

Acts Chapter 13 v 13 - 43

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[0 : 00] We're going to read together now from our Bibles, and if you'd like to turn with me to Acts, Acts of the Apostles and chapter 13.

Acts of the Apostles and chapter 13, and we're going to read from verse 13, so Acts 13, verse 13, reading through to verse 43.

This is a particular sermon of the Apostle Paul as he's in Pisidian Antioch on one of his missionary journeys. Verse 13, from Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.

From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the law and the prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.

Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said, Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me. The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers.

[1 : 22] He made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt. With mighty power he led them out of that country. He endured their conduct for about 40 years in the desert. He overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to his people as their inheritance.

All this took about 450 years. After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. Then the people asked for a king.

And he gave them Saul, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled for 40 years. After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him, I have found David, son of Jesse, a man after my own heart.

He will do everything I want him to do. From this man's descendants, God has brought to Israel the Saviour, Jesus, as he promised. Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel.

As John was completing his work, he said, Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

[2 : 32] Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. 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.

Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead. And for many days he was seen by those who traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem.

They are now his witnesses to our people. We tell you the good news, what God promised our fathers. He's fulfilled for us their children by raising up Jesus.

As it's written in the second psalm, you are my son. Today I have become your father. The fact that God raised him from the dead never to decay is stated in these words.

[3 : 33] I will surely give you the holy sure blessings promised to David. It is also stated elsewhere. You will not let your holy one see decay.

For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep. He was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him, everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.

Take care that what the prophets have said doesn't happen to you. Look, you scoffers, wander and perish. For I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone

told you.

As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

[4 : 47] We thank God for his faithful, wonderful word. We're going to be dipping in a little bit to Acts in chapter 13 from that sermon of Paul, Pisidian Antioch, as we consider some truths this morning.

Continuing that theme, I think it's good and right and helpful for us to continue to think on the resurrection of our Lord Jesus and upon the outworking and the repercussions of that tremendous event in history.

Whenever we come to the Bible, whenever we come to look at and consider the life of our Lord Jesus Christ or any other part of the Scriptures, we realize that we are coming to the very words of God.

And there are many, many reasons for us to believe and to have faith that this is the Word of God, that this is the trustworthy, faithful account of real history, real events, real people, and that this is something that we can trust and seek to apply to ourselves.

We have many reasons, as I say, for that. One of them, of course, is the very way in which the eyewitness accounts of the life of Christ are so precisely recorded.

[6 : 04] When Mark talks about the feeding of the 5,000, his gospel, he tells us that the grass was green grass, an eyewitness account. He tells us of the number of bread, loaves, the number of fish that were eaten.

At the end of John's gospel, when Jesus calls to his disciples out in the boat, and they are fishing and have been fishing all night without any success, and he calls them and they put their nets on the other side, we're told the exact number of fish that they caught, 153 large fish.

So again and again, we have these eyewitness accounts, things that would not be there if this was some sort of made-up fictional, mystical idea or story. We can trust the Bible as being complete, as being the perfect and complete word of God.

Everything that we need to live as Christians in this world. But, the wonderful thing as well is, that one of the things that we can also take as being a reason to believe and depend upon the Bible is that there are many things that are not included in there, that we would like to be included in there. There's incidents and events, and we think, what happened next? Or what happened before that? Things like Melchizedek. Where did he come from? Who was he? Episodes and incidents, which we're not told about.

[7 : 32] The lifehood and the adolescence of Jesus. Just that one event, when Jesus was 12, accounted for in Luke. What happened to the Ark of the Covenant? Is it buried somewhere, waiting for Indiana Jones to find it, or not?

Who was Cain's wife? All these questions are there, but they're evidence that the Bible can be trusted. Because it doesn't seek to defend itself in that way, by telling us everything.

But only that which we absolutely need. These things are not included, not because they're unknown. They're not included, because God has been selective in giving us just what he knows we need to live in this world before we go to be with him in glory.

That's why Paul, in his account, as he speaks about the Bible, says this, All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be, listen, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Whatever questions we have can wait till heaven, when everything will be seen, and we're told that we shall know, just as we are fully known.

[8 : 48] Now, when we come to the events of Easter, of course, we do have this gap, if I could put it that way, between the death and the burial of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus, the Friday afternoon burial of Jesus in the tomb, and the Sunday morning resurrection of Jesus from the tomb.

And questions may come to us about that. What went on between those three days? What did Jesus' disciples do? And perhaps more importantly, what did they feel?

What did they discuss? What did they go through? Now, we don't need to speculate too hard about that, because when we turn to the end of Luke, we find that on that very Easter morning, there were two of the disciples walking and talking together, and we're given an insight into the things they've

been discussing, which really share very much what, no doubt, all of the disciples were talking about.

