

Acts Chapter 13 v 13 - 41

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 0 0] Good evening. Welcome again. It's still Easter Sunday, so it's still the day that we're rejoicing in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. So I'm going to say it again. Christ is risen.

Hallelujah. Yeah, that's well, I think that's that we've been doing. We had lots of hallelujahs. We had more than most Pentecostal churches this morning, I think. Hallelujahs. We really outshone them there. Christ is risen. It's the day of hope. That's the wonderful thing for us. The resurrection of Jesus is our hope, and we live in a hopeless world where men and women have no hope. And what is it that makes a difference? Well, here's what Paul writes to the Christians at Thessalonica.

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, don't we? We believe that Jesus died and rose again. It's an absolute certainty. It's that which our faith rests upon. We have no other place for faith apart from the death and resurrection of Jesus. And because he died and because he rose again, we have real hope. Even in the face of death, even in the face of all situations. Our first hymn is a wonderful hymn of praise. 281, Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son. Let's stand and sing again to the glory of God and the praise of our Lord Jesus. 281.

All the glory belongs to our God who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. Let's continue to praise and praise and worship our God and bring him glory in prayer together. Not just myself, this is Easter Sunday. Let's, as many of us who feel able, bring our thanksgiving, our praise, our worship to God in prayer. I'll lead briefly in prayer and then others please continue to worship and to pray for us. We bless you, our God. We thank you that you are the one who raised Jesus from the dead. We thank you that you are the life-giving God, the death-conquering God, the sin-triumphing over God. You are the God for whom nothing is too hard, nothing is impossible. And, O Lord, we come to you again as men and women confessing our sin, confessing our weakness, confessing, O Lord, that within us there is still the taint and the power of death because sin still has its place in our hearts and lives. But we long, Lord, that this Easter Sunday your power, your resurrection power would fill us again that we might be men and women animated by the Spirit living for you day by day, following and serving Christ our living Savior. Come amongst us, upon us, and within us we pray, and do your work this evening we ask, for we ask it all in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Amen. Let's turn together in God's Word and we're going to read from Acts and chapter 13. Acts and chapter 13. If you have a Bible to hand.

[4 : 0 6] Acts 13, that's page 1107. If you've got one of the red church Bibles. And we're going to begin reading from verse 13. So Acts chapter 13, beginning at verse 13. And we're going to read particularly the sermon of Paul as he preaches to the people in the synagogue at Pisidian, Antioch.

Okay, so Acts chapter 13, page 1107. From Paphos, that's on the island of Cyprus, 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 leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak. Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said, Fellow Israelites, and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me. The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors.

He made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt. With mighty power, he led them out of that country. For about 40 years, he endured their conduct in the wilderness. And he overthrew seven nations in Canaan, giving 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. 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. God testified concerning him. I 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 Savior, 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 suppose I am? I'm not the one you're looking for, but there is one coming after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent.

[6 : 44] 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 ground, 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 cross and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people. I tell you the good news, what God promised our ancestors, he has fulfilled for us their children by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm, You are my son, today I have become your father.

God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said, I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David. So it is also stated elsewhere, you will not let your holy ones see decay. Now, when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep. He was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. But the one whom God raised from the dead did not decay. Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him, everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you. Look, you scoffers, wander and perish, for I'm 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. We'll come back to that sermon of Paul's in a moment or two. But let's... Please do be seated.

If you'd like to have your Bibles open to Acts and chapter 13. We're going to particularly, as I say, look at this sermon of Paul at Pisidian Antioch.

[9 : 29] Just before we do, I'm going to read. Just listen. I don't need to turn to it. Luke 24. This is when Jesus comes and speaks to two of the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Jesus approached them, and they were kept from recognizing him, and he asked them, what are you discussing together as you walk along? They stood still, their faces downcast.

One of them named Cleopas asked him, are you the only one visiting Jerusalem, does not know the things that have happened there in these days? What things, Jesus 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. We had hoped.

We had hoped. In our hands we have the word of God, the Bible, the Scriptures. And God has given to us in the Scriptures everything that we need to know in this life. Paul, as he writes to Timothy, reminds him of that very truth as he faced the challenges of being a pastor to God's people.

