

Thanksgiving

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[0 : 0 0] Acts chapter 14 we read at verse 17 Nevertheless he that is the Lord left not himself without witness in that he did good and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons filling our hearts with fruit and gladness he left not himself without witness the first thing we see in this verse is that God's provision for our daily and physical requirements his blessing upon the harvest of the earth and of the sea is part of his witness he left not himself without witness it is not merely that he has revealed his truth to his prophets and apostles it is not merely that he has reduced it to writing for all time that we may read the living word of God for ourselves it is not merely that he lives and breathes in every redeemed soul who is themselves a witness to the reality and truth of the presence of the Lord and his action in the world it is not even merely if we may say so reverently that the Lord Jesus Christ lived upon this earth and walked upon it and personified God the Son in his own body in this work it is not merely all of these things but from the very first day that God said let there be light and there was light until the last day when he shall bring all things to a conclusion and all the heavens and the earth shall melt with fervent heat he has day by day not left himself without a witness in creation in providence and in mercy in that he did good and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons filling our hearts with food and gladness in other words the necessities of life are God's gift to us part of his witness not merely that we should grindingly go on day by day being sustained in mere existence but he has designed us in such a way that to eat and drink is part of the pleasure of life and that for which we render thanks to the Lord eating and drinking with thankfulness in our hearts to the Lord this is part of the enjoyments of life here upon earth every occasion for which as I've mentioned comparatively recently every occasion for which we gather in celebration whether it be a child's graduation a family member or whether a wedding or some kind of gathering together and we celebrate we have a meal we have food and drink you can't have such a celebration without there being provision it's always going to be part of any celebration because to eat and to drink is enjoyable it is part of the goodness the Lord has given yes it would be the easiest thing in the world that the Lord could design the world in such a way that yes we physically ate and drank just to keep the machine of our bodies going and took no pleasure in it and it was just a fact of life but God has designed us in such a way that almost every part of life if it is rightly used gives enjoyment to the creature particularly the creature that is made in his image mankind when we sleep deeply and sweetly it is enjoyable

it is refreshing it is not just the shutting down of the body it is pleasure joy to us to sleep deeply and to awake refreshed from a good night's sleep when we if in the days of our youth or greater athletic ability we run and partake in heavy manual labour the joy of doing work hard work and feeling in a good way tired at the end of it there is enjoyment there is fulfilment in that to partake of the necessities of life particularly if we are blessed in such a way that we are able perhaps to either grow it ourselves or catch it ourselves or in some way bring it ourselves to the tables this sense of achievement in it and doubles the enjoyment of it all these things God blesses us with but it is who provides he left not himself without witness in that he did good and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons filling our hearts with food not just our stomachs filling with food but our hearts we are enjoying the good we love the good things that he gives us with food and gladness now if we see the context of this verse we see that

Paul and Barnabas have been preaching the gospel in various places we see that in Iconium one of the cities of what is now Turkey in those days part of Galatia and moving from there when there is hassle when there is trouble notice that they are still still opposing themselves to the gospel even though the Lord is granting verse 3 signs and wonders to be done by their hand so you know when the Jews said to Jesus show us a miracle show us a sign and he says well you are not going to get any sign when they say on the prophet Jonas you know you wouldn't just do miracles to order and we have nothing to suggest the apostles did miracles to order either but clearly signs and wonders followed with the teaching of the word the people would have seen they would have been amazed they would wonder and yet they still opposed themselves those who would not believe those you know you've got the old sort of saying that there's the two effects of the sun either clay on the one hand or wax on the other and it hardens the one and it melts the other and the difference is not the benign warmth of the sun the difference is the substance the material itself and it is as it were almost different material that people are made from when the Lord has them for his own over against when they are simply of the world because the one the benign merciful love of God melts the heart and draws them to him and in the other it just hardens them the same means the same instruments signs and wonders proclaiming of the gospel preaching of the apostles some were converted and saved and the great multitude both of the Jews and also the Greeks believed for the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and made their minds evil and treated against the ground so they free from Iconium to Lystra and Derby now Lystra is about 25 miles or nearabouts south of Iconium so it's not a huge distance away but far enough to be away so it's not just a day's walk it's probably took them a couple of days maybe maybe one day's full walking to get there but it's enough of a distance to put a wee bit of space between them and the people in this place in Lycaonia and Lystra they are pagans they worship the Greek gods in the original

