

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Turn your bibles with me to Acts 15

We been going verse by verse through the book of Acts and seeing how the Holy Spirit worked among the early church.

Let's pray...

In our study last week, we saw that there was group of men who showed up from Judah – and they came to Antioch and they delivered a not so pleasing message to the Gentile Christians there.

These Judaizers pretty much said – that the reason that the Gentile Christians were were not really saved was because they failed to convert to Judaism, meaning that they were not circumcised or adhering to the law and traditions of the Jews.

Paul and Barnabas confronted these Judaizers in Antioch didn't make much headway with them - so the church sends them both to Jerusalem in an effort to get everyone back on the same page.

And it was at the Jerusalem council that Peter, Paul and Barnabas gave the report of how God had already approved of the Gentiles without them having to convert to Judaism first.

So, James gets up and begins to quote scripture to show that what was happening to the Gentiles was God's plan all along – and most importantly, salvation by faith, was the way God had always planned it

So James concluded that they were not going to force the Gentiles to convert to Judaism – however, they were going to include a handful of guidelines in order to promote unity within the church.

And one of the things we saw was unity return to the church

This was not a decision that was made by only the apostles or only the elders or the majority –

Verse 22 states that the whole church came together

And they wrote a letter to the gentiles and sent a delegation of leaders in the church to go to Antioch and give them the good news.

And that brings us to verse 30

[Act 15:30-41 NKJV] 30 So when **they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter.**

Now, the “they” here in verse 30, it is a reference to Silas and Judas.

The scriptures told us last week that these were leaders in the church in Jerusalem.

But what do we see???

They were willing to be letter carriers.

They weren't promised any position of importance in Antioch.

They weren't going to some award ceremony.

They were delivering the good news to these Gentile strangers – that they might be kept free in grace.

And by doing this – Silas and Judas show great humility.

Question????

Now, why didn't the council just give the letter to Paul and Barnabas to take back to Antioch?

Because the Judaizers / the legalist simply would have said that Paul and Barnabas made it all up.

31 When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement.

The distance between Antioch and Jerusalem is about 300 miles.

It would take about 2.5 weeks to travel that distance.

That means from the time Paul and Barnabas left Antioch to go to Jerusalem – to the time that Judas and Silas arrive, it would have been almost two months.

For two months, the believers in Antioch didn't know if they were truly saved.

They sat there and waited.

They didn't know if they would have to subject themselves to circumcision or subject themselves to trying to adhere to the laws and traditions of the Jews.

So when the letter finally was delivered to Antioch and it was read to them, they rejoiced – they felt relieved.

They rejoiced that the principle of grace had been preserved.

They rejoiced that they were still right before God after all – that they were still saved.

Church, as Christians, sent to proclaim truth, let us never forget that we are going out with Good News.

Just like Silas and Judas.

The Good News has been given to instruct and encourage us, telling us of our freedoms in Christ, our responsibilities to Him and to our brothers and sisters and to this world.

It's the good news of grace and transformation.

The news that God has stepped down into the world to deal with sin and death and that He can make all things new.

The Good News that God who can bring beauty from ashes and completely change us - not just one life or two, but whole generations by His power.

Many times we ourselves need to be reminded of these biblical truths.

32 Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.

Now, we see here in verse 32 that Judas and Silas were prophets.

As prophets, they were selected by God (not the church) to deliver messages directly from Him to the church.

Remember, the early church didn't have the New Testament to read from.

They relied on the Apostles and the prophets during early days of the church –

In fact, Paul states in the book of Ephesians 2:20 that the church was built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets – with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone.

Turn with me to 1 Cor 14 –

Paul has something to say regarding the gift of prophesy -

[1Co 14:1-4 NKJV] 1 Pursue love, and desire spiritual [gifts], but especially that you may prophesy. 2 For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands [him]; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. 3 But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and

comfort to men. 4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

That is what Silas and Judas were doing in Antioch – they were exhorting and edifying and building up the church.

Now, the problem that was occurring in the early church (especially in Corinth) was that the gift of prophesy was being abused by the early church.

