

**TITLE: “Easter: It All Happened Just As God Planned It!” (Slide #1)**

**TEXT: Acts 2:22-24, 29-32. 36-39**

**DATE: March 23, 2008 - Easter Sunday!**

## I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. Welcome to Easter Sunday Morning, the culmination of an amazing week when amazing things transpired by an amazing Savior, Jesus Christ.
  1. It’s a story we consider every year, but it’s still amazing, isn’t it? That Jesus would even come to earth is amazing. That He would die on a cross for all of our sins is beyond amazing. That He would rise again on the third day after his death is beyond amazing.
  2. And it’s all because of God’s amazing grace.
- B. What a glorious and significant morning we have the honor of enjoying this morning - EASTER MORNING - The morning when we within the Christian community celebrate the near completion of God’s salvation plan.
  1. I say near completion because two other significant events are yet to come:
    - a. Pentecost when Jesus sends to us the Holy Spirit.
    - b. Jesus’ Second Coming when He invites all who are redeemed to join Him in heaven forever!
  2. Oh, but what a joy it is to celebrate this great, miraculous, marvelous victory - The resurrection of our Lord and Savior from the dead. Praise the Lord!
- C. When holidays role around, how I love to read the stories about children and their perception of the event. My two favorite are as follows:
  1. **The story of British Minister W.E. Sangster:** Margaret Sangster Phippen wrote that in the mid-1950s her father, British minister W.E. Sangster, began to notice some uneasiness in his throat and a dragging in his leg. When he went to the doctor, he found that he had an incurable disease that caused progressive muscular atrophy. His muscles would gradually waste away, his voice would fail, his throat would soon be unable to swallow. Sangster threw himself into his work in British home missions, figuring he could still write and he would have even more time for prayer. *‘Let me stay in the struggle Lord,’* he pleaded. *‘I don’t mind if I can no longer be a general, but give me just a regiment to lead.’* He wrote articles and books, and helped organize prayer cells throughout England. *‘I’m only in the kindergarten of suffering,’* he told people who pitied him. Gradually Sangster’s legs became useless. His voice went completely. But he could still hold a pen, shakily. On Easter morning, just a few weeks before he died, he wrote a letter to his daughter. In it, he said, *‘It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice to shout, “He is risen.” But it would be still more terrible to HAVE a voice and not want to shout!’* - **Lead in shout!**
  2. **A Father Tells about this true happening:** “Our three-year-old, Nichole, was as anxious for Easter to come as she had been for Christmas to come. Since my wife was expecting our third child in just a few weeks, many persons were giving us baby gifts since this was our first child in this church. Nichole had picked out a new dress and mom had given her a new white bonnet. As we stopped at a store to buy her a new pair of shoes to go with her outfit, she once again said, *‘I can’t wait for Easter Daddy!’* I asked her, *‘Do you know what Easter means, honey?’* She replied, *‘Yes.’* *‘Well, what does Easter mean?’* In her sweet three-year-old way, with arms raised, a smile on her face, and at the top of her voice she said. . . . (Slide #2) **“SURPRISE!”**
  3. Can you think of a better summary of Easter than: SURPRISE:

- a. SURPRISE Roman soldiers.
  - b. SURPRISE religious leaders who had put him to death.
  - c. SURPRISE former followers of Jesus who had turned on Him and called for His death.
  - d. SURPRISE Satan who thought he had won.
  - e. SURPRISE Sin for you have just been put to death.
  - f. SURPRISE FAITHFUL FOLLOWS! HE'S BACK! HALLELUJAH!
- D. Oh, good friends who have gathered here this morning, from the simple words of a child we find reason to rejoice in the surprise ending to a week filled with emotions and power.
- E. Just when everyone thought they had seen everything that could possibly be seen in Jesus, He adds yet one more miracle: He rose from the dead.
- F. What strikes me this morning and excites me just as much is this: GOD HAD PLANNED IT TO HAPPEN THIS WAY ALL ALONG!
- G. Jesus had repeatedly tried to explain to the disciples prior to Passion Week that everything that was about to happen would happen exactly as planned, but they didn't understand.
- H. The text we look at this morning is one that records Peter's words after finally coming to understand what Jesus had been saying. They are written after the Cross, after the Resurrection, and even after Pentecost.
- I. As we read the marvelous words of Peter's first recorded sermon here in Acts 2, we see that Peter has finally figured it out.
- J. As Peter proclaims what he has discovered to be true, he does so for the crowd that has gathered to try and figure out what is going on in this new Christian church.
- K. And as he preaches, the words that were good enough for the original hearers are great words for us today.
- L. Listen to the words of Peter spoken on Pentecost Sunday. READ TEXT. (Slides 3)
- M. What was the point of Peter's sermon? What was it that he was trying to convey to his original hearers and to us? What Easter message can be found in these wonderful words?
- N. The main point of Peter's sermon was quite simply this: (Slide #4) EVERYTHING HAPPENED JUST AS GOD PLANNED!!!
- II. (Slide #5) JESUS CAME TO THIS EARTH AND DID ALL THE THINGS HE DID JUST AS GOD PLANNED!
- A. As Peter opened his sermon, in a very quick fashion he explained the events that had just happened there on Pentecost so as to eliminate any confusion.
- B. He followed this with a summary from the Old Testament that further explained that what had happened on Pentecost was not a total surprise: It was predicted in great detail well in advance.
- C. And then he quickly turns to talk about Jesus and he calls the crowd - and us - to listen carefully. He says, "*Men of Israel, listen to this. . .*"
1. Peter is concerned that what he is about to say be carefully listened to.
  2. The words he is about to share to the crowd that had earlier crucified Jesus were vitally important.
- D. Getting their attention He states his first truth concerning Jesus with these words: "*Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through Him as you yourselves know.*"
- E. In short, Peter is announcing to all who will listen that everything about Jesus arrival on earth and all of His activities happened just as God planned.

- F. In fact, for all who would take time to study the Bible, they would discover that Jesus' arrival was hands down the most planned event in all of history. Every detail of His coming was spoken of thousands of years before He even arrived:
1. Gen. 3:15 - would be born of a woman.
  2. Gen. 18:18 - would be a descendant of Abraham.
  3. Num. 24:17 - would be of the tribe of Judah.
  4. Isa. 9:7 - would be heir to the throne of David.
  5. Mic. 5:2 - would be born in Bethlehem.
  6. Dan. 9:25 - the exact time of His birth is stated.
  7. Isa. 7:14 - His mother would be a virgin.
  8. Isa. 9:1-2 - would have a powerful ministry in Galilee.
  9. Deut 18, Ps. 110 - He would be seen as a prophet, priest, and king.
  10. Isa. 53:3 - He would be rejected by the Jews.
  11. Zech. 9:9 - He would one day ride into Jerusalem on a donkey.
  12. Ps. 41:9 - He would be betrayed by one of His closest friends for (Zech. 11:13) exactly 30 pieces of silver.
  13. And I could go on and on and on with over 40 different prophecies that predicted in detail the coming of Jesus and what He would do.
- G. All of this to say: Jesus coming to this earth and all the things He did happened just as God planned - every event, every miracle, sign, and wonder, everything happened just as God planned.
- H. And it was all planned because of God's great love for you and me!!! But theirs more.

