



Easter 2023: The Resurrection Says Yes (Acts 13:13-43)

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My grandmother on my dad's side turned 101 last month and is in remarkable health considering her age. My parents recently took our boys for a visit to her assisted living facility outside Barboursville, WV. The boys returned with iPods full of pictures and movies from the experience. Watching them brought back memories of conversations I used to have with her when I was growing up, including the fact that when you asked her a question, she would almost always say, "Yes."

For 95 years, she has been completely deaf in one ear and partially deaf in the other. Though she can read lips, she often doesn't understand what people are saying. Her disability hasn't made her reluctant serve people or engage in conversation. She has a remarkably generous and unselfish spirit and participates as best she can, usually with a smile. And if she's not sure what you've said or what she's supposed to say, she simply says, "Yes" with a long, slow, West Virginia accent.

As a young boy, I decided her default setting was a golden opportunity. My siblings and I would take turns asking questions like, "Grandma, can I have a million dollars?" And then clap for joy when she inevitably said, "Yes." To this day, in my mind, grandma is the woman who loved to say, "Yes."

Friends, the God who created us and redeems us is a God who delights to say, "Yes," but it's not because he doesn't know what else to say. He says "yes" because he is a faithful God! 2 Cor 1:19-20, "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you...was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him."

We live in a world full of shattered hopes, unfulfilled dreams, unmet longings for all manner of things that are good, true, and beautiful. People make promises they don't keep, commitments they fail to honor, and have intentions they cannot fulfill. Unfaithfulness hurts.

Perhaps you think of God like that. Sure, he says some nice things. But look at my life. Look at my suffering. Maybe there was a time when you thought he was worthy of your trust, but now you're not so sure. You can relate to the travelers on the road to Emmaus in Lk 24:21, who, speaking of Jesus after his crucifixion, said, "But we had



hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” Your own story feels like a long list of “had hoped.”

In a world where other people don’t keep their promises and we don’t keep our own promises, Jesus’ resurrection from the dead says something, it proclaims something, it proves and reveals something. God keeps his promises. He does all he says he will do.

The Old Testament is filled with divine promises, promises to restore, promises to heal, promises to grant freedom and joy and life where our rebellion against the authority and law of God ushered in corruption and death. To every one of those promises, the resurrection says, “Yes.” Why? **Because God’s promised salvation is fulfilled through Jesus’ resurrection for all who believe.**

God’s faithfulness is not an abstract idea. It compels him to do everything he says he will do, to accomplish mighty acts of salvation on our behalf, culminating in raising Jesus from the dead. And that is the good news of Easter, my friends. To all the saving promises of God, the resurrection says, “Yes.” In Acts 13, Paul makes at least three points about the salvation we need, and God has been faithful to provide.

1) SALVATION IS A GIFT FROM A FAITHFUL GOD

Paul’s account of God’s redemptive work begins with an invitation from the rulers of the Jewish synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, a 1st century Roman colony located in modern Turkey. V. 15, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.”

The sermon he preaches in response was a “word of encouragement” back then and remains a “word of encouragement” today. Why? Because these words are more than Paul’s words. They are Jesus’ words. They represent, no less than the rest of Acts, what Jesus continued to do and teach through his disciples and is still doing and teaching through us today!

In vv. 17-22, Paul summarizes roughly 1000 years of Israel’s history, beginning with God’s sovereign choice to draw their “fathers,” Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to himself. It was a story his Jewish audience had heard from childhood. But notice how Paul tells it. He doesn’t say Abraham did this, Moses did that, then Samuel, Saul, and David did their thing. No. Who’s the subject of all the verbs? It’s the Lord!

He “chose” their fathers. God’s work in our lives always begins with his gracious initiative. He “made” the people great during centuries of harsh slavery in Egypt. His



favor prevails over all the schemes of wicked men. And he “led” them out with an “uplifted arm.” Deliverance from trouble doesn’t come from our own wisdom or understand, it comes from the Lord.