There in Luke chapter 24, Jesus comes and walks with these two disciples. They didn't realize it was him. They didn't realize what had happened yet. And he asks them, what are you talking about?

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, are you only a visitor to Jerusalem? Do you not know the things that have happened in these days?

[10:09] What things, he asked? About Jesus of Nazareth, they replied. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed, before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him.

But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. They're downcast. They're discouraged. They're confused. And no wonder, of course, because all their dreams have been smashed.

All their hopes for the future have vanished into thin air. Their expectations have broken into pieces in their hands. Their hopes were that this man who'd been their friend for three years, this great teacher, this one they'd come to believe, and hope was the Messiah sent from God, was now dead. Everything that their lives had centered around had been destroyed. All that they'd hoped for, all that they'd dreamt of, was now lying in a, they thought, in a tomb in Jerusalem.

It must have seemed to them, at that time, that good had been conquered by evil. Notice how they mentioned about the priests and the lead rulers handed him over to death and crucified him.

[11:25] It seemed that wickedness had won the day. We can't begin to imagine the bewilderment that they must have felt, the confusion in their minds. They haven't got, at that time, the blessing that we have of hindsight, of looking and seeing what God was doing.

They were troubled, struggling, perhaps doubting, people. Now I want to flip over, just for a moment, to Acts 13, to this sermon that was preached by Paul in Pisidian Antioch.

As we read through it, you notice that Paul, as he speaks to these Jewish and converted Gentiles, goes through a very brief recap of the history of God's dealings with his people up until that day. He talks about the key events, of course, of what's happened, the people being in Israel and released, and in the wilderness, and the kings, and so on. But then he comes and talks about the key points about Easter as well.

He talks about Jesus' rejection by the people in verse 27. People and their rulers did not recognize him. He talks about Jesus being innocent and fulfilling God's word.

[12:39] He talks about his execution and his burial. Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. He took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.

It's only as he gets to the end there that suddenly he breaks out with his incredible declaration, the greatest words of hope, but God raised him from the dead.

Everything in history had been leading up to that point in time when God raised him from the dead. And what I want us to think about is this, this wonderful and glorious truth that we rejoice in, not just at Easter, but every single day of our lives as believers, is that God raised him from the dead into a hopeless situation, into a place where dreams have been destroyed, into a situation where all that we longed for was now buried in the ground.

God still has something more to say on the matter. God always has the last word. For he delights in turning lost causes into opportunities for his glory.

And there was nothing more hopeless, nothing more terrible in one sense than the cross. But God raised him from the dead. When his people rejected him, when they crucified and killed him, when they buried him in the tomb, but God raised him from the dead.

[14:02] These words and the truth behind them are essential for us, dear friends, as God's people, living in whatever age we live. I want us to think on them and to, as it were, absorb them into our very souls and spirits because they have great encouragement for us day by day.

We need to carry them in our hearts. God gave to his people in the Old Testament commands that they should write the scriptures upon their foreheads and upon their arms and upon their doorposts and so on.

We need to write God's word in our hearts that we might draw upon it in every situation and circumstance we face that we may receive help. I want us to consider the events of Easter and

what took place there and see the encouragement and the wonderful truth that this means to us that Jesus Christ is raised from the dead today in our generation.

First of all, we need to recognize, of course, that God raised him from the dead and how that relates to sinful humanity. See, the chief priests and the Sanhedrin who condemned Jesus and called him a blasphemer and someone only worthy of death, they were the highest religious leaders in the world.

They were the creme de la creme of religious study and understanding and of rule and of reign. They were the ones. And the Roman soldiers who took Jesus and Pilate who condemned him and sent him to the cross and those who crucified him so cruelly, they were representatives of the greatest empire in the world at that time.

[15:51] Possibly the greatest empire that there's ever been. One that lasted a thousand years and covered almost the entire known world at that time. They were the sublime heights of humanity, religious humanity and empirical humanity.

And they did their worst against Christ. They unleashed the fiercest attack upon the Son of God. And in their eyes, no doubt, he was finished and done with and over.

He was beaten. He was done. But God raised him from the dead. When sinful humanity had done its worst against God, God raised him from the dead.

And today, dear friends, we live in a world of sinful humanity. We live in a world where the majority of people around about us declare Christianity to be dead and buried.

God is no longer needed. Science is the one that we worship and bow down to. Technology has the answer to humanity's needs. Eventually, science will enable us to live forever.