Greek in which the New Testament is written it's not Jupiter and Mercury that it says there it's Zeus and Hermes which are the actual names that are there but these are the same gods the Greeks called them one thing and the Romans called them another so likewise in chapter 19 where it says you know great is Diana of the Ephesians the actual word the actual name is Artemis of the Ephesians and that's the Greek term for this particular goddess but they had the same panthea of gods they had the same sort of big sort of daddy of the gods which the Greeks called Zeus and the Romans called Jupiter and then there was the you know the huntress that the Romans called Diana and the Greeks called Artemis and there was you know the big strong guy and the Romans called Hercules and the Greeks called Heracles so slight difference there there was other ones the Roman goddess the Roman goddess of victory Victoria as in queen and the Greek equivalent was the goddess

Nike whom perhaps youngsters have heard of with their trainers and so on and that's where it comes from it's the Greek goddess of victory but it's the same gods and goddesses it's just that they are given differently in the original it's the Greek terms but the translators particularly the authorised version not of the new King James the new King James I put the Greek ones in they've changed to the Roman ones which people would be probably more familiar with at the time the actual text has Zeus and Hermes but the the translators for the authorised version have put Jupiter and Mercury now Mercury was the messenger of the gods he's sometimes depicted in art as having winged feet or a winged helmet as well perhaps because he was the one that took the messages from the different gods supposedly across the different parts of Mount Olympus or whatever they thought their gods lived in but he's depicted in that way to indicate the speed and quickness with which he would take messages some of you might remember maybe 25-30 years ago when the telephones were privatised opened up to competition and one of the first companies that began to sort of try and bring phones in as well as

[10:11] BT called themselves Mercury because Mercury was the messenger of the gods communicating between the different supposed gods so they called Paul Mercury because he's the chief speaker the one who gives out the messages and presumably Barnabas must have been older because they called him Jupiter as in the senior of the gods of the pantheon of all the different gods they worshipped and of course to the Romans Jupiter being the top god the big leader of them all if you think of the planets the planets in our solar system are mostly called after the Roman versions of the different gods Mars is the Roman god of war and the Greek one I can't remember offhand what he's called Neptune is often depicts the god of the sea and Poseidon is the Greek equivalent so likewise you've got Venus and the Greek is Aphrodite but it's the same gods and goddesses so Jupiter is the big one now Jupiter is the biggest planet in our solar system huge massive and because it's the biggest the sort of king of the planets that's the one that they give to the king of their gods so they call

Barnabas Jupiter and Paul Mercury once they they've preached this message and healed this man as a cripple from his mother's womb and so the priest of Jupiter says oh good here come the gods down to earth let's make sacrifice let's appease them and so on because obviously the gods are here in the flesh the gods are come down to us in the likeness of man how ready people are to ascribe the goodness of the true god to those who are no gods at all now the apostles of course try to put them right they say look no no it's not it's not us we're not gods we are just ordinary men like you we haven't done it ourselves we haven't got the strength to do this we want you to turn from these vanities to verse 15 the living god which made heaven and earth and the sea and all things that are therein who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways he let people be pagans if they want except for his own chosen people but now nevertheless he left himself not without witness he was still showing his goodness throughout all of the ages by giving us fruitful seasons rain from heaven filling our hearts with food and gladness this is what god did the true god and yet all these pagans and list and dirty and the other cities they would say oh no that's the other gods that Jupiter gives us and Mercury gives us all the gods that we worship they give us no they didn't but then as now people are very ready to ascribe to things which are no gods the good that god himself does if god enables men to learn new things then instead of saying wow how great god is he was already way ahead of us oh how great man is to advance even further discover more about his environment about how he came to be and so on and we're always ready to put man on the throne of god or our particular idols or heroes or stars that we worship or whatever instead of the true gods people will ascribe to anything or to anyone the powers or blessings or gifts that originate only with god and that's what the Iconians are doing and that's what happens in this world too but god has never left himself without a witness he may have allowed all these other nations to be pagans to go to hell in their own way we might say and yet even so he was good to them he gave them food and drink and harvest and blessings and everything but he focused the revealing of himself initially upon one nation one people his own family that he chose the descendants of Abraham