### III. (Slide #6) JESUS WOULD BE HANDED OVER TO MERCENARIES AND PUT TO DEATH ON A CROSS JUST AS GOD PLANNED!

- A. Peter continues with some shocking words: ***"This [Jesus] was handed over to you BY GOD'S SET PURPOSE AND FOREKNOWLEDGE; and you, with the help of sinful men, put him to death by nailing him to a cross."***
- B. As Peter continues to speak he shocks the crowd by not only telling them that Jesus' coming and all of His miracles, signs and wonders all happened just as it was planned, but the very fact that Jesus would be crucified was in no way a failure - it was just as God planned.
- C. Can you imagine how that crowd must have reacted to these words?
1. It seems to me that perhaps the first reaction was total silence as everyone's faces turned red with embarrassment. - They were guilty and they knew it.
  2. But the shock that what had happened was not a surprise to God at all - it had been planned in advance.
  3. And then maybe the questioning:
    - a. Why would God plan such a horrible thing for Jesus if indeed He was God's Son?
    - b. Why would He plan such a death for anyone?
    - c. Why did God send His Son to die on a cross?
- D. This was shocking news for those first hearers, but they are words that make perfect sense to us.
1. God planned Jesus' death, not because of cruelty, but because of a supreme love that goes beyond any other love that either has preceded or followed Good Friday.
  2. God planned the cross as the means of paying for the penalty of sin for all of mankind.
  3. It was God's loving solution to sin - that Jesus would take the punishment for the sins of the world upon Himself and die for their payment.

4. God planned Jesus' death as His ultimate plan of love and forgiveness.
- E. Jesus spoke of it in advance when He proclaimed these powerful words of wonder: ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son so that whoever would believe in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.”***
- F. Oh, friends, the story of Jesus is so amazing that for many it is surprising, just as the little girl said, but let it be known that all that happened was no surprise to God.
  1. That Jesus would come to this earth and do what He did was just as God planned.
  2. That Jesus would be handed over to mercenaries and put to death on a cross was just as God planned.
- G. And it was all planned because of God's great love for you and me. But theirs more. Theirs the Easter victory!

#### IV. (Slide #7) JESUS WOULD COME BACK FROM THE DEAD JUST AS GOD PLANNED!

- A. How I love the way Peter's good news grows as he continues with these words: ***“But God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”***
  1. There may have been a lot of people in Israel's past that had done great things.
  2. There may have been many in Israel's storied history that had provided great things.
  3. But Peter states a truth that none other in all of Israel's history - in all of man's history - can make.
  4. God not only planned Jesus' life and death. God planned all along that death would not hold Jesus but that He would rise again and live forever as both Lord and Christ. Hallelujah! Christ rose from the dead!!! He rose and is risen, just as God planned.
- B. The words of the little girl tell of our response to such unbelievably marvelous news: SURPRISE! SHOCK! AMAZEMENT! WONDER! GRATITUDE!
- C. **Illustration: The Trial of Jesus Drama:** In the drama *The Trial of Jesus*, John Mansfield has the centurion Longinus report to Pilate after the crucifixion of Jesus. Longinus had been the officer in charge of the execution, and after his official report, Procula, Pilate's wife, calls the centurion to come and tell her how the prisoner died. Once the account is given, she asks, *‘Do you think He is dead?’* Longinus answers, *‘No lady, I don't.’* *‘Then where is He?’* asks Procula. Longinus replies, *‘Let loose in the world, lady, where neither Roman nor Jew can stop His truth!’*
  1. I love that account, even though it is simply a drama based on John Mansfield's view of history.
  2. That Jesus did die is without question. . . He was dead and buried in a tomb for three days.
  3. But Mansfield's understanding of what followed is dead on: HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD AND HE IS SET LOOSE IN THE WORLD WHERE NEITHER ROMAN NOR JEW NOR ANY OTHER PEOPLE CAN STOP HIM.
  4. He is not set loose to destroy or haunt mankind. NO! He is set loose to hunt mankind down with love to offer the greatest gift, SALVATION.
- D. This all adds to the surprise of the Passion Week story; a surprise for everyone except God: For God IT HAPPENED JUST AS HE PLANNED!!!!
- E. And it was all planned because of God's great love for you and me.
  1. Jesus came as planned to demonstrate to us that He cares about us and can do all things we need.
  2. Jesus died on the cross to prove that He longs for a relationship with us to the point of even paying the penalty for the sins we have committed.

3. Jesus rose from the dead to show His desire to give to us not only forgiveness of sins but eternal life after death in relationship with Him.
  4. All because of His great love.
- F. But let me add one further truth. . . .

