

# PM Acts 14:24-15:35 By Grace alone

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[ 0 : 00 ] And from Acts chapter 14. We began some months ago looking at the missionary journeys of Paul.

And if we continue where we left off some while ago. At Acts 14 verse 24.

I'm going to read down to Acts 15 verse 35. Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia.

And when they had spoken the word in Perga. They went down to Atalia. And from there they sailed to Antioch.

Where they had been commended to the grace of God. For the work that they had fulfilled. And when they arrived and gathered the church together.

[ 1 : 15 ] They declared all that God had done with them. And how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained no little time with the disciples.

But some men came down from Judea. And were teaching the brothers. Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses.

You cannot be saved. And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them. Paul and Barnabas and some of the others.

Were appointed to go up to Jerusalem. To the apostles and the elders about this question. So being sent on their way by the church.

They passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria. Describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles. And brought great joy to all the brothers.

[ 2 : 25 ] When they came to Jerusalem. They were welcomed by the church. And the apostles and the elders. And they declared all that God had done with them.

But some believers. Who belonged to the party of the Pharisees. Rose up and said. It is necessary to circumcise them. And to order them to keep the law of Moses.

The apostles and the elders. Were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate. Peter stood up and said to them.

Brothers. You know that in the early days. God made a choice among you. That by my mouth. The Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel.

And believe. And God. Who knows the heart. Bore witness to them. By giving them the Holy Spirit. Just as he did to us.

[ 3 : 30 ] And he made no distinction. Between us and them. Having cleansed their hearts. By faith. Now therefore. Why are you putting God to the test?

By placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples. That neither our fathers. Nor we. Have been able to bear. But we believe.

That we will be saved. Through the grace. Of the Lord Jesus. Just as they will. And all the assembly fell silent.

And they listened. To Barnabas and Paul. As they related. What signs and wonders. God had done through them. Among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking.

James replied. Brothers. Listen to me. Simeon has related. How God first visited the Gentiles. To take from them.

[ 4 : 29 ] A people for his name. And with this. The words of the prophets agree. Just as it is written. After this. I will return. And I will rebuild.

The tent of David. That has fallen. I will rebuild. Its ruins. And I will restore it. That the remnant of mankind. May seek the Lord. And all the Gentiles.

Who are called by my name. Says the Lord. Who makes these things known. From of old. Therefore my judgment is.

That we should not trouble. Those of the Gentiles. Who turn to God. But should write to them. To abstain from things. Polluted by idols.

And from sexual immorality. And from what has been strangled. And from blood. For from ancient generations.

[ 5 : 25 ] Moses has had in every city. Those who proclaim him. For he is read every Sabbath. In the synagogues. Then it seemed good.

To the apostles. And the elders. With the whole church. To choose men. From among them. And send them to Antioch. With Paul. And Barnabas. They sent Judas.

Called Barsabbas. And Silas. Leading men. Among the brothers. With the following letter. The brothers.

Both the apostles. And the elders. To the brothers. Who are of the Gentiles. In Antioch. And Syria. And Cilicia. Greetings. Since we have heard.

That some persons. Have gone out from us. And troubled you. With words. Unsettling your minds. Although we gave them. No instructions. It has seemed good to us.

[ 6 : 26 ] Having come to one accord. To choose men. And send them to you. With our beloved. Barnabas and Paul. Men who have risked their lives.

For the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas. Who themselves will tell you the same things. By word of mouth.

For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit. And to us. To lay on you. To lay on you. No greater burden. Than these requirements. That you abstain.

From what has been sacrificed. To idols. And from blood. And from what has been strangled. And from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves.

From these. You will do well. Farewell. So when they were. Sent off. They went down to Antioch.

[ 7 : 23 ] And having gathered the congregation together. They delivered the letter. And when they had read it. They rejoiced. Because of its encouragement. And Judas and Silas.

Who were themselves prophets. Encouraged and strengthened the brothers. With many words. And after they had spent some time. They were sent off in peace.

By the brothers. To those who had sent them. But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch.

Teaching and preaching. The word of the Lord.

With many others also. We'll come back to. Well let's turn to that passage we read.

