

But... Easter  
Acts 13:27-31

### Slide 1

The greatest gift offered this Easter started as a day marked with mourning, but today it's a day of celebration.

It was a day when the forces of Evil celebrated victory, but today it's seen as the day when goodness and grace triumphed.

It started as a day when people paused to remember what man did to God, but today it's a day when people stop and remember what God's done for man.

As we continue to look at Acts 13, we see that Paul was preaching to a crowd in Antioch telling them the Jesus story of which part of his sermon, only 115 words, described the Easter weekend.

Last week we learned that in those 115 words, there's a *'but'* for Good Friday and a *'but'* for Easter. That one little word is the pivot on which history now turns.

Because of today's "but," all history is divided into BC, Before Christ (now BCE, Before Common Era) and AD, *Anno Domini*, The Year of the Lord (now CE, Common Era). Listen again to Paul's message:

*Acts 13:27-28, "The people in Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize Jesus as the one the prophets had spoken about. Instead, they condemned him, and in doing this they fulfilled the prophets' words that are read every Sabbath. They found no legal reason to execute him, but they asked Pilate to have him killed anyway."*

Now, that was Friday, but this is Sunday!

Acts 13:29-31, *“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.”*

Did you catch the ‘but’? *“They took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. **But** God raised him from the dead!”*

That ‘but’ was the deal breaker for everyone. Because, with that ‘but,’ everything changed.

## **Slide 2**

On Thursday, the Apostles had been on top of the world. They had arrived in Jerusalem and celebrated the Passover feast together.

But by Friday one of the twelve was dead by his own hand, one had denied he had ever known Jesus and nine had scattered rather than be associated with the One they called master and friend.

When Jesus needed them most, they had given Him their least. And now, on Sunday morning, they were defeated and discouraged.

They felt that they hadn’t just lost their friend, but they’d lost their dignity in their denial. Not only that, they felt they’d lost three years of their lives they’d invested in following Jesus.

What did they talk about on Saturday or what plans were they making on Sunday. Were they wondering when the Romans would arrive at their door to take them away?

Were they planning on leaving Jerusalem and heading back to the Galilee, resuming the lives they had left behind? Were they wondering what they were going to tell their friends and family?

They'd been so confident that Jesus was the One, that Jesus was the Messiah. Now He was dead, and they felt defeated. But... that all changed when the women arrived at the tomb and found it empty.

If the religious leaders and the Romans had been right about Jesus, there would've been a body in the tomb, but the tomb was empty.

Now I would never presume to put myself inside the mind of Jesus, but if my friends had denied me or deserted me, I think I would've been a little put out.

I think I would've gone back to the Father and said, *“Well, that didn't work out so well, did it?”*

Listen to Mark's account of the resurrection. Mark 16:5-7, *“As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. “Don't be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”*

Did you catch that? The women were told to go and tell the disciples and Peter, that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Wait a minute. Who were they to tell... the disciples? Those nine who fled when Jesus needed them the most, and not only them but Peter who denied that he had ever known Jesus.

They were to tell them that Jesus' body was not in the grave, but that He lives. With that statement, they knew they had been forgiven.

They knew that Jesus' talk about grace and forgiveness wasn't just words but when Jesus had looked down from the cross and said, *“Father forgive them,”* that He was talking about them.

Regardless of how Sunday morning started, His resurrection changed everything. C. S. Lewis once said, *“You can’t go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.”*

The Apostles didn’t get a do over for what happened on Friday but, through His grace, Jesus offered them the opportunity to start again.

But it wasn’t only the present that was changed.

### **Slide 3**

Because of the ‘but,’ the future was changed, too. The world’s what it is because of Jesus. Not because of His teaching, not because of His death, but because of His resurrection.

Without the resurrection, the life and ministry of Jesus would’ve only had a minimal impact on the world. His words would’ve been forgotten; His teachings would’ve been lost.

But all that changed when the women found an empty tomb instead of a body. Then, 40 days after he rose from the dead, Jesus told His followers what His church would accomplish and how they would do it.

Remember our scripture from two weeks ago? Acts 1:8 were the last words that Jesus spoke to the Apostles before He returned to the Father.

Remember, this was forty days after the resurrection, Acts 1:8, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

That’s exactly what happened. Because Jesus had risen from the dead, the Holy Spirit empowered the 11 and they became witnesses about Jesus and His story to the very ends of the earth bringing His teachings of grace and forgiveness to everyone.

The church and Christians often get a bad rap from the world and, to be truthful, there are instances in our history of which we need to be ashamed.

But so much of what's good about the world comes from Jesus' teachings and the church's influence.

The teachings of Jesus revolutionized how people viewed the poor, how women and children were treated and for how the sick were cared.

Because of the church, hospitals and universities were founded. If Jesus hadn't been raised from the dead, the world, as we know it today, would be unrecognizable.

Yet not everybody agrees with that premise. There are those who criticize the church and point to areas where the church has failed through the years.

It was the atheist Friedrich Nietzsche who said, *"I call Christianity the one great curse, the one great intrinsic depravity, the one great instinct for revenge for which no expedient is sufficiently poisonous, secret, subterranean, petty — I call it the one immortal blemish of mankind."*

Of course, this was the same Nietzsche who was educated in a university founded by the church, paid for by a scholarship because his father had been a Pastor.

