

PM Acts 13:13-43 Christ the Climax of History

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[0 : 00] From Acts 13, continuing our studies in the missionary journeys of Paul, going to read quite a long passage, Acts 13 from verse 13 to verse 43.

Acts 13, verse 13. Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia.

And John left them and returned to Jerusalem. But they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia.

And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them saying, Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.

So Paul stood up and motioning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen.

[1 : 26] The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt.

And with uplifted arm he led them out of it. And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance.

All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king.

And God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king.

Of whom he testified and said, I have found in David the son of Jesse, a man after my heart, who will do all my will.

[2 : 37] Of this man's offspring, God has brought to Israel a saviour, Jesus, as he promised. Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

And as John was finishing his course, he said, What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.

Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation.

For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognise him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him.

And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.

[4 : 05] But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people.

And we bring you the good news, that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children, by raising Jesus.

As also it is written in the second psalm, you are my son, today I have begotten you. And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.

Therefore he says also in another psalm, you will not let your holy ones see corruption. For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption.

But he whom God raised up did not see corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

[5 : 30] And by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed, by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest what is said in the prophets should come about.

Look you scoffers, be astounded and perish, for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.

As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

Well, let me ask you to turn, please, to Acts chapter 13.

And I'll read again by way of text, verse 32. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us, their children, by raising Jesus.

[7 : 08] Back in January, I began a series of studies on the missionary journeys of Paul. And we looked at the first stage of the first journey, Cyprus, in Acts 13, 1 to 12.

Tonight we come to the second stage, Antioch in Pisidia, so called to distinguish it from the other Antioch in Syria, Syria, from which Paul had set out on this journey.

We have here Paul's complete sermon in Antioch, or at least a summary of it. It's one of just two sermons by Paul that we have at length, the other being his sermon at Athens in Acts 17.

Though we do also have a fragment of a sermon at Lystra, a brief outline of his preaching in Thessalonica, an address to the elders in Ephesus, and two testimonies, one before the crowd in Jerusalem and one at his trial, as well as numerous occasions where his preaching is simply mentioned.

Some of his letters also are virtually sermons. And several times in his letters, he tells us what he preached. 1 Corinthians 1.23, for example, we preach Christ crucified.

[9 : 02] The book of Acts also gives us three sermons by Peter in Acts 2, Acts 3, and Acts 10, and one by Stephen in Acts 7, and mention of Philip also preaching Christ in Samaria.

Now it's important that we have these sermons. We live in a day when all kinds of things are preached from supposedly Christian pulpits.

These biblical sermons show us what the apostles preached. They show us what they thought the gospel, the good news, was.

These sermons were given 2,000 years ago in different circumstances from ours to people from different backgrounds from ours.

But the gospel hasn't changed. And therefore these sermons still speak to us today. Now the main thrust of this sermon is that all the ancient prophecies are fulfilled in Christ.

[10 : 30] Christ is the climax of history who brings to us the long-promised salvation.

I want us simply to look through this sermon and see what it has to say to us today. But first let's just look at the background in verses 13 to 16.

Having preached throughout Cyprus, Paul and his companions, Barnabas and John Mark, have crossed by sea to Perga in Pamphylia.

And there John Mark has left them and gone back to Jerusalem. No reason is given, but it must have been a disappointment and later it was a cause of division when Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them on the second missionary journey and Paul didn't because he had proved unreliable.

For now though, Paul and Barnabas continue together travelling inland up into the mountains to Antioch in Pisidia.

[11 : 56] This was a Roman colony. It was used to provide land for retired Roman soldiers.

Curiously, where we used to live, Lincoln, was another Roman colony used for precisely that same purpose, a retirement home for the army.

They could expect to find plenty of Gentiles there in Antioch in Pisidia. That of course was Paul's great calling to preach to the Gentiles.

Nonetheless, they go first on the Sabbath day to the synagogue. Paul's principle was always to the Jew first and afterward to the Gentiles.

So, they go in, they sit down, the law and the prophets are read as usual, and then the rulers of the synagogue send them a message.