From the book of Acts. And I'll read again. By way of text. Chapter 15. And verse 11.

[ 8 : 29 ] But we believe. That we will be saved. Through the grace of the Lord. Lord Jesus. Just as they will. Earlier this year.

We started looking at the. Missionary journeys of Paul. And we got. Almost to the end. Of the first. Journey. The second journey.

Begins at the end. Of chapter 15. But in between. There is. The so-called. Council. The so-called. Council. Of Jerusalem.

Now this. Might. Seem. At first sight. To be just. An interruption. To the story. An obscure.

Conflict. In the early church. Much. But actually. It's vital. To the whole. History. Of mission.

[ 9 : 35 ] And vital. To our faith. As well. Because. Here in this chapter. The whole. Basis of mission. Was agreed.

Read. What exactly. Are we preaching. To the world. What exactly. Do we ourselves. Believe. Peter sums it up here.

That we are saved. By grace. Through. Our Lord. Jesus Christ. And not. By any works.

Of our own. I want us tonight. To look first. At the. Background. The. Triumphant.

Return. And the. Trouble. That arose. And then. At the council. Of Jerusalem. Itself. The discussion. The doctrine.

[ 10 : 31 ] And the decision. Let's start. With the. Background. And. Firstly. The triumphant. Return.

At the. End. Of chapter. 14. You have. Here. The end. Of the first. Missionary. Journey. Paul. And Barnabas. Return.

To. Antioch. The city. From which. They'd. Been sent. Out. Preaching. At. Perga. On. The way. At. Antioch.

They gather. The church. Together. And. They tell. Them. All. That. God. Has. Done. It was.

The church. At Antioch. That. Had. Sent. Them. Out. On. Mission. Quite. Likely. They'd. Financed. It. As. Well. They. Would. Be. Eager. To.

[11:23] Know. How. Did. It. All. Go. Know. Well. The answer. Was. That. It. Had. Gone. Brilliantly. In. Verse. Twenty. Seven. God.

Has. Opened. A. Door. Of. Faith. To. The. Gentiles. How. Thrilled. They. Must. Have. Been. To. Hear. This. The. Gospel. Was.

Spreading. Just. As. The. Lord. Had. Said. It. Would. To. All. Nations. Notice. How.

Paul. And. Barnabas. Attribute. Their. Success. To. God. They. Declared. What. God. Had. Done. With. Them. And. How. He.

Had. Opened. The. Door. Of. Faith. To. The. Gentiles. Wasn't. What. They. Had. Done. But. What. God. Had.

[12:15] Done. Not. To. Us. Not. To. Us. To. Us. Glory. But. To. Thy. Great. Name. In.

2. Corinthians. Paul. Speaks. Of. A. Door. Of. Opportunity. Being. Opened. For. Him. To. Preach. To. The. Gentiles. Well.

Here. A. Door. Of. Faith. Is. Opened. For. The. Gentiles. To. Believe. It's. All. God's. Work. And. It. Is. Marvelous. In. Their. Eyes. They. Had. Been. Commended. To. The. Grace. Of. God. For. This. Work. And. The. Grace. Of. God. Was. Evident. In.

The. Results. It. We.

[13:08] We. We. We. Seldom. Have. The. Opportunity. To. Hear. Such. Reports. First. Hand. Here. In. This. Church. But. We. Do. Have. A. Missionary. Prayer.

Meeting. Once. A. Month. With. Brief. Printed. Reports. And. We. Can. All. Read. Missionary. Prayer. Letters. Remember. Also.

Our. Interim. Moderator. Duncan. Peters. Is. Involved. In. Mission. I. Should. Have. Prayed. For. Him. Earlier. Shouldn't. I. Do. Pray. For. Him. Constantly. It's.

Always. Good. To. Hear. What. He's. Doing. Amongst. The. Asian. Community. In. Glasgow. Still. Today.

Any. Success. That. Missionaries. Have. Is. Due. To. God. And. We. Should. Praise. God. For. It. Well. There. Was. Rejoicing.

[14:01] At. Antioch. I'm. Sure. And. They. Stayed. There. For. Some. While. But. Then. A. Dark. Cloud. Came.