V. **(Slide #8) MANY WOULD ACCEPT HIM AS LORD AND SAVIOR JUST AS GOD PLANNED. THAT YOU AND I WOULD ACCEPT THIS JESUS, WHO WAS CRUCIFIED, BUT IS NOW RISEN AS LORD AND CHRIST, IS JUST AS GOD PLANNED IT.**

- A. When Peter had finished presenting the amazing news of God's plan and how Jesus had perfectly fulfilled that plan, surprise turned to action.
- B. We are told in verse 37: *"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins."*
- C. To this invitation we read these words in verse 41: *"Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."*
- D. Listen, my good friends:
  1. That Jesus would come and do just what He did was just as God planned.
  2. That Jesus would be put to death on a cross by mercenaries so that the penalty for our sins would be taken care of was just as God planned.
  3. That Jesus would rise from the dead and in so doing provide for all who would receive Him the promise of eternal life even after death was just as God planned.
  4. But let it be clearly stated and understood this morning - this Easter Sunday morning - included in God's plan from the very beginning was that many who would hear about this great plan would accept the provisions of the plan, confess their sins, and invite Jesus into their lives.
  5. Many of those included in that Divine Plan are sitting here this morning, but have not yet received Jesus as Lord of their lives.
- E. I wonder this morning, is there someone here who is just now discovering that you are included in God's plan and you want to do just what three thousand did on the Day that Peter preached and millions have done since - agree with God's plan and make Him you Lord.
- F. It's in God's plan. You and I are a part of God's plan. How about cooperating with that plan today?

VI. CONCLUSION.

- A. **(Slide # 9)** As I bring this sermon and offering to a close, I do so with a closing story and application:
- B. A well known follower of Christ by the name of Bill Hybels tells this story: "Jenny was a beautiful young woman: personable, competent, self-confident, dynamic. As we talked, the topic of marriage and family came up: *"Is that something that you foresee in your future?"* I asked. *"Or do you pretty much plan on just building a career?"* "Oh, no," Jenny said. *"I would love to meet someone and be in a committed relationship that might lead to marriage. That would be wonderful, if it happened, but I seriously doubt that it ever will."* "Why?" I asked, startled by her certainty that she could never find someone to marry. I couldn't imagine her having any problem attracting a mate. *"I've dated a lot of men,"* she said, *"and I've come to the conclusion that all men can be put into one of two categories: the givers and the takers. So far, all I've met are takers, and I have no intentions of hooking up with a taker."*
- C. As I read this story and thought about this morning, it occurred to me that for many, the reason Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter have been nothing more than stories is because for many their

perception of God is that He is nothing but a taker:

1. He takes away my individuality and freedom to live the way I want to.
  2. He is so restrictive with all of His laws and expectations.
  3. He is so demanding and seemingly unbending.
  4. For many, God is nothing more than a taker. And so many have absolutely no intentions of hooking up with one who is seen as a taker.
- D. May I suggest to you this morning with all the kindness I can muster that your perception of God may be far from accurate. You see, all that we have considered here this morning tells us the exact opposite. God is not a taker; He's a giver.
1. He gave His one and only Son to this world.
  2. He gave Jesus not just as a visitor, but He gave the very life of His Son on a cross.
  3. When He rose Jesus from the dead, He did so not to make demands but to offer to all the gift of eternal life.
  4. All of the things that follow entering into a relationship with Jesus is not a matter of God taking from us freedoms; it's a matter of Jesus offering to us opportunities and promises.
  5. God is not a taker, He is a giver.
  6. God is not a rule maker, He is a protector.
  7. God is not demanding, He is giving.
  8. God is the very person everyone in the world is looking for, but many just don't realize it.
- E. In asking you this morning if you would like to accept God's plan into your life, I am not asking you to hook up with a God who is a taker; I'm asking you to hook up with a God that for all of time has been the most generous giver the world has ever known - even to the point of giving up His own life.
- F. The call this morning is to come and receive into your life "The grace giver."
- G. **(Slide #10)** Why don't you receive Him today?