[13 : 05] Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it. It wasn't unusual to invite a visiting rabbi to give a few words of encouragement.

Remember how the Lord Jesus himself was invited to preach in the synagogue in Nazareth. It's even possible that they knew who these men were.

They'd been causing quite a stir in Cyprus and words gets around. So, Paul seizes his opportunity, stands up, motions with his hand and says, Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen.

The men of Israel and you who fear God are actually two different groups of people. Men of Israel are obviously Jews. Those who fear God was a technical term for Gentile converts.

those who believed in the one God and attended the synagogue. As apparently many did. So, Paul is preaching here both to Jews and to Gentiles, but Gentiles who have already embraced Judaism.

[14:41] we can picture the scene then. A hush has come over the synagogue. What will this man say?

Well, Paul doesn't give us a neat three-point sermon, but I'm going to divide it into three all the same. Christ, the promised Saviour in verses 17 to 25, the good news of salvation 26 to 39, and a warning of judgment in verses 40 to 41.

And then we'll look very briefly at the reaction in verses 42 and 43. So, first then, Christ, the promised Saviour, verses 17 to 25.

And Paul begins with a history lesson. The God of this people, Israel, chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in Egypt, and with an uplifted arm, he led them out of it.

And so on. He reminds them of the wilderness, conquest of Canaan, the judges, Samuel, how they'd asked for a king, and God had given them Saul, and then after 40 years, he'd removed him, and given them David.

[16:23] Where's he going with all this? You can imagine the congregation in the synagogue getting slightly restless at this point, thinking to themselves, yes, we know all this, why are you telling us?

Imagine a preacher today beginning his sermon with a potted history of Scotland. If I'd stood up today and said, friends, you know that in ancient times Scotland was an independent kingdom, but then the English invaded, but Robert the Bruce defeated them at Bannockburn, you'd be thinking to yourselves, yes, very interesting, we know that, why tell us?

What are you getting at? Well, Paul does have a purpose, in all this. Having spoken of David as a man after God's own heart, quoting from 1 Samuel 13, he adds, of this man's offspring, God has brought to Israel a saviour, as he promised.

That's the point, that's what he's leading up to. Jesus, the climax of this history of Israel, the saviour that God had promised.

He doesn't actually quote the promise, but the Jews would have known perfectly well the promise that had been made to David, to Samuel 7, your throne shall be established forever.

[18:14] that implied an everlasting kingdom, and an everlasting king. And that everlasting king was the Messiah.

And they would know how the prophets had elaborated on that promise, and had spoken of the Messiah as the saviour of Israel.

All Israel was expecting the Messiah. There in that synagogue, in Antioch, in Pisidia, they were expecting the Messiah. Well, Paul is proclaiming, he has come.

Jesus is the promised king. Jesus is the promised saviour. And he adds the testimony of John the Baptist, who had proclaimed a baptism of repentance, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

John said, after me, one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie. meaning, of course, Jesus. Why mention John the Baptist, you might say, that he's hundreds of miles away from Israel.

[19:34] Would these people have known about John the Baptist? Well, actually, they did. It was in Ephesus that Paul met some disciples of John the Baptist, who hadn't yet heard of the Holy Spirit.

it. So, John the Baptist was indeed known in that part of the Roman province of Asia. So, this is the first point of Paul's message.

Jesus is the promised Messiah. And it's striking how similar this is to the sermons of Peter in Acts 2 and 3 and the sermon of Stephen in Acts 7.

All of those sermons also began with the history of Israel, with Jesus as the grand climax of that history. Stephen especially must have been often on Paul's mind, having given his consent to

Stephen's murder.

Well, Stephen had said, Jesus was the Messiah. Paul now believes that with all his heart. And that is what he preaches to these Jews and converted Gentiles in Antioch.

[21 : 03] He can preach like this because they know the scriptures. In a totally pagan congregation, he would approach it slightly differently.

In Athens, he begins with God the creator and with the sayings of their own poets and philosophers. But wherever he starts from, Paul is always aiming for the same place.

He is always aiming for Jesus, the one and only saviour. God will be to say that Jesus is the promised saviour.