Over. Them. Let's. Look. Now. At. The. Trouble. That. Arose. Verse. In. Chapter. Fifteen. Verses. One. To. Five. In. Verse.

One. Some. Men. Came. Down. From. Judea. And. Were. Teaching. The. Brothers. Unless. You. Are. Circumcised. According. To. The. Custom. Of. Moses. You. Cannot.

Be. Saved. Wherever. The. Gospel. Is. Successful. It. Seems. There. Will. Always. Be. Trouble. Sometimes.

It's. Persecution. Sometimes. It's. Quarrels. Among. The. Lord's. People. God. Has. Just. Done. A. Remarkable. Work.

[14:53] Among. The. Gentiles. And. Yet. Here. Are. Some. Grumpy. People. Finding. Fault. With. It. All. And. They.

Appear. To. Have. Been. Christians. Little. Later. In. Verse. Five. It. Speaks. Of. Some. Believers. At.

Jerusalem. Who. Belonged. To. The. Party. Of. The. Pharisees. Who. Were. Promoting. This. View. Seems. They. Were. Still. Pharisees.

At. Heart. And. They. Probably. Resented. Paul. The. Ex. Pharisee. Departed. Departing. From. One. Of. Their.

Most. Treasured. Beliefs. Now. Paul. And. Barnabas. Tried. Hard. To. Resolve. This. Matter. Themselves. They. Had. No. Small. Dissension.

[15:47] And. Debate. With. Them. But. Without. Success. And. So. A. Delegation. Including. Paul. And. Barnabas. Is. Sent. To. Jerusalem. To. Discuss. This.

Question. With. The. Apostles. And. Elders. Along. The. Way. They. Pass. Through. Phoenicia. And. Samaria. Telling. The. Churches. About. The. Conversion. Of.

The. Gentiles. And. There's. Great. Joy. Clearly. They don't have any hangups about circumcision. They're welcomed in Jerusalem too. But here.

There is opposition. Some of the Pharisee party said it is necessary to circumcise them. And to order them to keep the law of Moses.

Now what was at stake here was the very way of salvation. Grace or law. Which was it?

[16:48] You see circumcision was not just a harmless ritual. It was a pledge to keep the whole law of Moses.

That's why they link circumcision with the law. The identity of the church is also at stake. When they said they must be circumcised.

They were saying in effect they must become Jews. Before they can become Christians. Christians. They were viewing the church. As a sect.

Of Judaism. Now these were crucial questions. That. Had to be answered. And so we come.

To the council. Of Jerusalem. Doesn't actually call it that here. But that's how it's always described.

Now this was not a council.

[17:49] A council in the same sense as the later councils in church history. Such as the council of Nicaea. Where representatives from all the churches gathered together.

This was just the leaders in Jerusalem. Considering a single issue. Raised by a single church. Even though it had ramifications of course.

For the whole church everywhere. We probably shouldn't read too much into it. As a pattern for church government.

True it shows there were friendly relationships between the churches. It also shows the respect that they had for the church at Jerusalem. This was the mother church.

And the apostles were there. But Jerusalem was not trying to control Antioch. And Antioch was not unconditionally submitting to Jerusalem.

[18:52] Under some kind of hierarchical pattern. Peter was not claiming to be Pope. He's not even the chairman of the meeting.

They were simply looking to Jerusalem for wisdom. But I suspect. If the decision had gone the other way. Paul probably would not have submitted to it.

Even if all the apostles had said salvation is by works. He would have insisted. You're wrong. And he would have stood firm. In what he knew to be the truth.

It's probably best to regard this as just a one-off occasion. The book of Acts covers about 30 years. And we never again read of a gathering like this. But it was a very important occasion. With a very important question.

[19:57] Discussed and decided. So let's look at what happened. The discussion is in verses 6 to 21. The apostles and elders gathered together.

And there was much debate. And then Peter spoke. He's not the chairman. James was the chairman.

But he was an apostle. And he did have a special claim to be heard. He had been among the inner circle of Christ's disciples.

If anyone was going to know. What the Lord Jesus himself had taught. Then it would be Peter. He had preached the first sermon.

In Jerusalem. At Pentecost. And many of the people there perhaps. Had actually been saved.

