

# Monday - Week Thirty-six

## Acts fifteen: The Council at Jerusalem

**Summary:** This church council meeting reinforced the central truth of the Bible: salvation is by faith, not by works.

### Background and Comments

- This meeting was extremely important. At stake was the Bible's teaching of grace through faith. Some Jewish Christian leaders wanted the Gentiles to keep the ceremonial laws as part of their Christianity. Peter and Paul saw the issues at hand with crystal clarity. God used these two great apostles to uphold the truth.
- Paul made the point that even the Jews were not able keep the ceremonial laws. The Jews were saved by faith ... as were the Gentiles.
- The council decided that there were four regulations that the Gentiles should observe:
  1. Avoid food sacrificed to idols (not because it was sinful but because the Jews were particularly repulsed by it. The council must have felt that this was a common sense proposal).
  2. Avoid sexual immorality (the Gentiles has problems with this sin).
  3. Avoid meat from strangled animals (same category as # 1)
  4. Avoid blood (probably consuming blood) (same category as # 1)

### Lessons for Today

- There was open conflict at this important meeting. Often we think of conflict as a negative thing. Actually conflict can be very healthy; it can help us to get to the heart of the matter and to make the best decisions possible. What do you do when conflict begins to appear at home, at work, at a church meeting, at a friend's home? If you simply crush the conflict without addressing it you have missed a valuable opportunity. Instead of eliminating conflict try to manage conflict. Talk through the issue while you focus on the issue instead of on personalities.
- Paul and Barnabas could not agree on what to do with Mark. These two great men disagreed so sharply that they went their separate ways. Perhaps in this case there was no right and wrong. In any case, God used this disagreement to create two mission teams.

**Read:** Psalm 5; Revelation 11.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, help me to manage conflict in my life in a way that pleases You. Don't let me become afraid of conflict. Rather, help me to use conflict to make thoughtful decisions, to deepen relationships, and to get to know others better. Amen.

# Tuesday - Week Thirty-six

## Acts Sixteen: Another Mission Journey

**Summary:** Paul and his associates were willing put their lives on the line for the sake of the Gospel.

### Background and Comments

- Verse 7 tells us that the Spirit of Jesus would not let them enter Bithynia. How that happened we don't really know.
- The contrast between Paul and the owners of the slave girl are shocking. The owners were interested in money even at the expense of a little girl's life. Paul was interested in bringing people to the knowledge of their Savior. There are still such shocking contrasts between people today.
- The fact that the leaders of the city had to escort Paul out of prison gave credibility to the Christians who remained in Philippi.

### Lessons for Today

- Paul had Timothy circumcised even though it would have been OK not to. In fact, we might have guessed that Paul wouldn't have wanted Timothy to be circumcised to uphold Christian freedom. Paul knew that if Timothy would not have been circumcised it would have become a major stumbling block for the Jews Paul would preach to. Paul's motivation was love for those souls. As you witness to other people do you ever change your behavior to avoid putting stumbling blocks in their way?
- The end of verse 14 shows us the heart of mission work. The Lord opened Lydia's heart to respond to Paul message. Sharing your faith is only half of your responsibility in mission work. The second half is to pray that God would open the person's heart to the message.
- Paul never took any "time off" from being a Christian. He not only sang Christian songs in jail he was quick to share the Gospel with the jailer. Do you ever take time off from being a Christian? Why?

**Read:** Psalm 6; Revelation 12.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, today in our reading we saw that the life of a missionary can be very difficult and dangerous. Please guard and keep our missionaries all over the world. When dangerous situations arise send Your angels to protect them. Use their words and their actions to spread the Word of God. Guide us to support them with our prayers and offerings. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

# Wednesday - Week Thirty-six

## Catechism Review

Read Questions 285-289

1. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper on the night before He died. At this solemn time in His life Jesus made every word count (as He always did). What does this say about those who change the meaning of the words of the institution (This is my body, this is my blood)?

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2. Martin Luther once said that it would be a lot easier to believe that Jesus' body and blood were just represented in the Lord's Supper (as opposed to truly being there). Why can't we take the "easy" way out?

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3. Why do we use unleavened bread in the Lord's Supper?

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4. Here is a chart of the teachings of various churches:

	Bread and wine?	Body and Blood?
Reformed teaching	YES	NO - ONLY REPRESENTED
Catholic teaching	NO	YES
Biblical teaching	YES	YES

**Read:** Psalm 7; Revelation 13.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, help me to study the Lord's Supper with reverence. Thank You for this wonderful gift. I pray in Jesus' name; Amen.

## Thursday - Week Thirty-six

### Acts Seventeen: the Missionary Journey Continues

**Summary:** Paul received much different receptions in Thessalonica, Berea and Athens. His message remained the same in each city.

#### Background and Comments

- The Jews' jealousy toward Paul cut short his time in Thessalonica. Their persecution also must have caused the whole city to take notice of these people who were willing to suffer for their faith.
- The Bereans were of "noble character" because they studied the Word of God and compared Paul's message with the Word. What a pleasure it must have been to spend time with these mature believers. No doubt they were looking forward to the Messiah. Paul obviously told them that the Messiah was Jesus.
- Paul started his sermon in Athens by talking philosophy (the love and study of wisdom) with these professional philosophers. They were intrigued with Paul's new ideas. Paul was a very smart person; he could have argued and debated all day with them. Instead Paul quickly moved to the heart of his message: Christ crucified and risen. These people who said that they loved wisdom showed how ignorant they were by laughing at Paul.

#### Lessons for Today

- Paul did not have to start from nothing when he did mission work among the Jews. They knew and understood the Old Testament very well. They were waiting for the promised Messiah. Verse 3 shows us that Paul's message revolved around Jesus the Messiah. Evangelism in America used to be able to assume a basic knowledge of the Bible. Now we cannot assume that at all. Most people haven't spent any time in Sunday school or any sort of Biblical training. What impact will that have on your mission work?
- Do you compare what your pastor says to the Word of God? Have you ever asked for some clarification? Have you asked a question about a sermon text? Obviously this will require some study on your part. Your pastor will welcome the extra interest you show in the Bible.

**Read:** Psalm 8; Revelation 14.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, in Athens they laughed at St. Paul. When I am ridiculed for my faith, remind me that I am in good company. Let me continue to do Your will even at those difficult times. Amen.

## Friday - Week Thirty-six

### John - Lesson Seven: Interview with Nicodemus (3:1-21)

1. The first verses introduce us to this Pharisee named Nicodemus. The Pharisees were zealous leaders who thought that God's favor came through following endless rules and regulations. These Pharisees pinned a lot of hope on their lineage; they were children of Abraham by birth. Who are some people who externalize religion today?
2. Why might Nick have come at night (think about it - get a full answer).
3. Instead of exchanging pleasantries with Nicodemus, Jesus got right to the point. Nicodemus needed to see his sin; he needed to see that his relationship with God was not external. What was Jesus stressing when He said, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again/from above?"
4. Flesh in verse 6 means the sinful nature. What does verse 6 add to this discussion with Nicodemus?
5. The Old Testament contains many pictures of Christ. What are the points of comparison between the bronze serpent (Numbers 28:8-9) and Jesus (v 14-15).
6. How can you use verse 17?
7. Often Christians are put down for their ideas, etc. What is really the case? (v 18)

**Read:** Psalm 9; Revelation 15.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, when people come to me with questions about religion guide me to point them toward Jesus. In Jesus' name; Amen.