Well, Paul now goes on to speak of the good news of salvation, verses 26 to 39. He addresses the congregation afresh in verse 26.

Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent this message of salvation. And now he speaks of the death and resurrection of Christ.

[22 : 20] that's the heart of the matter. That is the message of salvation. Christ dying for our sins and rising again.

First his death in verses 27 to 29. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognise him or understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfil them by condemning him.

Though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. Then they took him down from the tree and buried him. The cross is central to the gospel of Christ.

Though interestingly Paul doesn't immediately explain why. He simply attests that Jesus was innocent and that his death was prophesied in scripture.

That was the vital point for the Jews to understand. He would come no doubt later to explain the mechanics of the cross as it were. The first thing for them to understand was that this was God's plan, that this is what their own scriptures had said would happen.

[23 : 46] because as Paul says elsewhere the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews. They would have reasoned that if their own leaders had condemned him, well he must have been guilty.

And they would have known that the scripture said, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. So to them, Jesus was cursed. How could he be the savior?

But no, says Paul, this was also prophesied in scripture. This was God's plan.

Again, he doesn't quote the scripture, but it was all there. Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, and elsewhere. Jesus had to die as a sacrifice for sin.

That was how he would save us. The only way, that we could possibly be saved. But a dead savior would be of no use to anyone.

[24 : 53] And so Paul goes on with the most astonishing doctrine of all. The resurrection in verse 30. But God raised him from the dead. And for many days he was seen alive by those who came up with him from Galilee.

Now that truly is good news. And Paul describes it that way in verse 32. We bring you the good news, quite literally the gospel, that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children, how?

By raising Jesus. You see, the resurrection sets the seal upon Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and it establishes Christ as the everlasting king.

Good news indeed. The angel said at the birth of Christ, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people for unto you is born this day in the city of David a saviour who is Christ the Lord.

Paul is now taking that a stage further. I bring you good news of great joy which shall be to all people. This same Jesus has now fulfilled his mission.

[26 : 15] He has died for our sins and risen again. Now this extraordinary claim that Jesus has risen from the dead needed support.

Wasn't really enough just to say that there were eyewitnesses. Well, they would question those eyewitnesses and they were hundreds of miles away anyway. The proof they wanted was proof in scripture.

Where does it say in the Bible that Jesus would rise from the dead? Well, Paul does quote this time. Quotes from Psalm 2, You are my son, today I have begotten you.

Isaiah 55, I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David. And Psalm 16, you will not let your holy one see corruption.

That last scripture was quoted also by Peter in Acts 2. Indeed, Paul is following here exactly the same line of reasoning as Peter.

[27 : 25] David has died and has been buried and his body has decayed. Peter points out that the tomb was still with them to that day.

But Jesus did not see corruption because God raised him up. People sometimes try to drive a wedge between Peter and Paul, but they were preaching the same gospel.

They were singing from the same song sheet. They were quoting the same scriptures scriptures and giving the same interpretation. All of this brings him to the grand conclusion in verses 38 and 39.

Let it be known to you, therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. And by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

That was Peter's grand conclusion as well, wasn't it? In Acts 2, let all the house of Israel, therefore, know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ repent and be baptized therefore for the forgiveness of sins.

[28 : 41] That's what it's all about. Forgiveness of sins. Same message from both apostles. This is the true gospel. This is the good news.

Forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. sin. But what does he mean by being freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses?

That's a distinctively Pauline idea. Something he develops in his letters. Though Peter agrees with it by the way in Acts 15.

through Christ we are freed. Firstly from the guilt of sin. The law couldn't do that.

The law of Moses condemned us. True it provided sacrifices for sin but they had to be repeated year after year. Christ has died as the one sacrifice forever.

[29 : 46] through Christ we are also freed from the power of sin. the law of Moses couldn't do that.

The law of Moses simply required total obedience. This do and you will live. Now everyone agrees we ought to keep the Ten Commandments or at least they used to.