[11 : 07] In 2 Timothy, in chapter 3, he said to him, all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that a servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

everything that's necessary for our Christian life. Everything that we need to know is found within this volume. And of course, we find some very interesting and very intimate details that are brought out for us about the eyewitness accounts of those who walk with Jesus.

Mark tells us of the very color of the grass when Jesus fed the 5,000, that it was green. John tells us that when the disciples went fishing after the resurrection, they hauled in their nets and they had so many fish they were going to break.

And we're told how many fish? 153. But of course, there's many things in the Bible that we are not told.

We're not told. We're not told very much about the early years of our Lord Jesus Christ, his teenage years, his adolescence. We're not told what happened to the Ark of the Covenant, that glorious box, as it were, that was the symbol of the presence of God.

[12 : 33] There's many questions we will not know the answer to until we get to glory. But because they're not included in the Bible, does not mean that they're unknown.

They're known to God. It does not mean that we need to be worried that the Bible doesn't give us the answer to every single question that can be asked.

God has been very careful in selecting for us that which we need to know. And giving to us in his word, the answers to the questions that we need to know.

Of course, one of the areas that the Bible is silent about is between the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those nearly three days. Three days. We looked at that this morning in John. And we're basically told at the end of chapter 19, Jesus was laid in the tomb. And then nothing until verse 1, when it's the day after the Sabbath, the first day of the week at dawn.

[13 : 47] What did Jesus' disciples do in those three days? What did they think?

What did they talk about? Well, I've just read there from Luke in chapter 24, and we've got a pretty good idea what it is that they did.

They basically sat around feeling sorry for themselves. I think that's fair to say. They sat around with a sense of hopelessness, with a sense of being bereaved, with a sense, we're told, of downcast faces.

And no wonder. No wonder they felt that way. No wonder they were so confused.

No wonder they were so unhappy. All their dreams were gone. All their expectations were dashed.

[14 : 49] All their hopes were scattered. Their friend, their teacher, their master was dead.

Three years they'd been living in the light of his presence. Three years they'd sat at his feet. Three years they had been finding themselves growing in expectation and hope that this Jesus, the Messiah, would bring about a revolution that would transform the world.

And in the space of just a few days, really in the space of 24 hours, if I can put it this way, he went from hero to zero.

From being this incredible Messiah who could change the world to being this lifeless corpse dying upon a Roman cross.

must have seen to them that good had been conquered by evil, that sin had triumphed over righteousness, that the devil had defeated God.

[16 : 04] We can't really imagine the bewilderment that filled their minds. We look back with hindsight, looking through the lens of Easter.

But for them, in the midst of that situation, their sorrow and their grief must have been immense. Dear friends, you and I have many unanswered questions.

many unanswered questions, particularly to do with our own experiences of life, of pain, of suffering, of loss.

Like those disciples on the road to Emmaus, like all those disciples who had seen Jesus taken and beaten and crucified, there are things that puzzle us so intensely that they cause us great sorrow.

How could God have let this happen? All the hopes we had for a certain situation or relationship or future or job or town or whatever it may be or for ourselves, we find that they were dashed or have been dashed, have been broken.

[17 : 30] And it's very hard for us to have hope. But I want to put it to us that the message of Easter and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, though we have not all the answers, is the answer to the hope that we need whatever we face.

And so back to Acts and chapter 13 and the sermon of Paul where he has laid out for them the history of God's dealing with his people, his grace and mercy and salvation in bringing them to that promised land.

And then he has pointed them to the Savior, Jesus. And he relates to them what happened in Jerusalem some years earlier.

We're not sure exactly when he wrote this, but probably 10, 15 or more years after Jesus' death and resurrection. And he says to them, the people of Jerusalem and the 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.

[18 : 52] When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. Now I'm not sure how Paul would have preached, whether he would have then just paused, allowing them to think, well, that's queer.

This Savior has died and he's laid in a tomb. Or whether he'd have gone straight into, but I think he would have paused to allow them to sink, as it were, to sink into their minds this terrible tragedy, this terrible travesty of justice that the Savior God had sent, had been killed by the people of Jerusalem, was laid in the tomb, and then he says, but God raised him from the dead.