[17:00] It will answer the mysteries of the universe. It will explain to us everything we need to know. It will give us every answer. From the whole in our world today, God has played only lip service.

The church of Jesus Christ is a tired old has-been from a past age of ignorance and foolishness. Soon, it will be no more.

Isn't that something of the sense of what we get around about us? It's only just good for funerals and weddings and christenings. And even then, all these things are subject to change.

We can feel as Christians at times outnumbered, overwhelmed. We can feel as if we really are up against it and there is no way forward. We look at the churches in our land, particularly, and we see that many of them are small and struggling.

Many of them are dying and closing and being turned into carpet warehouses and other things. But God raised him from the dead. That's when we need to recognize that truth.

[18:06] That's when we need to look to that reality, whatever around about us is going on. For all man's efforts, all man's attempts are of no use whatsoever. They are all temporal.

They are all just for a moment. Back in 2 Chronicles in chapter 32, King Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem were up against it.

The king, Sennacherib, the empire of the Assyrian army, the biggest army, the biggest empire of his day, had come into the land and was besieging the city.

And Hezekiah, the king, stands up and speaks to the people and he says this, Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him.

With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us to fight our battles. And the people gain confidence from what Hezekiah, the king of Judah, said.

[19:15] Sennacherib sent a leader to the people of Israel and said, What's the point of you resisting me? No other kingdom, no other country can resist me, no other people can resist me, no God can stand against me.

But it was Sennacherib who died and his army who was defeated and God's people who were spared. But God raised him from the dead. See, when sin seems to prosper, when we are surrounded by those who call something evil which we consider to be good and call something good which we, in the Bible, consider to be evil, when evil is exalted and righteousness is oppressed, when wicked men grow more powerful and influential and Bible Christianity is laughed to a scorn, then, dear friends, we need to say, but God raised him from the dead.

Whatever goes on around about us, that truth, that reality does not change. All through history, God's people have struggled and found it difficult when they've seen wickedness in the

ascendancy.

Here's the psalmist, Asaph, in Psalm 73. For as for me, my feet had almost slipped. I had very nearly lost my foothold, for I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

He saw and looked and saw that in a wicked and evil world, the wicked was prospering and triumphing and righteousness and God's truth was in decline. And for him, the answer was to go into the temple of God, to go and focus his mind again on God.

[20 : 53] Ours is exactly the same answer, to set our hearts and minds upon the risen Christ, but God raised him from the dead. Don't we struggle today?

Don't we find ourselves beset with doubts? Don't we look around about us and hear the laughter and the mockery? You see, dear friends, we know, we know, wealth is here today and gone tomorrow.

Political power is as changeable as the weather. Science is not the last word because it keeps changing the last word and everything. All human strength that rises up must inevitably fall, but God raised him from the dead.

And that doesn't change and that truth is now and always. So whatever man may bluster and say, whatever sinful humanity may declare, God raised him from the dead and that doesn't change.

The second thing that we need to see as well in all of this, when we look at the cross of our Lord Jesus and his sufferings, is we need to see that the resurrection of Christ bears relation to the attacks of Satan, the opposition of Satan.

[22 : 14] Behind the human attacks that we speak about, behind the assaults upon Christian faith, there is someone else at work. There is a power and a force.

It is satanic. It is the devil. He's not that cuddly sort of toy thing that people stick in their car windows. He's not just some funny man with a costume dressed up with horns.

He is the personification of evil and wickedness. He is the force and the power that is at work in this world. That's why he's called the God of this age, the prince of this age, says Jesus.

He's that unseen, persuasive, and pervasive enemy of God's people that has always been there.

He's not gone away just because people don't believe in him anymore.

That's one of his greatest tricks and deceptions. He's a spiritual enemy. And behind the death of Christ, behind the suffering of Christ, we see that Satan was at work.

[23 : 16] We're told that it was the devil who filled the heart of Judas to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. It was Satan who sifted Peter as wheat so that he who swore he'd never leave Jesus and would die with him denies him three times when a girl speaks to him.

Surely it was Satan who had turned the crowd in Jerusalem from those who called Hosanna to those baying for his blood as a pack of wolves before the Roman governor. Surely it was Satan who crept into the heart of Pilate who in cowardness, knowing him to be an innocent man, still turned him over to death.

Wasn't the cross the very culmination of the ministry and the work of Satan that he'd been doing and trying to do ever since Christ was born? Wasn't it him who instigated in the heart that jealousy of Herod so that when he heard that he'd been tricked by the kings, the wise men sent soldiers to massacre those boys in Bethlehem?

Wasn't it his vain hope to destroy that new king? And while Satan was tempting Jesus in the wilderness, wasn't it one of those things that he should jump from the temple roof?

