

Death Could Not Hold Him

Acts 13:13-41

April 5th, 2026

1. The _____ – Paul's first missionary journey (13:13-15)

2. The _____ – Old Testament overview (13:16-25)

3. The _____ – Jesus' death and resurrection (13:26-37)

4. The _____ – What will you do with Jesus? (13:38-41)

5. Why do the death and resurrection of Jesus matter?
 - a. Your failure isn't _____.

 - b. Your future will be in a _____ body.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on Acts 13:13-41

1. Follow the story arc for John (Mark) from Acts 13:13 to 15:36-41 to 2 Timothy 4:11. We have minimal details, but what appears to be the source of the conflict? How does it appear to resolve by the end of Paul's life?

2. Underline each of the verbs that describe God's actions in vv. 17-23. Why does Paul emphasize God's role in Old Testament history?

3. Of all the OT events that Paul could have included in his summary but did not include, why do you think he included those that he did? How do they prepare the way for his emphasis on the death and resurrection of Jesus?

4. Paul quotes Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:33. What other messianic aspects do you see in the Psalm, especially in vv. 8-12?

5. What line of reasoning do we see in the string of OT quotes from vv. 33-35?

6. In what ways do you think people – and perhaps yourself – feel the weight of guilt in their lives and they need the assurance of forgiveness in Jesus? (v. 38)

7. What similarities do you see between Paul's message in Acts 13 and the content of 1 Corinthians 15:1-5?

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Big idea: Forgiveness comes through Jesus who fulfilled OT promises by His death and resurrection.

Intro

Dutch artist Vermeer – The Art of Painting – in 1666-1668 - It portrays an artist at work in a meticulously rendered studio interior

This is a sermon about a sermon – a message about a message.

The original message was given by the apostle Paul at a Jewish synagogue in the mountains of modern day Turkey.

It's a master class in briefly, concisely summarizing the OT, pointing to Jesus, and placing the decision before people – what will you do with Jesus?

We are covering it today because the central fact of Paul's message is that Jesus rose from the dead.

1. The **Setting** – Paul's first missionary journey (13:13-15)

- a. At the beginning of ch 13 Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark were commissioned and sent out from a church in modern day Syria.
- b. They began their journey by sea to the Island of Cyprus and that's where v 13 picks up.
- c. They leave the town of Paphos in Cyprus, land at Perga on the coast of modern day Turkey.
 - i. John (Mark) left and returned.
 1. By itself it's a small, innocuous statement, but it's loaded.
 2. John, who also goes by Mark, is Barnabas' cousin. When Barnabas wanted to bring Mark along again in ch 15, Paul disagreed because Mark had "deserted them." Paul and Barnabas ended up separating over this.
 3. People speculate – was he homesick? Was it too physically grueling? Did he disagree with Paul? We don't know.
 4. We do know they reconciled by the end of Paul's life. While in prison, Paul writes for Timothy to bring Mark along to visit him.
 5. I appreciate the honesty and realism of the Bible. Relationships have friction, even among believers, even among leaders.
- d. Paul and Barnabas travel to Pisidian Antioch, a 100 mile journey over the mountains.
 - i. The route was barren, steep, and dangerously affected by robbers that even the Romans couldn't bring under control.
 - ii. It's easy to read a couple words, glance at a map, but miss the difficulty. When was the last time you went on a 100 mile backpacking trip through the mountains with an elevation change of 3,600 feet?
 - iii. Some of the most unreached people groups remain in some of the most inaccessible places – the mountains of Nepal, Pakistan, and China; the dense, isolated jungle of Papua New Guinea

- e. They enter the synagogue on the sabbath for a typical service, which would have included a recitation of the *shema* (Deut. 6:4-5), readings from the law of Moses and a related text from the prophets, and then a sermon that was usually based on the readings.
- f. They invited Paul and Barnabas to speak, and Paul took them up on the invitation.