It was all an act of grace. He “put up with them” in the wilderness. He patiently bore with his people despite their persistent refusal to trust and obey. Mercy is the theme of our song. But it’s not because God is unjust or soft on wrongdoing and sin. After all, he destroyed “seven nations” in Canaan on account of their wickedness! No, he carried Israel because he promised to bring her to the place, he had prepared for her and he was faithful to keep his promises!

However, the timing of his gift of salvation is not governed by the dictates of human wisdom or understanding. V. 20, “All this took about 450 years.” Do you think the wait made sense to Israel after 300 years of slavery? God’s ways haven’t changed, brothers and sisters. When something makes no sense to you at the time, do not conclude God his missing in action. Humbly remember his ways and thoughts are higher than your ways and thoughts.

The story of Israel’s salvation, from beginning to end, was God’s work. He “gave” them judges. He gave them prophets like Samuel. He “gave” and “removed” a king named Saul. And he “raised up” David, the son of Jesse, in his place. What was significant about King David? V. 22, he was “a man after my heart, who will do all my will.” Yes, David was faithful in amazing ways, but even his story is punctuated with spectacular failures.

In fact, every leader through whom God graciously and faithfully worked deliverance for his people for the previous 1000 years inevitably failed at some point to do “all” God’s will. So does that make the divine assessment, the divine promise in v. 22, a lie? Not in the least! Where David ultimately failed, David’s greater Son did not. For there is a man in the line of David who perfectly and completely did “all” God’s will in the power of the Spirit. V. 23, “Of this man’s offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised.”

Jesus is not less than a man. And yet he is infinitely more, the eternal Son of God, the Creator of heaven and earth, clothed in human flesh. It’s why John the Baptist, the last and greatest of all the prophets – a man who knew his own frailty – said so forcefully, “I am not he!” I am not the Messiah. I am not the Lord’s Christ. I’m not the Savior. But he’s coming. He’s on his way. He’s almost here. And for him, I am not worthy to perform even the lowliest and most menial act of service.

What does Israel's story from Abraham to David to Jesus tell us? God is the main actor and the salvation we need comes from him. We need his mercy. We need his intervention. We need a perfectly obedient man to live the life we are supposed to live and inevitably fail to live, to earn the divine approval we can never earn. That's what Jesus came to do, friends. God promised a Savior and he has acted in history to provide a Savior by becoming our Savior. Salvation is a gift from a faithful God.

2) SALVATION IS ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION

In vv. 26-37, Paul lingers on exactly what it is that Jesus did to bring God's promised salvation to pass. For he did it in a certain kind of way – not by immediately healing all our diseases, or ending global conflict, or giving us all the same standard of living, or the spouse or kids we wish we had. He saved us by dying on a cross and rising from the grave, just as God promised.

And in both cases, in both Jesus' death and resurrection, Paul doesn't simply say what Jesus did or what happened to him, but that it was a direct fulfillment, a loud "yes" promises God made centuries beforehand. His account of the crucifixion in vv. 27-29 begins with a reference to the Old Testament prophecies or "utterances" read every Sunday in synagogues like the one in Pisidian Antioch.

They would have read passages like Isa 53:5, "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed." Or texts like Ps 22:16-18, "They have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

The Jews in Jerusalem and their rulers should have recognized Jesus as the Suffering Servant. But they were spiritually blind. They didn't see themselves as sinners who deserved the curse of death on a tree. We're the good people. Our Roman oppressors, the political leaders we didn't vote for, the people on the other side of the aisle, they're the problem. They're the bad guys.

Thus, they saw nothing on the cross but a religious pretender, a messianic farce, a threat to religious authority, a blasphemer who claimed to be God. "Jesus can't be long-awaited Savior. Look at him! He can't even save himself!" But their spiritual blindness didn't derail God's plan; it accomplished God's plan. It was the very means God used to fulfill promises like Isa 53 and Ps 22. V. 27, they fulfilled them "by condemning him."