In this godless age people are casting aside even the Ten Commandments but if we do agree that we ought to obey them do we? We might keep them in the letter but we disobey them in the spirit. Paul teaches elsewhere that we are slaves to sin but Christ sets us free from that slavery. He sets us free from the power of sin and gives us the power to walk in righteousness.

through Christ also we are freed from an endless enslavement to ritual. Under the law of Moses there were endless sacrifices to be made endless rules to obey.

[31 : 09] These Jews in Antioch they would feel that only too keenly and maybe some of the Gentiles had been put off by it but all of that is done away with in Christ because Christ has fulfilled the law.

Now today perhaps this promise expressed in this way might not have the same appeal. Not many people today are consciously trying to be set freed from anything by the law of Moses except perhaps Orthodox Jews with their black hats and tassels.

And yet whenever anyone speaks of being accepted by God because of what they have done because they've been baptized because they've been confirmed because they've taken communion because they've lived a good life because they're as good as the next man what are they doing?

They're trying to be saved by the law. Their own law perhaps their own rituals but the principle is the same. Nothing that you do will ever save you.

God has provided a saviour Jesus and he alone can save you. we're saved by grace through faith in Christ.

[32 : 45] There is no other way. Peter also says there is salvation in no one else. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Again in Acts 15 Peter says we believe that we will be saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul and Peter then still speaking with the same voice.

Paul ends though with a warning of judgment verses 40 and 41 Beware then lest what is said in the prophets should come about look you scoffers be astounded and perish for I'm doing a work in your days a work that you will not believe even if one tells it to you.

He's quoting there Habakkuk 1 and verse 5 a prophecy that will go on to warn of the Babylonian invasion. Is Paul suggesting perhaps that national disaster will come upon the Jews if they did not

repent?

It certainly did in 1870 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and Jesus himself had prophesied that disaster.

[34 : 06] Certainly personal disaster will come upon anyone who rejects Christ. If Christ is the only one who can save you then you will be lost if you reject him and lost forever.

It's not a friendly way to end a sermon perhaps but it's necessary. This is a life and death decision that these people were facing and it's a life and death decision that we face today when confronted by the gospel.

So how did they react? Well in verse 42 we have the initial reaction as they went out people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath.

It wasn't just that they wanted to hear it all again. Enjoyed that Paul wouldn't mind hearing that sermon again. No they want to know more. There's all kinds of unanswered questions.

things that Paul hadn't explained. They're eager to hear more. They begged him to come back the next Sabbath. How often do people beg to hear more today?

[35 : 31] More often they're looking at the clock wondering how much longer the preacher is going to go on for. Oh for a spiritual hunger in our land.

Oh for people eager to hear more about Christ. But more than that some are converted.

Verse 43 after the meeting of the synagogue broke up many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas who as they spoke with them urged them to continue in the grace of God.

the same advice that Jesus gave to those Jews who followed him in John chapter 8 the same advice that Paul and Barnabas would give to those who were converted in the churches in Acts 14 encouraging them to continue in the faith.

How we need today for people to continue in the faith. There are many who make a good start and then fall away. Jesus says those who endure to the end shall be saved.

[36 : 45] So where do you stand in regard to this sermon of Paul? What is your reaction? Make all the allowances you need for this being a sermon to the Jews.

Its central message is a message to us all. Christ is still the only saviour. Have you believed in him personally for your own salvation?

If Christ is the climax of history then if you reject him you are on the wrong side of history. Many were converted that day but many weren't.

I wonder what the others thought. Maybe they went home thinking that was interesting. You know people often make comments to me after a sermon and sometimes they say that was an interesting sermon and it's meant as a compliment I'm sure but I always feel deflated by it.

I want people to be more than interested. want them to be convicted and convinced and thrilled about Christ. Or maybe some of them went home thinking I didn't really agree with that.

[38 : 13] How does he get the resurrection out of those scriptures? Is he doing away with the law of Moses? Well at least they were asking questions.

Perhaps next week they would get their answers. I hope that your reaction is yes Jesus is the saviour and I want him to save me.

And I hope he'll go beyond that and say I want him to save everyone in this congregation in this town in this nation.

May the Lord thrill our hearts with the good news of salvation through Christ. Amen.