Many people were getting up and proclaiming that they had a message from God –

So instead of edifying the church – it was bringing confusion

So, Paul had to bring correction to the church in Corinth because of it.

The message had to be verified with the word of God.

And the same thing should be done today.

33 And after they had stayed [there] for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. 34 However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there.

These two churches, Antioch and Jerusalem were very, very different.

And yet we see them filled and guided by the Holy Spirit and that brought unity among them.

They were brothers.

They were a family.

So after sticking around for a while – some estimate that they were there in Antioch for a year – the church sends them back to Jerusalem – but Silas decides to stay.

Now, if you're following along in the NLT, the ESV, the NIV or the CSB, verse 34 is omitted.

I have a NLT on my desk and it goes from verse 33 directly to 35

If you have a NKJV or KJV you'll probably have a note saying that verse 34 is not found in some of the manuscripts.

Some Biblical scholars think that it was, at some point, added as a marginal note. So it is not included in some translations.

The Good News is that verse 34 is not consequential to when it comes to anything like doctrine.

35 Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

So we see the great teaching ministry that existed in Antioch.

There were “many others” that were doing God's work – Not just Paul, Barnabas and Silas.

Many others were planting seeds.

That is what we, as the church, are called to do.

We are called to scatter the seed – which is the word of God – and we are sent to scatter it all over the world – so that receptive hearts might take it, believe and be saved.

That is our most essential business.

[Psa 68:11 NKJV] 11 The Lord gave the word; Great [was] the company of those who proclaimed [it]:

I like the NLT – instead of great was the company – it says, and a great army brings the good news.

That's us.

A great army – a band of brothers.

Sent out to proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ by grace through faith. Bringing liberation to a world trapped and desperate, looking for hope.

36 Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, [and see] how they are doing."

It's been a couple of years since Paul and Barnabas were led by the Holy Spirit in their first missionary journey.

Paul looks at Barnabas and tells him, "Barney – you remember that time we were in Antioch of Pisidia and we were invited to speak in the synagogue and we proclaimed the gospel and then they wanted us to come back again the following week – I wonder how those new believers are doing"

"Or do you remember that time when we went to that city the people thought we were gods and they called you Zeus and me, Hermes – and then they got mad and stoned me to death and they dragged my body outside the city – do you remember and do you remember the look of the brothers and sisters when God revived me and I went back into the city?"

Barney – I wonder how those believers are doing?

Barney – let's go back and check on them and see if how we can help. Let's go back to encourage them.

During his first missionary journey – he was mainly an evangelist – but here, he demonstrates a pastor's heart.

Paul had a genuine concern about how the churches they planted were doing.

And it was this desire, this curiosity that made him want to go back.

Church, often God's leading starts with our own desires

He'll plant an idea into our heads to get us moving in the right direction.

It's after we get moving that He'll often redirect us to where He really wants us to go.

We'll see this a little more when we get into chapter 16 when we see how God will get Paul and Silas out into Galatia, and once they're in Galatia, He'll turn them towards Macedonia.

Sometimes in our lives we might head out in a certain direction, only to find that God was just trying to get us to the point where we'd turn the corner and see where He was really leading us.

37 Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. 38 But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.

Now, John Mark was a relative of Barnabas

This was the same Mark that the Holy Spirit inspired to write one of the gospels.

During Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey, John Mark went with them.

He was there when they went to Cyprus, however, when they got back to the mainland, John ditched Paul and Barnabas and went back to Jerusalem.

And the language that Luke uses to describe John Mark leaving is the language used to describe a soldier abandoning or deserting his unit.

John Mark is back in Antioch and Barnabas wants to give him another chance – he wants to take him and Paul says, no way – he is not going – I don't want this quitter to quit on us again.

I had you make a note that Barnabas was **determined** – the word that is used here is not the word of someone who wished or desired that John Mark would join them – Barnabas seems to have some resolve – “I'm putting my foot down – John Mark is going and that is that!!!!”