Make no mistake, Jesus was completely innocent. V. 28, “They found in him no guilt worthy of death.” And yet it was his very innocence that enabled him to bear our guilt and shame, dying so we wouldn’t have to die. That’s how God works. He uses the greatest evil, the greatest injustice the world has ever known, the crucifixion of God himself, to vindicate his justice and accomplish his salvation in accordance with the perfect sovereignty of his will. People thought they were inflicting their will on Jesus. In reality, v. 29, they were carrying out “all that was written of him.”

Jesus’ opponents thought his death meant game over. His followers thought it meant evil had won – again. Better luck next time. Or maybe history is nothing more than an endless cycle of powerful people oppressing the weak for selfish gain. That’s a persuasive argument, except for the fact that the story doesn’t end there. Look at v. 30. On the third day after his death, “God raised him from the dead.”

V. 32, “We bring you good news that what God promised to the fathers,” the salvation from sin and death he said he would bring to pass, “this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus...” And Paul immediately gives three promises from the Old Testament that point forward to the resurrection.

First, he quotes Ps 2:7, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.” In its original context, the Son in Ps 2 is all of God’s chosen people, Israel. In other sense, it’s the Davidic king, the rulers in the line of David whom God appointed to govern his people. But ultimately “the Son” in Ps 2 points forward to someone far greater than David. It points forward to Jesus!

As Paul says in Rom 1:4, he was “declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.” The One who created the stars, who reigned supreme from the dawn of time, who upheld all things by the word of his power even as he hung on the cross, that Jesus, was vindicated in the eyes of the world and revealed before the host of heaven as our all-sufficient Savior on the day he rose from the grave. The first Easter morning was a royal coronation, the inauguration of Christ’s redemptive rule, the crowning display of the indestructible power of his life.

“Today I have begotten you” doesn’t mean Jesus became God’s Son on the day of his resurrection. It means he was crowned and recognized as the Davidic King, our Savior, through the triumph of his resurrection. And as the Davidic King, what does Jesus accomplish? V. 34 tells us. “I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.”

The “you” is plural, which means the “holy and sure blessings” are not limited to the king but are given to all his people along with him. Paul’s paraphrasing Isa 55:3 where the Lord makes a promise to his people: “I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.” What did God promise David? That he would not remove his steadfast love from him and his offspring. So what sort of love is he ultimately talking about? In light of Ps 2:7, it’s God’s love for Jesus, David’s Greater Son.

In Isa 55:3, God promises nothing less than to bring his people into the experience of steadfast, fatherly love Jesus himself enjoys! And bringing us into that eternal experience requires something. Jesus must continue to live! Then and only then can all who are found in him, united to him, one with him, continues to receive and enjoy the steadfast love Jesus receives and enjoys. Our life, our continued acceptance and welcome and enjoyment of the Father’s love, is wholly bound to his.

And Paul knows as much, which is why he says in v. 35, quoting another promise in Ps 16:10, “You will not let your Holy One see corruption,” meaning, “You will not leave the Son of your delight in the grave!” The Father’s active, personal love for Jesus is eternal because Jesus’ life is eternal. Jesus’ life is indestructible. As Peter declares earlier in Acts 2:24, “God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”

Ps 2 says Jesus is David’s Son, to whom the Father promised eternal dominion. Isa 55 says we will receive as God’s people nothing less than the very blessings Jesus himself enjoys. And Jesus is able and faithful share the fullness of the Father’s love with us as his people because he’s not dead. He’s alive! In the words of David Peterson, “Israel’s future is intimately connected with what happens to her Messiah.” Because Ps 2:7 and Ps 16:10 are true of Christ, Isa 55:3 is true of us! All three promises anticipate the resurrection, require the resurrection, and are fulfilled by Jesus’ resurrection.