Under that sermon. And although his special calling.

[21:01] Was to the Jews. He had actually preached the first sermon. To the Gentiles. In Acts 10. When he preached to the Gentile centurion.

Cornelius. And his speech. Focuses on that. Brothers. You know that in the early days. God made a choice among you. That by my mouth.

The Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel. And believe. And God who knows the heart. Bore witness to them. By giving them the Holy Spirit.

Just as he did to us. And he made no distinction. Between us and them. Having cleansed. Their hearts. By faith.

They did indeed know that. Peter had been criticized. At the time. For going to the Gentiles. Just as Paul and Barnabas.

[21:57] Were being criticized now. He had given them. A lengthy account. Of what had happened. Back in Acts 11. At the end of that account.

We read. They glorified God. Saying. Then to the Gentiles. Also. God has granted repentance. That leads. To life. Peter.

Peter. Peter. Peter doesn't say so. But he. Could have. Asked. What's changed? You accepted it then. Why not now?

Cornelius. Wasn't asked. To be circumcised. Why is it an issue now? These people. Were. Digging up. The foundations. That they had laid before.

They were. Raising questions. That had already. Been answered. But Peter. Graciously. Reasons it through. With them again.

[ 22 : 57 ] In verse 10. Now therefore. Why are you. Putting God. To the test. By placing a yoke. On the neck. Of the disciples. That neither our fathers. Nor we.

Have been able to bear. Circumcision. You see. Was more than a ritual. It was a yoke. It was. As I've said. A pledge. To keep the law. And no Jew. Had ever. Been able. To do that. Not. Even. The Pharisees. Why lay this burden.

Now upon the Gentiles. We couldn't do it. Why ask them to? Perhaps he has in mind.

That lovely saying. Of the Lord Jesus. Come to me. All you who labor. And are heavy laden. And I will give you rest. Take. My yoke.

[ 23 : 51 ] Upon you. And learn of me. For my yoke is easy. And my burden. Light. There's no need.

To lay this burden. Of the law. Upon the Gentiles. Because God. Doesn't require it. On the contrary. We believe. That we will be saved.

Through the grace. Of the Lord Jesus. Just as they will. Now the assembly. Fell silent. Barnabas and Paul. Were able to.

Tell them. How God himself. Had borne witness. To this doctrine. By the miracles. And signs. That they had performed. Now let's pause here.

For a moment. And consider. The doctrine. That Peter. Has just stated. We will be saved. Through the grace.

[ 24 : 53 ] Of the Lord Jesus. Just as they will. In other words. We Jews. Will be saved. In the same way. As the Gentiles. There's only one way.

Of salvation. For everyone. And that is. By grace. Salvation. Is the. Central.

Theme. Of the Bible. It's a central. Theme. Of mission. And it's something. That we simply. Must. Get right. Salvation.

Is God's. Answer. To sin. Right at the beginning. Of the Bible. Adam's sin. In the garden. Of Eden. Brought. Judgment.

Upon himself. And mankind. And we've all added. To that. With all the multitude. Of our sins. How can we escape?

[ 25 : 48 ] There is. Nothing. That we can do. For ourselves. No ritual. Can save us. Whether circumcision. Or anything else. No amount.

Of righteousness. Can save us. Because we can never. Do enough. The law. Of Moses. Shows us. What's required. And it's too much.

For us. Any religion. That says. Do this. And you will be saved. Is false. Whether it's a religion.

That's. Telling us. To recite. Certain prayers. Five times a day. Or whether it's. Telling us. To. Come to church.

And perform. Various rituals. Or whether it's. Some cult. That's telling us. That yes. It's good. That Jesus died. But you've got. To do this. And this.

[ 26 : 44 ] And this. If you want. To be saved. All of these. Are false. Gospels. There is. Nothing. That we can do.

To save. Ourselves. But the good news. Of the gospel. The true gospel. Is that God. In his love. Has provided.

The way of salvation. He sent his son. To die. On the cross. As a sacrifice. For sin. And everyone. Who simply. Trusts in him.

Will be saved. That's why Jesus. Came into the world. You shall call. His name. Jesus. Meaning. God. Saves. For he will save his people.