Isaac and Jacob he said these were to be his and from that family and that those tribes and that nation the Messiah would come and then once the Messiah had come then the message could be spread throughout the rest of the world he focused initially on his own chosen people in much the same way as if we think of an example if somebody was let's say started up in business in his youth and he found something he had a real aptitude for he was able to sort of do the work and buy and sell and keep on doing the work and people getting contracts for him and he'd do the work get paid and the money was coming he was building all this business expand open more branches and then he gets married and has his kids and has a house and he builds a house maybe for himself and the business is still growing he's employing more people and so he's focusing with his family and providing for them and making sure they've got a good education and all the things that they need and then let's say in later life his business really builds and he becomes a multi-millionaire so he starts being able to start up charities here and projects there and get to this project and that good work there he's bestowing his good gifts around in philanthropy and helping those in need those in distress and reaching out with the blessings the abundance that he's got now people might say well you know why didn't you do that earlier why has it taken him so long to spread around all these good gifts why has it taken him so long to sell these charities and help these people and spread this goodness around because before that he was focusing on his business and on his family he was focusing on his own family his own children his own home his own wife yes he was focusing on them and in the fullness of time he then spread around the benefits that he had been enabled to build up and in the same way similar what exactly was it the Lord for a time focuses on his own chosen people exclusive to the children of Israel is the fact that he reveals himself to them he works with them he bestows his benefits exclusively spiritually speaking upon them he makes himself known and gives them his laws his commandments and so on in much the same way as our business man example was perhaps yes bringing up his children disciplining them when necessary and maybe if they were bad getting them into trouble and showing them the right way he doesn't do that for everybody else's kids just for his own he doesn't do that for all the other families round about just for his own and then in the fullness of time he's able to help other people and the Lord to begin with he makes his laws his commandments known to his own people he chastises them in a way that he doesn't the Assyrians or the Babylonians or the Persians or whatever the time comes when the Lord does make himself known when he does spread the gospel around these other nations but to begin with he focuses on what we might call his own family the nation of Israel but then he spreads it around who in time past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways or what happened when they walked in their own ways well they worshipped these false gods

Jupiter and Mercury and all the others and they would end up going to hell they'd think oh that's terrible oh I'm dreadful oh what kind of god would send people to hell well now he's not now he's bringing the means whereby they don't have to go to hell now he's bringing them the gospel now he's bringing them the good news they don't have to go to hell anymore he suffered them in the past to walk in their own ways but he still fed them and clothed them and provided for them and be good and left not himself without a witness and now his goodness to them is going to be even better and with these things scarce restrained they the people that they had not done sacrifice unto them but how fickle is the adulation of men because the next verses we read there came there were certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium who persuaded the people and having stoned Paul drew him out of the city supposing he had been dead where's all the adulation now oh no this guy was Mercury this guy was Jupiter oh these people no they healed this man who was crippled from his mother's oh no they're telling us about the true god no I'm worried about they were flavour of the month one minute and the next minute they are ready to try and put them to death that is the extent of mankind adulation this is the celebrity status that so many in the world hanker after they want to be famous they want to be loved they want to be all the clicking cameras and the paparazzi and the wealth and the fame and fortune and so on and maybe they get it but it's only for a few minutes it's only for a little while even whoever was top of the celebrity even five years ago that had been replaced by somebody younger and fresher you know who were the people filling the pages of magazines and news and so on when your parents were young and if they said oh so and so this actress or that actor or that author or whatever they were really thinking who were they so I've never really heard of them yeah they were famous but it passes such is the adulation of men such is the fickle nature of celebrity status of popularity in the world one minute they think

Paul and Barnabas are gods the next minute they're ready to put them to death just as the people in Israel and Palestine and Jesus day they're shouting oh shout out to the son of David and by the end of the week they're ready to crucify him maybe it's not the same crowd some people make an argument for that and that's probably the truth of that not exactly the same people but it doesn't alter the fact crowds flock to follow him they can't get enough of him and then then they decide to crucify him at the end of the week such is the adulation of men it is shallow it is passing flick of vapour but God has acted consistently throughout history throughout providence he left not himself without witness in that he did good he is always good to mankind whether they are pagans whether they are Christians or Jews or Gentiles he keeps providing for that he makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good he sendeth away upon the just and the unjust now I know for a fact