When David died, his body remain in the earth and returned to dust just like yours will, friend unless the Lord returns first! V. 36, “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.” Not so when Jesus’ died! V. 37, “But he whom God raised up did not see corruption.”

Jesus’ body did not languish in the grave and return to dust, waiting like David for resurrection on the final day, because Jesus was not done serving “the purpose of God” in his generation! He was only getting started, drawing lost men and women to himself, opening blind eyes to see his all-satisfying beauty, working all things



according to the perfect counsel of his will. It's the very work our crucified and risen Savior is still doing today, serving the purposes of God in our own generation.

And his resurrection has implications for our generation, friends. It's more than a historical fact. It proclaims something. It says something. It announces something.

3) SALVATION CONSISTS OF FREEDOM FROM THE GUILT AND POWER OF SIN

Look at v. 38. "Let it be known to you therefore, brothers..." Because God raised Jesus up, let it be unmistakably clear, let it be forever certain, let it be unchangeably sure "that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you..."

Forgiveness of sins has always been the obstacle to experiencing the joy of relationship with God. It's a need we all have. In fact, it's our greatest need. And it is a gift the resurrection secures. Think of it this way. What if Jesus had died on the cross and remained in the tomb? What would we not know? We wouldn't know whether his sacrifice was sufficient! Sure, the blood of bulls and calves could never take away sin and Jesus' sacrifice is better, but was it enough? Might the justice of God require something more?

Heb 10:12, "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God..." His resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand in glory confirmed the death he died was more than enough. Enough to atone for your guilt. Enough to cover your shame. Enough to make you right with God. His resurrection ensures the fulfillment of promises like Jer 31:34, "They shall all know me...for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more."

Friends, there is nothing noble in beating yourself up when you sin, languishing in self-condemnation, as if despising yourself in sufficient measure could make up for your iniquity or call forth God's compassion. Nor is there anything noble in those who say, "I believe God forgives me. I just can't forgive myself." Who are you to take the place of God? Who are you to privilege your judgment of yourself over the Judge of all the earth. Judgment belongs to the Lord! Do not enthrone yourself above him. To say, "I can't forgive myself," is to walk in pride cloaked in a veneer of humility. The resurrection proclaims forgiveness of sins through Christ and Christ alone! Do not reject as insufficient what the resurrection declares is wholly sufficient!

But that's not all. Paul continues in v. 39. "And by him everyone who believes is freed from everything which you could not be freed from the law of Moses." We've been studying the law of Moses in Deuteronomy the last few months. So what does it do?



The law brings an awareness of sin, the conviction of sin. It shows us what it really means to love for God, to love our neighbor, and how far we fall short.

The law cannot remove the sin that separates us from God. Nor can it change our hearts and give us power to obey. It marks out the path of God's commands but doesn't provide the freedom we need to run in them. But what the law could never do Jesus is faithful to do! He offers us forgiveness, freedom from the guilt of sin through his all-sufficient death. And he offers us deliverance, freedom from the power of sin, by filling us with the Spirit who exercises in our hearts and lives the same power that raised Jesus from the grave!

Do you feel your need for deliverance from the power of sin, brothers and sisters? Is there something you know is wrong, but you keep doing it again and again? The resurrection says the freedom you long for is available, not in the distant future or when you manage to get your life together, but right here, right now. It's found in Jesus.

Parents, please remember that. When your children are struggling to obey, what they ultimately need is not a more strident lesson, a firmer lecture in what "not" to do. They need you to point them to Jesus. Point them to the cross. Point them to the empty tomb. Remind them again and again that freedom from the enslaving power of sin comes from Christ and Christ alone. And here's the good news. He's eager to set us free!

There is only one requirement and Paul identifies as much in v. 39. You must believe. Believe what? Believe what the resurrection confirms and declares – that through his life and death, Jesus has done all that is necessary to save you from the guilt and power of sin. Faith in Jesus is how we experience the fullness of his resurrection life in our lives.