From their sins. The son of man. Came. To seek. And to save. That which was lost. And that salvation.

[ 27 : 40 ] Is completely. Free. That's the meaning. Of the word grace. Grace is the free gift. Of God. We pay nothing. For it.

We can contribute. Nothing. To it. It is God's. Free gift. And it is the same. For everyone. Jew. And Gentile.

Rich and poor. Old and young. There is one way. Of salvation. Only. Through Christ. That is actually.

Implied. In the. Great commission. In. Mark 16. Go into all the world. And proclaim. The gospel. To the whole creation. Jews and Gentiles.

No distinction. Whoever believes. And. Is baptized. Will be saved. No mention. Of circumcision. No mention.

[ 28 : 36 ] Of them. Having to keep. The law. In order. To be saved. Whoever. Believes. And is baptized. Will be saved. Incidentally.

Some say. That. Baptism. Has. Replaced. Circumcision. If that was so. Then that would have ended. The discussion.

There and then. They've been baptized. Why bother. With circumcision. There are similarities. Between baptism. And circumcision. Very close. Similarities. But no one here. Suggested. That the one. Had replaced. The other. No.

Baptism. Is an expression. Of faith. In the free. Grace. Of God. The rituals. Of the law. And all rituals. As ways.

[ 29 : 34 ] Of salvation. Have been done. Away with. Forever. Paul. Paul. Teaches.

The same doctrine. In Romans 3.24. He says. There is no distinction. Between Jews. And Gentiles. For all have sinned. And fall short. Of the glory of God. And are justified.

By. His grace. As a gift. Through the redemption. That is in. Christ Jesus. Jesus. How do you obtain a gift?

Do you earn it? Do you pay for it? Of course not. You simply receive it. You may notice. That Peter speaks here. In Acts 15.

Of salvation. In the future. We. Will be saved. The thinking. Of the day of judgment. He's not suggesting.

[ 30 : 30 ] That we must wait. Until then. Salvation. Salvation. In the Bible. Can be seen. From a past. Or a present. Or a future. Perspective. We have been saved.

Already. By the death. Of Christ. We are saved. Present tense. The moment. We believe. And we will be saved.

Future. On the day of judgment. We could liken it. Perhaps. To a drowning. Man. Being rescued. By. A lifeboat.

At what point. Is he saved? Well actually. The moment. The lifeboat. Sets out. From the shore. He doesn't know it. But help. Is on the way. It's going to happen.

The moment. He is lifted up. Into the lifeboat. He is saved. But that salvation. Is only complete. When they arrive. Again.

[ 31 : 30 ] At the shore. Christ. Our lifeboat. Has come out. From heaven. To rescue us. We've been lifted up. Into the lifeboat.

And we will safely arrive. At the shore. In eternity. This doctrine of salvation.

By grace. Through faith. Through faith. It's not something. That's invented. In the New Testament. It's found all the way. Through the Bible. It was there. In the Old Testament. For these.

Jewish Christians. In Jerusalem. To read. Isaiah 45. 22. For example. Look unto me. And be saved. All the ends. Of the earth. What's required there.

Just look. As simple as that. Or Joel 2.32. Which was quoted by Peter. On the day of Pentecost. Whoever calls.

[ 32 : 24 ] On the name of the Lord. Shall be saved. How are we saved then? By works? No. Simply by faith in Christ. Calling upon his name.

Jesus himself. Had only asked. That people believe in him. Nowhere had he ever. Demanded obedience. To the law. As a way of salvation. Yes.

The law still matters. As a guide. To God's ways. And it's good. That we walk. In the way. Of righteousness. But salvation. Is by grace.

From start. To finish. That was what Peter believed. That's what he preached. Imagine. How different. His sermon.

Would have been. On the day of Pentecost. If he had believed. In salvation. By works. Men and brethren. What shall we do? Well.

[ 33 : 22 ] Go to the temple. It's just down the road there. And offer up a sacrifice. Maybe seven bullocks. And twelve oxen. And then go home.

And keep the commandments. What a hopeless. Empty. Gospel. That would have been. But no.

He had said. Repent. And be baptized. In the name. Of Jesus Christ. For the forgiveness. Of sins. That was his doctrine. And it was Paul's.