I also had you make a note that Paul **insisted** – the word that is used here is to judge worthy – the more Paul thought about taking Mark – the more he came to a conclusion that it was a bad idea.

39 Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

As a result of their disagreement over John Mark –

Paul and Barnabas split up.

Barnabas takes John Mark and goes to Cyprus – that is where he was from.

Paul picks a new partner – Silas and they set out to revisit the churches that they established during the first missionary journey.

Barnabas was more focused on trying to restore a family member while Paul was more focused on the work that God had called him to do.

If you read bible commentaries – about half of them will tell you that this disagreement between Paul and Barnabas was a good thing – they will tell you that God used this split to preach the gospel to two different regions at the same time.

I don't agree with this view – for these reasons.

1) This is the last we hear of Barnabas.

2) Luke doesn't say that Barnabas went to Cyprus to strengthen the churches (like he does about Paul). It just says he went home.

3) The church will seem to have taken a side in the dispute, choosing to support Paul. But they don't seem to endorse Barnabas.

I had you make a note of **being commended by the brethren to the grace of God**

This is talking about Paul and Silas now – this phrase was used about Paul and Barnabas back in Acts 14:26

It would appear that after the split between Paul and Barnabas, that Paul has the approval of the church in Antioch.

[Act 16:1-5 NKJV] 1 Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, [the] son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father [was] Greek.

Lystra is the place where Paul was stoned to death during the first missionary journey – and if you were here when we did that study, the scriptures tell us that God revived him – he marched back into the city.

And during the study, I had made the point that one of the reasons that he marched back into the city was that there were new converts in the city – and he wanted to make sure to equip them with the little time he had there before he left.

And I mentioned that two of those converts could have easily been Timothy and his mom.

And after seeing what happened to Paul – with the stoning and being dragged out and the reviving, it led Timothy to be involved in ministry.

Timothy is about 18 here in chapter 16, he would have been 15 or 16 during Paul's first missionary journey.

2 He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium.

So Timothy had a good reputation in the churches – not just in his home town of Lystra but in Iconium which was 20 miles away.

And that reputation was a result of the fruit

Church – proof of the call is in the fruit.

Sometimes we get the wrong ideas of who might be called by God to the ministry.

We think it's going to be the person who's the most popular, or the best looking, or the best athlete.

The real test is in the fruit.

In the Old Testament – we have an example of this in Num 17 -

When God wanted to prove to the nation of Israel that He had called Aaron and his family to be the priests of the nation, He had each tribes put a staff in front of the ark of the covenant for a night .

In the morning, Aaron's staff had budded, with leaves, flowers, and even ripe almonds!

His staff produced fruit.

It was the fruit that proved Aaron's calling.

If you think God has called you to a special ministry, then there's going to be fruit.

3 Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took [him] and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.

So here we have Paul disciple-ing Timothy –

This is where he would take him under his wing and train him for ministry.

So, Paul takes Timothy and one of the first things he does is that he circumcises him.

Now, I know what you are thinking – didn't we just spend last week talking about how it wasn't necessary for the Gentiles to become circumcised.

Yes, we did.

But Paul did not circumcise Timothy for the sake of salvation – he circumcised Timothy for the sake of ministry.

If Timothy was to join him in ministry – the fact that he was uncircumcised, it would hinder their ability to preach and to reach the Jews around the world for Jesus Christ.

By Jewish law Timothy was a Jew, because he was the son of Jewish mother, but because he was uncircumcised he was technically an apostate Jew.

If Paul wished to maintain his links with the synagogue, he could not be seen as someone who tolerated apostasy.

Paul was willing to do whatever it took to reach people with the gospel.

He was even willing to limit some of his own freedom, if it might open up an opportunity for someone to trust in the Lord.

4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.

So as Paul and Silas went through the cities, they told them what the Jerusalem council had concluded – that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised in order to be saved.

And we see the result of this – the churches were strengthened in faith.

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, "I am a sinner."

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

[Num 6:24-26 NLT] 24 '

May the LORD bless you and protect you.

May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you.

May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.!



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