Those are the words, dear friends, of hope for us, I believe. But God raised him from the dead. When all appeared to be absolutely hopeless, and there is nothing more hopeless, is there, than death.

When all the dreams are shattered, and when they are buried, God still has something to say on the matter. When everything seems to be at its very worst and lowest ebb, God is still in the picture.

God is still alive, and he is the God who delights to turn lost causes into opportunities for his glory. What we see in the resurrection of Jesus is what we see as a principle in the dealings of God with his people again and again and again and again.

[20 : 40] That's why it's so important that we read the Old Testament. That's why it's so important that we read church history, and you will see that in times and situations when it would appear that there could be no possible way for there to be life or hope or rescue or deliverance, God steps in.

But God raised him from the dead. There's nothing more hopeless than the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing more pitiful than a dead saviour, but God raised him from the dead.

I believe that that's something that we need to hear today, the 21st century. I believe it's something that God's people have always kept on reminding themselves of throughout history.

And I believe it's something that we need to keep ringing in our ears day by day, moment moment by moment, but God raised him from the dead.

There is encouragement here, there is blessing here, daily to lift our hearts in every situation that we face, in every circumstance that we come across, in every difficulty.

[22 : 00] Even in a day, as I say, when churches have been blown to pieces by wicked and evil men, we can say, but God raised him from the dead.

I want to consider two things in the light of Easter. Two things that took place in the crucifixion and death of Jesus, but also two things that continue in our own day and generation to be the cause of great struggle and confusion and mystery and question.

the first of these is this, the sinfulness of humanity. The sinfulness of humanity.

Do you know how, notice how Peter lays out who is to blame for the crucifixion of Jesus. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus.

The chief priest, the Sanhedrin, who condemned Jesus at that kangaroo court and the night before his death, who called him a blasphemer, who struck him and spat upon him and said he was worthy only of death.

[23 : 15] Those who stood before his cross and mocked him and said, come down if you're the son of God and we'll believe in you. They were the highest religious leaders in the world.

They were the top echelon of religion, the Jewish religion, people. They were the peers of it. They were the established church.

They were the ones who had all the religion and all the knowledge and all the power, as it were, in the spiritual realm. them. And they poured it out upon the Lord Jesus Christ and called for his death.

Crucify. Crucify. And then what do we read? Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed.

It was Pilate. Pilate and those Roman soldiers who drove those nails into his hands, who lifted him up upon the cross, who carried out that cruel execution of Jesus, were representatives of the most powerful empire in the world.

[24 : 22] Possibly the most powerful empire that there's ever been in the world, lasting a thousand years, covering most of the entire globe. The most powerful human forces on earth.

ganged together against Jesus to destroy him and wipe his name off the face of the earth. When mankind had done its worst, when it had unleashed its fiercest attack upon Christ, and in its own eyes no doubt considered him to be beaten and finished and over with, but God raised him from the dead.

Today, dear friends, we live in a secular society. Today we live in a world which declares to us Christianity is dead and buried. It's something of the past.

It's something of ancient history. It's got no place in the 21st century in the West. We worship only science. We worship only technology.

We worship only advancement. We worship only evolution. evolution. That's got the answers to all the needs of our people, science and technology and evolution.

[25 : 40] They will help us to become a great human race, greater than ever before, and we can do without God, and we can declare that he is dead, and we can answer all the mysteries of the universe ourselves.

And if there's any place for religion, it's for grannies, and for do-gooders, and for that tiny, tiny percentage of people who are weak and insipid and need a crutch to lean upon, and before very long, the church of Jesus Christ will be as dead and buried as he was on that good Friday, and will disappear and never be known again.

Don't we feel outnumbered? Don't we feel that all is lost at times? Don't we sometimes lose hope for the salvation of men and women in our town, in our world, in our nation?

Aren't there times when, like Cleopas and the others, our faces are downcast and our shoulders are sunk and our knees are bent because we say, well, what's the point?