Faith in Jesus mean you stop trying to make yourself acceptable to God, trying to earn his love, merit his approval, or prove you are good enough, and start trusting Jesus to justify you. Faith in Jesus means you stop trying to "do better" and "be better" and start trusting Jesus, relying on the power of the Spirit, to sanctify you. Don't try to save yourself. Look to Jesus!

That's what genuine saving faith does. Not once, but day after day after day. Today, Jesus, because you rose, I believe I am forgiven. Today, Jesus, because you rose, I believe I am free. That doesn't make the measure of our faith the measure of our salvation. Belief doesn't forgive anyone. Belief doesn't free anyone. We are forgiven

and freed “by him,” as Paul says in v. 39. Rather faith unites us with Christ such that his story becomes our story.

Rom 6:5-8, 11, “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him...So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

God’s salvation consists of freedom from the guilt and power of sin. And that promise is fulfilled through Jesus’ resurrection for all who believe. Without the resurrection, there is no salvation. But because God raised Jesus from the dead, just as he promised, we know his merit is greater than our guilt. His honor is greater than our shame. His power is greater than every evil. The Savior took our sin into the grave and the Savior walked out victorious. Justice has been vindicated. Salvation has been accomplished. Death has been defeated and life secured because Jesus prevailed.

CONCLUSION

And in so doing, the resurrection issues a warning, a gracious and loving “beware” in v. 40. The question is not does God keep his promises. To all the saving promises of God, the resurrection says Yes. The question is whether you will utter “Amen” to God for his glory – believing them, trusting Jesus, obeying Jesus – or stubbornly refuse to believe because you don’t see the need or you think you’ll have plenty of time in the future to work things out with God, if there even is a God.

Know if you choose the latter, friend, if you reject or dismiss or ignore the resurrection, you are fulfilling yet another divine promise, only in this case it’s a promise of judgment. V. 40, “Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the prophets should come about.” And then Paul paraphrases Hab 1:5, “Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.”

The work God promised to accomplish then was a work of judgment, a word Judah refused to believe. We’re fine, Habakkuk. Nothing bad will happen to us. The Babylonians won’t take us into exile. They rejected the Word of the Lord and suffered the consequences.



Friends, many continue to make the same fatal mistake today. If you scoff at the gospel, if you refused to take seriously your need for a Savior and God's provision in Jesus, you will perish in your sin. Trusting Jesus to save you isn't a religious lifestyle option. It's a matter of life and death.

Today, you have heard the gospel. Forgiveness of sins has been proclaimed to you. Freedom from the power of sin has been made known to you. Both are found in Jesus and him alone. I urge you, respond the way the people in Pisidian Antioch did. In v. 42, they "begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath."

Why is that the right response? Because we never outgrow our need for the gospel. We need Christ crucified and risen portrayed before our eyes again and again in all its glorious implications. That's what it means to "continue in the grace of God," as Paul and Barnabas urged them to do in v. 43.

Today, Jesus, display your resurrection power in my life. Help me to hope in you because you are alive. To trust in you because you are alive. To rest in your salvation because you have accomplished all that is necessary to save me – past, present, and future. I need you, Jesus. Thank you for being the Savior I need.

How do we know God is faithful to save? How do we know God will do all he has said he will do? Because (v. 34) he raised Jesus "from the dead, no more to return to corruption." To all the promises of God the resurrection says, "Yes." Yes, God is able. Yes, God is faithful. Yes, his sacrifice is sufficient. Yes, his power is greater. Yes, his life can be your life. Yes, sin and death will not have the final word. A day is coming, when the resurrection body Jesus now enjoys will be the resurrection body you enjoy.

More than anything else, the resurrection is a call to faith that Jesus is who he says he is. No matter what is going on in your life right now, that is your greatest need. A sturdy, unwavering, unshakeable faith that Jesus who he says he is. That all the promises of God find their Yes in him. On this Easter Sunday, may we utter Amen to God for his glory. He is worthy, brothers and sisters. Let's pray.