[20 : 58] I've used the example in the past of a gentleman I spoke to a few years ago who had been involved in a project to bring a desalination plant to Saudi Arabia I know you've heard it so apologies but it doesn't do any harm to reiterate the point and whether he was involved as an engineer or whatever the Saudi Arabians were spending huge sums on this massive desalination plant piping seawater out of the red sea you know you can get thousands of gallons out of sea and it's still going to look the same still not going to be any gone down any and they were going to turn this seawater into fresh water desalination take the salt out of it and then they would pump it out into the desert and in again the desert plant crops and trees and all that stuff and I said a brilliant fantastic idea yeah that's that's a good use of such wealth and resources take the seawater turn it in the fresh water make the desert bloom brilliant so yeah but it's it's a pretty expensive way to do it if it's just going to drop that out of the sky just going to drop that out of the sky that's exactly what the

Lord gives us that's what he's been giving us all day today we button up our and say oh isn't it great isn't it well I do it too but the fact of the matter is he sends the rain from heaven that which is one of the most basic requirements of all life on this planet whether plant life or animal life or human beings is fresh water if we haven't got fresh water we die where does the fresh water come oh the streams flow down from the mountains yes but how does it get there oh well springs bubble up from the earth yes but how do they get replenished because it literally drops down out of the sky that which is most essential for our lives he left not himself without witnessing that he did good and gave us rain from heaven it doesn't need water from the rock in this wilderness it's rain dropping down from heaven just as he fed the Israelites of manna from heaven in the desert he feeds us with rain from heaven he feeds us with the fruitfulness of the earth with the harvest of the sea he did good and gave us fruitful seeds and spilling our hearts with fruit and dryness he provides and he provides so much and he provides it so consistently that instead of being thankful to God we just expect it we just think well of course why wouldn't it be the more good God does the less we are inclined to be thankful and that is a sad fact but it is true there is such need for us not only once a year to have such times of thanksgiving but in our daily lives to acknowledge that when we have taken food it's God who provided it for us when we turn on the tap and clean water pours out which isn't the case for an awful lot of people in this world

God has provided us yes men may have dug the places to put the pipes and the engineering plants and purify the water and so on but God gives them the ability the technology this is his provision this is his mercy with these same scarce restrained they are people they have not done sacrifice on the land but there's also another point to this and that is that clearly as we can see linked in in this verse is the interconnectedness between God's physical provision and his spiritual provision he reveals himself not only in the witness of providing us with food and drink and the necessities of life but interconnected with that almost like the other side of the same coin is the fact that at the same time he reveals himself in his mercy his laws and commands we find this not only in the sermon on the mount where

Jesus says you know you worry about what you're going to eat what you're going to drink you know consider the loomies of the field the toil not the spoon yet I say to you Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these just think of the birds of the air you know they don't gather into barns they don't harvest things in the fields and yet your heavenly father feeds it are you not worth much more loomies Jesus teaches people that God knows their needs he understands yes you have to eat he understands you need the necessities of life he has designed your body in such a way that you do need it but he has designed his earth in such a way that you shall have it Jesus taught us seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you notice it's added God first and then these things are added if we make these things to be all and end all of life oh because we can't survive without them okay let's say you spend 90 years of your life finding food and drink and money and all that you need after all these things

Jesus said the Gentiles the heathens go up with us you get to be 90 years old and you spend your entire life accumulating enough food and drink and wealth and so on that's brilliant fantastic but what have you got now you're about to pass from this world to the next what have you got to take with you into the next because you can't take any of this stuff with you you can't take any of this food and drink and wealth and bank account and all the stuff you've accumulated it'll do you no good the minute the minute that mass breath leaves your body what have you got to take into eternity if you have not Christ seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness all these things God will give to you desires to give to you all this has given to you this is the thing nevertheless he left not himself without witness in that he did good give us rain from heaven fruitful seasons in other words what Paul is saying to these pagans is don't you realise what you thought all this time was these pagan gods that you worship it was in fact a living God he gave you this he gave you that he gave you the next thing he always did this is what he was always being like and now that we're bringing you as if we're the missing piece of the jigsaw you can see that oh yeah all these things always added up leading right up to this moment leading right up to this point in time he was always there he was always doing this there was always an interconnectedness between