Your world and its secular power is advancing. Humanity is forging ahead with all sorts of authority. And let's not forget, of course, all the powers of human wickedness, those world religions which seek to persecute and kill.

[27 : 05] We don't know who carried out those bombings in Sri Lanka. It's been put down at the moment to extremist Islamic forces. Power of communism in North Korea, China.

China. Don't think that China is getting any better for Christians. Just start to look under the headlines and you'll find that Christians, churches are still being closed and persecuted. Why should we have hope for the church of Jesus Christ?

Because God raised him from the dead. Read church history, dear friends. Read the medieval period before the Reformation.

Read the state of the world spiritually before the Lord God raised up Luther. And you could probably find two or three dozen believers in a whole world where no gospel was proclaimed, no truth was known.

And God, through this mad monk, as it were, raised up a glorious church again. And the gospel had power. Read about the state of the United Kingdom of England before the days of Whitfield and Wesley.

[28 : 21] I won't even begin to tell you the sort of things that were going on in our nation that would put even our present nation to shame. Such was the wickedness.

And there was no godliness in the churches. But God raised him from the dead. You see, all that humanity throw at the church of Jesus Christ, all that human beings seek to do to bring the name of God down and overthrow his power are all useless.

Again, read the Old Testament. When King Sennacherib from Assyria came up against Jerusalem, this is what the prophet said, With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles.

When sin seems to prosper, so that what is good is called bad, and what is evil is exalted as righteous. When wicked men grow more and more powerful and influential, when biblical Christianity is laughed to scorn, then remember dear friends, but God raised him from the dead.

What's the hope that we have for this church here in Whitby? Joel's coming. Oh, due respect to dear Joel, he's not going to save this church, and neither am I, and neither are you.

[29 : 45] We have no hope, have we? We're getting old. We're losing our hair, our teeth, our marbles. What hope is there? But God raised him from the dead.

Throughout history, believers have struggled living in a wicked world. It's not surprising we feel like giving up at times.

It's not surprising that we lose hope. Think of the psalmist in Psalm 73. He said, as for me, my feet almost slept. I nearly lost my foothold, and I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

And he talks about how he looks at the wicked and how in their lives it seems that they don't have the troubles that the believer has. And they seem to be able to do whatever they like. And they say things like this, how would God know?

Does the Most High know anything? It wasn't until he went, we're told, into the temple. It wasn't until he went back to God.

[30 : 49] It wasn't until he remembered the mighty deeds of the Almighty God that he remembered that their end is destruction.

Wealth is here today and gone tomorrow. Political power is as changeable as the weather. Science is not the last word. And all human strength that rises up must inevitably fall in death.

But God raised him from the dead. There was another power at work, wasn't there, here? Paul doesn't mention it, but we know that it's real.

We know it because again and again in the book of Acts, this power comes to the fore and comes to the surface. Yes, we have sinful humanity, but we have satanic opposition.

See, behind all those human attacks, including even the death of Christ, there's another force powerfully at work, an unseen but pervasive enemy of God's people that has not gone away, the devil.

[32 : 08] It was the devil, we're told, weren't we, when we read the Gospel accounts who filled Judas' heart at the Last Supper. Filled his heart so that he would betray Jesus with 30 pieces of silver.

We know it was Satan who sifted Peter so that when he was accused of being a follower of Jesus, on three occasions he denied him. Surely it was Satan who was in the hearts and minds of the crowd in Jerusalem, who turned them into a pack of wolves, baying for the blood of Christ.

Crucify, crucify. Surely it was Satan who entered the very heart of Pilate, that cowardly Roman governor who found no fault with Jesus, but just to please the crowd, handed him over to death.

And wasn't the cross the very culmination, of all that Satan had been working hard to do throughout the life of Jesus? Read the Gospels. From the very moment of Christ's birth into this world, Satan was determined to hound him to death, stirring up the jealousy of Herod the Great to send soldiers to massacre those young boys in Bethlehem.

And wasn't it Satan in the wilderness who tempted Jesus to jump off the temple to see whether God would catch him? On several occasions in the Gospels, we're told the crowd who listened to Jesus wanted to kill him, some taking up stones to stone him, some seeking to drive him off the edge of the cliff.

