be our Leader. This may be our Deliverer; and He came riding into Jerusalem; and they all took their palm branches; and they cried, "Hosanna." You know what Hosanna means? Save now. Save now. And they were crying for political deliverance from Rome. Too blind to know that what they needed was deliverance from Satan in their souls.

Jesus arrived, and they cried, "Hosanna, the King of David. Save now." And Jesus calmly said, "No, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, brings forth fruit. I've come to die." And they turned Him off. The next time the crowd got together, they screamed for His blood. "If you're not gonna be our political Messiah, we're not interested in You. You're a

blasphemer." And they killed Him.

Now, we recognize the fact that they nailed Him to a cross. The Roman soldiers did the actual crucifixion. The Jews put Him to a false trial and brought it to pass. Both were instrumental in His death, and the devil tried to stop Him by killing Him. That's the last power he had. Jesus had showed that the devil's disease power wasn't any good at all. He'd shattered that again and again. The devil tried to expend the power of death on Jesus.

Look at verse 40. I love this. "Him God raised up the third day and showed Him openly." The devil got men to kill Him, but God raised Him up. Men made a verdict. Blasphemer. God reversed the decision and shot Him outta the grave and said, "No, wrong, Redeemer, Messiah, King, Anointed." Isn't it interesting that always, always, always, man and God are at opposite extremes. "My ways," said God, "are not...what?...your ways." Here was the Redeemer, the Messiah. Men judged Him a blasphemer and executed Him. God said, "Wrong," and shot Him outta the grave, and said, "He's alive. He is the Messiah. He is the Redeemer."

And notice it says that He "showed Him openly." I heard two guys on television this morning before I left who masquerade as Bible teachers; and they were subtle. For a long time, I didn't know what they were saying. You know, they were like the clock that doesn't work, right twice a day; and they said a few interesting things; and I continued to listen; and then they got to their great climax; and they said that it was obvious that Jesus did not literally rise from the dead; and I knew they were blasphemers.

The Bible says right here that He did rise, and He was showed openly. My dear friends, the Apostle Paul says, "If Christ be not risen, then are our hopes in vain. Then are we of all men most miserable. If Christ is not risen, then those who have died, hoping in Christ and His resurrection, are damned forever, if Christ be not risen."...

And these two characters on the television said, "What came forth was some kind of a phantom spirit." You ever had a meal with a phantom spirit? Verse 41. "Yes, He appeared, not to all people," no sense in showing Himself to the unbelievers. They didn't believe anyway. They'd forfeited the right. "But to us chosen before by God, even to us who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead." He was alive in a real body. Jesus came out of the grave.

You say, "Is that important?" Yes, it's important, because He lives, you can live. Listen to this, friend, He died to pay the penalty of your sin. He rose to give you life. You gotta have both. It's one thing to pay the penalty for sin and to have that outta the way. It's something else to come out the other side of the grave and have eternal life. Both sides are necessary, and I'm excited about death myself. I'm not excited about the pain of it. I just know that, when I die, it's simply gonna free my soul to be with God; and I fear no death.

Paul says, "Now is Christ risen and become the first fruits or the guarantee of all of those who sleep." He did come outta that grave. It's exciting. Satan tries to keep Him in the grave. Believe you me, he got Pilate to try to keep that thing shut. "Seal it. Don't let it get opened. Make sure you do as well as you can. Get those Romans around there," which didn't do a bit of good. God just gave a divine anesthesia to all the soldiers, sent an angel, and just removed the stone, and Jesus walked out. Satan's still trying to cloud the resurrection, you know that? In fact, Easter is so gunked up with Satan's lies that it's hard to get down to the real thing. He spawned gods and customs and rites and rituals and philosophies and symbols and myths all through history to foul up Easter just like he has Christmas.

For example, Easter itself is the name of an ancient Chaldean goddess Astarte. Another name for Astarte is Ashtoreth, always associated with Baal worship. From there, we get the word Easter. If that's not bad enough, Easter eggs come from the myth that a great egg fell from heaven into the Euphrates River, and out of that egg came Ashtoreth, again, a false goddess; and then we had Lent. Lent is nothing but the worship of Camus or Baal translated into Christianity. Has nothing to do with the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and then we look at Easter today, and all you see are rabbits and eggs and even they don't go together. But all the way along the line, Satan is attempting to cloud the resurrection of Christ, to get concentrating on all this other stuff. Believe me, Satan would like to keep Him in the grave, but he can't. He's alive, and because He lives, I live.

Listen, friend, the day I put my faith in Jesus Christ, I came alive; and I'll never die. Oh, the body'll fall off, but my soul shall live eternally, spiritually with God. What a promise; and I have peace with God and joy in all these things that are promised. Peter says, "This isn't just halfway stuff I'm telling you that I heard from somebody. I saw it. I was a witness." In verse 42, he says, "And He commanded us to preach it and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead." Peter said, "If He's not your Deliverer, He'll be your Judge." Take your choice. And so does Peter conclude the main body of his sermon very simply by saying this, "Salvation is available. Salvation is in Jesus Christ. Here's the invitation. Salvation is by faith...verse 43...To Him give all the prophets witness."

The Old Testament testimony, we're speaking of Christ, "That through His name whosoever believeth in Him, Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, shall receive remission of sins." Remission is forgiveness. The only thing that can allow God to receive us is forgiveness, and forgiveness comes when you believe. Whosoever, don't you love that? I remember reading the story of a father, took his wife and three children on his yacht. They were out in the harbor, far out, and a storm came and the boat capsized. They could see the shore. He had a wife and three children in the water. He knew he could save one, and the others would need to drown. A horrifying decision. He chose to save his wife. I don't know the logic of it. You could think it through yourself. Took his arm around her and swam to shore while the three children drowned.

That's not like God...God has no problem collecting all the drowning people who wanna be collected. God is not limited. Whosoever believes shall receive forgiveness, and it's only a question of faith. God is not limited. Salvation is available to everybody who comes. It's in Christ. It's by faith. You say, "It's just a matter of believing?" Yes. Paul said, "If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God hath done...what?...raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." Do you believe this morning? Do you believe Jesus died on the cross for you, bore your sin? Do you believe He rose from the dead to give you life? If you believe that, personalize it. Say, "Christ, come into my life. Give me resurrection life," and He will, and this will be the first day of the rest of your life. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for the resurrection of our Lord Christ. We thank You that it can be personalized. That it's not just history. It's living reality. Oh, Father, may no one leave this place this morning who has not made it real. Christ's name. Amen.

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