[27 : 56] God's provision for our bodies and the provision for our souls not just in the New Testament not just in the sound of the light we go back to the prophets and we see Isaiah 55 for as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven and returneth not thither but water of the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth it shall not return unto me boy but it shall accomplish that which I please and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I send it the interconnectedness between the work of nature bringing forth fruitfulness and fruit from the earth and God's word to save and inspire men and women as the rain comes down the snow from heaven waters the earth makes it bring forth and bud seed and soar bread to the eater so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth the interconnectedness of the physical and the spiritual of the provision for our bodies and the provision for our souls it's there in the prophets it's there in the law it's way back in

Deuteronomy and before that of course but in Deuteronomy especially we see in chapter 8 verse 6 therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God to walk in his ways and to fear him spiritual animal for the Lord thy God bringeth he into a good land a land of brooks of water of fountains and depths that spring out of the valleys and hills a land of wheat and barley and vines and fig trees and pomegranates a land of oil and olive and honey physical provision the interconnectedness of the spiritual and the physical now we say oh yeah well that was the Israelites then you know God brought them into a land a promised land where he just blessed everything what is the feature of this land verse 9 of Deuteronomy 8 a land where thou shalt eat bread without scarceness thou shalt not lack anything in it a land with stones or iron out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass when thou hast eaten and art full then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God in not keeping his commandments and his judgments and his statutes which I command thee to say lest when thou hast eaten and art full and hast built goopy houses and dwelt therein and on to verse 17 and thou say in thine heart my power and the might of mine hand hath gotten thee this wealth but thou shalt remember the

Lord thy God for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth that he may establish his covenant which he swore unto thy fathers as it is this day the interconnectedness what do we dwell in in this land do we eat bread without scarceness pretty much do we have brooks of water and depth that spring out of the earth pretty much have we been able to mine the resources the minerals the fossil fuels of our lands pretty much yeah whatever the promised land had Scotland pretty much has it too this land in which we dwell God has blessed even more abundantly in provision and physical riches than the promised land was blessed and we fall into exactly the same trap we think oh it's because we are good and we've worked hard we've deserved and we did this we did that so of course we've got plenty to come and go of course we've got plenty of food and so on and we forget the

Lord we forget the covenant into which our forefathers entered we forget the covenant that our nation enter into with the living God we forget and when we forget what happens to Israel when they forget the commandments and the ordinances of God well the land no longer brings forth its increase and the enemies of Israel come and overpower them because the strength of Israel was not their number or their forces or their military might it was that the Lord dwelt in the Israel and if we would be strong again as a nation if we would know the blessing of the Lord in our list as a people it means must be that the Lord must dwell in the midst of us again and if we are to do that then we must begin with recognition and thankfulness for all that he has done for not only the provision for our souls but the interconnectedness of the provision for our bodies the one goes hand in hand with the other if God has given us life in this world and sustained it with food and drink and all that we need it is in order that he may open up to us the opportunity of even greater life hereafter of the blessings of eternity with him that we can begin to enjoy here and now if we have life on earth it is that we might have the opportunity of life in heaven if he would feed our bodies here it is that he might feed our souls both now and for eternity it is the interconnectedness of the physical and the spiritual of what the

Lord has done and what the Lord promises he will continue to do nevertheless he left not himself without witness in that he did good and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons filling our hearts with fruit and gladness when we are filled with food we have cause to be thankful but we have cause to be thankful not only for that food but ultimately for the Lord who provides it as another year draws to its close we have cause to say with all those who have gone before us and acknowledged his goodness the Lord is good and merciful to us the Lord desires not only that we continue to enjoy the blessings and benefits of this world but the promises and the riches of the world to come and these can be ours in him because he is consistent in his witness because he is interconnected and joined up in his thinking he desires us to have not only the one but the other not only the good but the best not only the blessings but the riches and the crown that he has laid up for them that love him and one way we show our love is that we do pause to give thanks let us pray