The same Nietzsche who spent his last days being cared for in a hospital that was founded by the church and who's buried in a Christian graveyard.

If we were to eliminate every university in the world started by churches, there would hardly be a place for our children to be educated.

But over the past two thousand years, children have been educated in schools and universities founded by the church. Why?

Because Jesus' followers remembered how Jesus told his followers to love God, not just with their hearts but with their minds.

If we were to eliminate every hospital in the world founded by churches, there would be no place for our sick to be treated. Why?

Because for two thousand years those who have taken the name of Christ have read the stories in the Gospels where Jesus saw the sick and had compassion on them, saw the lepers and touched them when others wouldn't, and they remembered how Jesus healed people.

If we were to eliminate every relief agency founded by the church, then there would be nobody to help the next time a disaster strikes.

But... because the tomb was empty, we have World Hope, World Vision, the Samaritan Purse, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, Texas Baptist Men and a multitude of other relief agencies.

The majority of relief agencies around the world are either operated by the church or were started by the church. Why?

Because two thousand years ago Jesus was born and told His followers to care for the poor and the unfortunate.

It was the church that helped eliminate child labor in England and North America. It was the church that formed the first schools to teach children to read and write. Why?

Because Jesus embraced little children and encouraged His followers to do the same.

It was the church that changed how slaves were viewed and treated 2000 years ago and it was the church that was at the forefront of ending slavery in the Western world 200 years ago.

2000 years ago, slavery was a part of life, and had been for thousands of years before, so the teaching of the early church was revolutionary when Paul wrote Galatians 3:28, *“There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

Even the thoughts of Colossians 4:1 were a brand-new teaching, *“Masters, be just and fair to your slaves. Remember that you also have a Master—in heaven.”*

But don't think that slavery is simply a historical battle that's been won. It's estimated that there are 27 million slaves in the world today and Jesus' followers are still in the forefront of that battle to end slavery.

It was in the church where the women's rights movement began. The Apostles saw how Jesus treated women and later, when they gathered together in groups, called churches, many of those identified as being in positions of leadership were women.

Time and time again Paul addressed his letters and sent greetings not only to men but to women in the early church.

For example, Romans 16:3, *“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus.”* Not Aquila and his wife, or Mr. and Mrs. Aquila but instead he refers to *“my co-workers”* in the ministry, Priscilla and Aquila.

Because of how Jesus treated women, Paul wrote Galatians 3:26-28, *“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”*

*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* That was radical.

Jesus never commanded that woman should cover themselves from head to toe and hide away from men, instead He told men to respect them and not look on them as objects.

Jesus didn't say that if men had lustful thoughts, it was because of women, instead He said it was men's responsibility to control their own thoughts.

Not because on Friday Jesus died on a cross but because on Sunday God raised Him from the dead!

If there had been no resurrection, then the 11 apostles would've left Jerusalem discouraged and defeated.

The Holy Spirit wouldn't have come, the church wouldn't have been founded, and the world would've been a darker place today.

#### **Slide 4**

But it wasn't just the early Christians' present, nor the future that was changed by the resurrection, because of the 'but' our forever was changed.

Jesus didn't just come to heal people and feed people and make people feel good. He came for a specific purpose.

Jesus told his followers in John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*



But it took more than three years of preaching and healing to give us eternal life. It took more than Jesus dying on the cross to give us eternal life.

While both of those would have made Jesus a good teacher and a good man, that wasn't enough to buy our salvation. It all comes down to the resurrection.

Ultimately that's what we need to understand because that's the foundation of our faith.

Listen to the words that Paul wrote to the church 2000 years ago in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19, *“But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”*

It was because Jesus was able to defeat death that He gives us the victory. The promise of eternal life was a promise that Jesus made to His followers over and over again.

He didn't just offer His followers good teachings and the truth, instead in John 14:6 Jesus told them, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”*

At the end of the story, if Jesus had remained in the tomb, the promises would've been empty, but the promises weren't empty because the tomb was empty.

John 3:36, *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them."*

## **Slide 5**

### Conclusion

Do we believe that? On this Easter Sunday, as we celebrate the resurrection, do you believe that Jesus can offer you grace, forgive your sins, and give you eternal life? In fact, do we act like we believe it?

Saint Ignatius wrote, *"Among the many signs of a lively faith and hope we have in eternal life, one of the surest is not being overly sad at the death of those whom we dearly love in our Lord."*

So, on this resurrection morning, we not only celebrate that Jesus conquered the grave but, that in so doing, His promises are true, and we'll conquer the grave as well.

John, one of those who was closest to Jesus would go on to write in 1 John 5:13, *"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."*

Did you catch what he said. Not that you'll hope you have eternal life, but that you may know that you have eternal life.

Jesus' promise doesn't just begin when this life is over, either. Corrie Ten Boom wrote, *"You know, eternal life does not start when we go to heaven. It starts the moment you reach out to Jesus. He never turns His back on anyone. And He is waiting for you."*

On this resurrection Sunday, as we celebrate Christ's victory over the grave, do you have the assurance that the Apostle John had when he wrote to the church 2000 years ago saying in 1 John 5:13, *"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."*