Then we read in the Gospels that time and time again the crowd was stirred up against Jesus and cried for his death trying to drive him off a cliff or pick up stones to stone him.

[24 : 40] Who was behind all of this? Who was motivating and moving all these things? Surely it was Satan. As our Lord Jesus Christ breathed his last upon the cross, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Wasn't there, can we not imagine surely some sort of great cry of pleasure from Satan and his hosts that at last after 33 years it was over, the seed of Eve was bruised and beaten, the Son of God was dead and buried.

But God raised him from the dead. all was not over. He was not beaten. Satan had simply, unwittingly fulfilled God's purposes and now death and sin were destroyed in the cross.

Those very powers that Satan thought that he could use and manipulate against humanity were the things that Christ himself had triumphed over. Those authorities and powers in the spiritual realm were beaten.

For Colossians chapter 2 speaking of Christ on the cross having disarmed the powers and authorities he made a public spectacle of them triumphing over them by the cross.

[26 : 03] Satan had done his worst when Satan had accomplished what he thought was his greatest triumph. In fact, God raised him from the dead and it was his greatest defeat. This devil is still around.

He's still active. He's still the accuser the Bible says of the brothers. He's still the tempter of old.

He's still the enemy who prowls like a lion looking for someone to devour.

He's still the one who's always on our shoulder always seeking to trip us up. His purpose is still the same as it always has been to deceive, to lie, to cheat in some way to prevent the church from gaining and enjoying its inheritance in Christ.

He sends his servants as angels of light with false gospels. He is the God of this age that blinds the eyes of those who don't believe so that they cannot see the light of the gospel and turn and be saved.

And even today, somewhere in this world, almost certainly, he will be the one who is putting to death the believers for their faith. But God raised him from the dead.

[27 : 12] Whatever power Satan holds, whatever work that he does, whatever forces he unleashes, he is still the one who has been triumphed over by Christ.

He is still the defeated one. Lovely hymn that we sing, When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and see him there who made an end of all my sin.

It's looking to Christ, the risen Christ, the glorified Christ. The victory, dear friends, is certain. The battle is won. The enemy is in retreat. Why?

Because God has raised him from the dead. Whatever forces he throws against the church, whatever attacks he brings against you individually, dear friends, God has raised Christ from the dead.

If you're still in the midway between Good Friday and Easter Sunday today, if you're still in that Easter Saturday frame of mind that the disciples were, if you're looking around and saying what's the point of me living for Christ, what's the point of me standing up for him, witnessing for him, obeying his commandments, what's happening in this world when we see so much evil rising up and iniquity at work, if you're in that place of discouragement and your face is downcast, God raised him from the dead.

[28 : 34] God raised him from the dead. Hope is not crushed. Knees are not weak.

Hands are not limp. Hearts are not faint. God raised him from the dead. Dear friends, because God raised him from the dead, we too are raised up with him and shall be raised up with him again.

Ephesians chapter 2. God raised us up with Christ. Seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

Dear friends, take God's promise, take God's word, take this truth with you tomorrow. Take it with you into the workplace, take it with you into the home, take it with you into the shop, take it with you into the circumstances and the doubts and the darkness and the difficulties.

Take it with you as you see and hear the evil that's going on around about you. Remind yourself that whatever the world has to say, whatever Satan has to deceive, but God raised him from the dead.

[29 : 54] That cannot change, that does not change. And because he lives, we have hope. let's pray together.

You know our hearts, O Lord, our thoughts, our struggles, our doubts, our fears. You know us so completely. You know that like the disciples of old, there are times, perhaps even this morning, when we are downcast and we said we hoped that this would happen and we thought that this might occur and we were looking too and Lord, all our hopes and dreams are in tatters and when we look around us in the world and we look around us in the town and in our families, look around us in our streets and our nation, in our world, we see so much evil and so much wickedness and so much of Satan's work and you know that like the psalmist of old, we feel as if our feet are slipping and our faith is holding on by our fingernails sometimes.

Oh Lord, we thank you that these words are true for us and true for this world and true for our town and true for our family and true for our nation but God raised him from the dead and because you are alive Lord Jesus then we know that there is no circumstance, no situation which is too hard for you, there is no place in which hopelessness can reign and rule for you are alive and because you

are alive we are alive and as long as you live we shall live and because oh Lord you have been raised we are raised help us ever Lord we pray to rest all our hope, our faith, our trust to make all our dreams those that remain and rest upon the risen Lord Jesus Christ who will never fail us nor let us down for we ask these things again our God and Father in the name of your dear Son who you've exalted and given the name above every name,
Amen.