And it is ours. Finally. We come to the decision. James. James. James.

James. Now. Sums up. Presumably. James. The Lord's brother. Acting as chairman. Or as we might say. In our circles.

[ 34 : 19 ] The moderator. He appeals to scripture. Timely reminder. That all our decisions. Must be based on scripture. Brothers.

Brothers. Listen to me. Simeon. That is Peter. Has related. How God first visited. The Gentiles. To take out a people. For himself. And with this.

The words of the prophets. Agree. And he quotes. From Amos 9. After this. I will return. And I will rebuild.

The tent of David. That has fallen. I will rebuild. Its ruins. And I will restore it. That the remnant. Of mankind. May seek the Lord. And all the Gentiles.

Who are called. By my name. Says the Lord. Who makes. These things known. From of old. Strange choice.

[ 35 : 13 ] Of scripture. You might think. But James. Knows his audience. These are people. Who know. And respect. The Old Testament. Well. The Old Testament.

Predicted. The calling. Of the Gentiles. Therefore. He says. My judgment. Is that we should. Not trouble. Those. Of the Gentiles.

Who turn. To God. But he does. Suggest. Writing to them. With these. Four. Requirements. That they abstain. From things.

Polluted. By idols. Sexual. Immorality. Things. Strangled. And blood. These things. He thinks. Will be. Well known. To them. Because Moses. Is preached. In the synagogues. Everywhere. And they agree. To that suggestion. Seemed good. To the apostles.

[ 36 : 07 ] And elders. And to the whole church. To send. Two men. Judas. Barsabbas. And Silas. With Paul. And Barnabas. To Antioch. With a letter. Along the lines. That James.

Had proposed. These men. Are commended. To the churches. Judas. And Silas. As leading men. Among the brethren. And Paul. And Barnabas. As men.

Who have risked. Their lives. For the gospel. And a letter. Is written. Disowning. Those. Who troubled them. Saying.

That it seemed good. To the Holy Spirit. And to us. God loves to work. In cooperation. With his people. To lay.

No other requirements. Than these four. That James. Had listed. They read the letter. In Antioch. There's great joy. Judas. And Silas. Return. Paul.

[ 37 : 00 ] And Barnabas. Remain. Was it a compromise? Well. Some think so. Certainly.

We hear no more. About this letter. Paul. Never. Appealed to it. In any of his letters. James. We know.

Was prone. To compromise. See that. In Acts 21. When he asked Paul. To make a vow. In the temple. And yet. Paul himself. Says in Romans 14.

That sometimes. We have to make. Concessions. To avoid. Offending people. And no one. Surely. Would disagree. With avoiding.

Sexual immorality. What matters though. Is not these. Four. Requirements. But the main message. That it was not.

[ 37 : 56 ] Necessary. To be circumcised. Just. Believe. It was a radical. Decision. To make.

A brave. Decision. The temple. Was still there. In Jerusalem. The priests. Were still. Offering sacrifices. The scribes.

Were still. Teaching the law. But the council. Of Jerusalem. Ignored. All of that. And declared. Plainly. Salvation.

Is by grace. And not. By the works. Of the law. And that is still. Our gospel today. The reformers said.

That salvation. Is. Sola gratia. By grace alone. Sola fide. By faith alone. And solo Christo. By Christ.

[ 38 : 52 ] Alone. Every other religion. Offers salvation. By works. Which is worthless. But Christianity. Teaches salvation.

By grace. By grace. We were awakened. To our sin. And to our need. As we sang. In that hymn.

By grace. Our eyes. Were opened. To see. The glory. Of Jesus. As our savior. By grace. We were brought. Out of darkness.

Into his glorious light. By grace. We were rescued. Out of our sins. By grace. We were forgiven. And clothed. In Christ's righteousness.

And by grace. We will eventually. Be brought. To glory. But knowing. All this. Is not enough. We must.

[ 39 : 51 ] Make it personal. It must become. Our experience. Are you. Trusting. In Christ alone. For your salvation.

Or are you. Trusting. Even to some degree. In what you. Have done. Or indeed. What you intend. To do. Trust in Christ.

And in him. Alone. And you will be saved. Amen.