2. The **Introduction** – Old Testament overview (13:16-25)

- a. He addressed his audience – Jews and “you who fear God”
 - i. The primary target is the Jewish audience. His message is loaded with OT history that they would have known and quotes from scripture they would have known. He was in a Jewish synagogue on the Jewish Sabbath.
 - ii. However, there were some “who fear God,” which was a way of describing Greek Gentiles who believing in the true God, the God of Israel.
- b. He spans centuries of history, from “the fathers” – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to Egypt and deliverance (Exodus), the wilderness (Exodus – Deut), war and the distribution of land (Joshua) – 450 years as a round number that includes Egypt through the land.
- c. He skips along the surface of judges, Samuel, and Saul.
 - i. They asked for a king – 1 Sam 8
 - 1. God had warned them in Deut. 17 about setting a king over them
 - 2. But they do it in 1 Sam 8, demanding a king like the nations around them. He gave them Saul, but Saul was a trainwreck.
- d. Then we get to David, a man after God’s own heart, from whom God promised would come the Messiah, the king of kings, whose kingdom would have no end.
- e. Paul skips a thousand years of history from David to John the Baptist, the transitional figure who prepared the way for Jesus.
- f. His OT overview is saturated with God – God is the main character. He is the subject of almost every verb.
 - i. 17 God chose, God made the people great, He led them out
 - ii. 18 He put up with them
 - iii. 19 He destroyed, distributed their land
 - iv. 20 He gave them judges
 - v. 21 gave them Saul
 - vi. 22 removed him, Raised up David
 - vii. 23 God has brought to Israel a savior
 - viii. 30 But God raised Him from the dead
- g. Merida “None of their history is random because God doesn’t do random. He is accomplishing his purposes in history.”

3. The **Focus** – Jesus’ death and resurrection (13:26-37)

- a. Brethren, sons of Abraham’s family – leaning in to the crowd around him in the synagogue, to whom he had just recounted their own history and promises and the activity of God among their people

- b. Those in Jerusalem, especially their rulers, didn't recognize Him.
 - i. We are studying this week after week in John, as Jesus implores them and reasons with them to believe, but most do not.
 - ii. After His death and resurrection, that continued. Certainly many turned to the gospel – thousands – but there was also opposition and persecution.
 - iii. Not only did they not recognize Him, they didn't recognize what they read every Sabbath.
 - 1. He says this to a group who had just read from the prophets.
 - 2. There is a danger in reading and reading and reading and yet missing Jesus.
- c. In their free actions they still nevertheless fulfilled prophecy
 - i. They fulfilled by condemning Him
 - ii. They carried out all that was written concerning Him
- d. They took Him down and laid him in a tomb
 - i. Historical details, described as fact, undeniable in the record that He was killed on the cross and laid in a tomb.
- e. But God... (v. 30)
 - i. How many great verses of the Bible start with these two words?
 - 1. Gen 8:1- But God remembered Noah
 - 2. Gen 17:19 – But God said, No, but Sarah your wife will bear a son
 - 3. Rom 5:8 – But God demonstrates His own love toward us
 - 4. Eph 2:4 – But God, being rich in mercy...
 - 5. Our lives, our stories, our eternities would be radically different, but for God.
 - ii. We would not be talking about Jesus if His story ended in v. 29. But it doesn't end in v. 29.
 - iii. The resurrection was verification
 - 1. It proved that His death on the cross in the place of sinners like you and me was sufficient, it worked, it was accepted, it was enough.
 - 2. It proved that His words were true – He said He would raise and He did raise.
 - iv. He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee – His friends, His disciples, His followers – people who knew Him and would recognize Him.
 - 1. Paul is giving historical details, undeniable not the recounting of a mythical legend.
 - 2. This is the same thing that Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15
 - 3. **1 Corinthians 15:3-8** For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; ⁷ then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; ⁸ and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.
- f. So, we preach good news (v. 32)
 - i. Like a herald bringing an announcement from a far land

1. Kids, if you are the first to hear that school has been canceled, how eager are you to tell your brothers, sisters, and friends?
 2. When there is good news, we want to share it!
- ii. Good news of the promise made to the fathers
 1. This is why he gave a flyover of OT history
 - iii. God has fulfilled the promise to our children, or “to us their children” as ESV puts it
- g. OT quotes
- i. Jesus is the Son of Psalm 2
 1. Vickers: Jesus’ sonship cannot be separated from his kingship, as he is the royal son of David who could not be contained by death (“corruption”; [Acts 13:34](#)). Paul strings together [Psalm 2:7](#); [Isaiah 55:3](#); and [Psalm 16:10](#) as scriptural support.
 - ii. He is the source of the holy and sure blessings of David from Isaiah 55:3
 1. The “holy and sure” blessings are permanent only because of David’s Son – David’s descendant – who rose from the dead.
 - iii. He is the Holy One who will not undergo decay in Psalm 16:10
 1. King David died and underwent decay –
 - a. According to Dr. Arpad Vass, a professor in forensic anthropology, human decomposition begins around four minutes after a person dies and follows four stages: autolysis, bloat, active decay, and skeletonization.
 - b. The body has no way of getting oxygen, so cells almost immediately begin to break down.
 - c. Leaking gases from the cells cause bloating.
 - d. Soft tissues decay
 2. David, the king after God’s own heart, died and underwent decay, but “He whom God raised did not undergo decay.”
4. The **Application** – What will you do with Jesus? (13:38-41)
- a. Therefore – What difference does this make? How should we respond?
 - i. The OT history
 - ii. The death of Jesus
 - iii. The resurrection of Jesus
 - b. Through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you
 - i. It’s not that everyone is automatically forgiven but rather it is proclaimed but you must respond.
 - ii. Through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things from which you couldn’t be freed through the law of Moses.
 1. The word for “freed” is the same word often translated “justified.”
 2. “Freed” from the weight and guilt of sin, forgiven for your sins.
 3. Guilt is a heavy weight to carry. An unsettled conscience is a terrible burden.