[33 : 36] Who was behind all this but Satan himself? And so as our Lord Jesus Christ breathed his last, wasn't there a sense of delight in the mind and the heart of Satan and his armies?

At last, after 33 years of onslaught and attack against the Messiah, at last their job was done. The seed of Eve was bruised and beaten.

But God raised him from the dead. Satan is real, there's no doubt about it. Satan is our enemy in all things.

And yet, unwittingly, here in the cross of Christ, we find that he fulfilled the purposes of God. Did you read that there?

The people of Jerusalem, verse 27, and the rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him, they fulfilled the words of the prophets. Isn't that incredible?

[34 : 45] Even Satan, with all of his power and malice and evil, cannot overthrow the purposes of God, cannot hold back and prevent God from saving one soul, from building his church.

And what seems to be the greatest victory of the devil in killing Christ was, in fact, the moment of his greatest defeat. Colossians chapter 2, having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

We still are in a spiritual battle, dear friends. Paul makes that so very clear in Ephesians 6.

We do not wrestle with flesh and blood. Yes, there may be evil men and women doing atrocious things against God's church, but behind them is Satan. He is the accuser of God's people.

He's still the tempter of old. He's still the enemy who prowls around like a lion looking for someone to devour. His purpose is still the same as it was there, to destroy the church of Christ, to attack the very sons and daughters of God, to deceive, to cheat, to do whatever it takes, to somehow, he thinks, thwart the purposes of God.

[36 : 07] He sends angels of light, as false teachers, Paul tells us, to blind the eyes of men so they cannot see the light of the gospel. And as I mentioned before, even today in Sri Lanka, surely he was instrumental in the putting to death of believers as they gather to celebrate the resurrection.

But God raised him from the dead. It's a wonderful line from this hymn, when Satan tempts me to despair. That's what he wants us to do.

He wants us to despair of hope in the face of a wicked world. He wants us to despair of hope in the circumstances of the church, whatever it may be, and tells me of the guilt within.

Up would I look and see him there, who made an end of all my sin. To the risen, to the ascended, to glorify Jesus.

Jesus. The victory is certain, dear friends. The battle is as good as won. The enemy is in retreat.

[37 : 17] Why? Because God raised him from the dead. That makes all the difference in the world. That changes the whole scene.

And whatever situation you and I are in, dear friends, whatever circumstances we face, ultimately, the fact that God raised him from the dead changes everything.

It may appear to be utterly hopeless in the circumstances you find yourself. It may be that even you've given up praying in a certain situation that God would change it.

But don't forget, God raised him from the dead. Don't forget that whatever, however low it may be, however dark it may be, however painful it may be, however overwhelming the odds, as it were, God raised him from the dead.

Whatever you and I are facing, whatever you and I are struggling with, whatever it is that's causing us confusion and to question and even to pull our hair out, it is not any worse than a dead Messiah lying lying in a cold tomb.

[38 : 30] The disciples on Easter Sunday, sorry, on Easter Saturday wanted to give up. They wanted to throw the towel in.

They said, what's the point? Our Savior is dead. Our hopes are crushed. All the world is falling around our ears. When that happens, dear friends, we need to rejoice in and tell ourselves, but God raised him from the dead.

the wonderful thing is this, that the God who raised Jesus up from the dead is the God who raises us up.

Not only from the dead, but raises us up to seat with Christ in heavenly places. Ephesians chapter 2, Paul reminds us of our sin, that we were dead in trespasses and sins, that we were lost.

But he says this, because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

[39 : 46] It is by grace you have been saved and God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus in order for this purpose that in the ages to come he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Not only did God raise Jesus from the dead, but God has raised you from the dead and will raise you again. Let's sing together our final hymn.

It's going to be on the screen behind me. It's a hymn of rejoicing and praise. Come people of the risen king. That's who we are. People of the risen king.

Listen, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

The trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed. The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality.

[41 : 07] When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true. Death has been swallowed up in victory.

Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O grave, is your sting? The sting of death is sin. The power of sin is the law. But, thanks be to God, he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

Amen.