- a. We try to deal with it by blaming others, convincing ourselves we aren't really wrong, turning to distractions, turning to other good actions to make up for our bad actions, we shower with gifts, we make renewed commitments to obey God or do better and try harder, we punish ourselves with self-denial. But none of those things work.
- b. Our guilt must be taken away – and that's what Jesus does. It's not through the "law of Moses" it's through Jesus.

iii. Where is Paul when he gives this message?

- 1. Pisidian Antioch, modern day Turkey, also known as Galatia. A few months after giving this message, he would write a letter to the churches in this region, maybe to some of these very people who are hearing this message in the synagogue.
- 2. This message that takes up 25 verses in Acts 13 is developed over 6 thoughtful, precise chapters in the NT letter of Galatians.
- 3. **Galatians 2:20-21** "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. ²¹ "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."
- 4. **Galatians 3:24** Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

c. But for those who scoff and reject, take heed

- i. He quotes from Habakkuk in a warning about judgment.
- ii. Remember, he's in a synagogue speaking primarily to Jews, and so he peppers the message with OT scripture.
- iii. Habakkuk warned about the coming attack from the nation of Babylon, but Paul uses it as a picture of a greater judgment to come for those who reject

5. Why do the death and resurrection of Jesus matter?

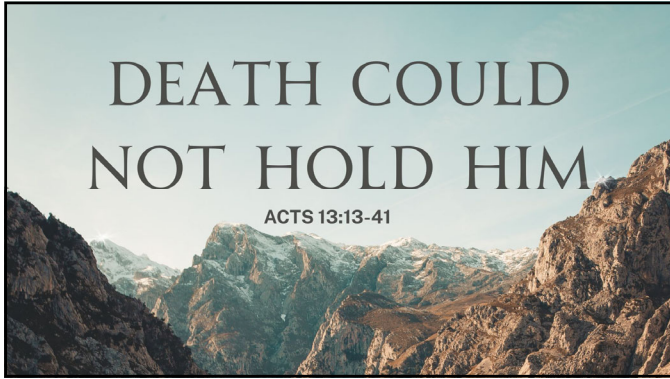
a. Your failure isn't ***final***.

- i. You can be forgiven by the one before whom you stand most guilty.
- ii. People may harbor unforgiveness, and you might not be able to change that. There may be practical consequences of your mistakes, lapses in judgment, outright rebellion.
- iii. However, before God, the judge of all the earth, you can be declared innocent, even righteous. Not because you are innocent or righteous by your own life, but because Jesus was. And He died your death and rose to life.

b. Your future will be in a ***resurrected*** body.

- i. Death for a Christian is a doorway not a destination. It is shedding the perishable to put on the imperishable. It is replacing a tent with a home (2 Cor. 5:1)
- ii. **1 Corinthians 15:20** But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.
- iii. Your future will be in a resurrected body. Because Jesus rose, you will rise. As Jesus rose, you will rise.
- iv. DA Carson, "I'm not suffering from anything that a good resurrection can't fix."

- v. You're suffering from lots of things –
 1. Physically – you may have chronic pain that one person described like having an alarm clock taped to your head and constantly going off, you may have a terminal diagnosis that statistically gives you 1-5 years. It may just be the relentless ticking of time and the realization that in your 40's you can't do what you do in your 30's, and in your 50's you can't do what you did in your 40's, and on and on.
 2. Relationally – you're a sinner living among sinners and you may have strained relationships
 3. Emotionally – you might find yourself wracked by anxiety and depression, you've seen growth but they are still there in the background like an unwelcome guest.
- vi. These are all remnants of living in a sin cursed world. But our future is a future in resurrected bodies



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