

Acts 15:1-35

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[0 : 0 0] We are looking at Acts 15 this morning. If you would turn there with me. That's page 923 in the Pew Bible. Acts 15.

We are going to look at the whole chapter this morning.

But I am just going to begin by reading verses 1 through 21. Let me read this for us. 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.

[1 : 0 5] Describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles. And brought great joy to all the brothers. 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's 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. 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.

[2 : 0 5] 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 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. And the remnant of mankind.

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.

[3 : 08] 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 the things polluted by idols. And from sexual immorality. And from what has been strangled.

And from blood. For from ancient generations. Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him. For he has read every Sabbath in the synagogues. Well it's.

Been said. That in the heart. Of every human being. Inside all of us. Deep down. There is.

There is. A legalist. Now I don't know about you. But I've never met anyone who would actually call themselves a legalist. It's not like anyone's Facebook profile.

Facebook profile has religious views. Legalism. And yet I think there's still a good case to be made. That it's a problem in us all.

[4 : 04] In 2008. The Coke company released Diet Coke Plus. Do you remember that? Of course you don't. It was basically Diet Coke.

Enriched with vitamins and minerals. Apparently someone thought this was a good idea. As if Diet Coke doesn't taste awesome enough. Let's put some vitamins in it. And see what happens.

Well the soda was apparently supposed to appeal to more health conscious customers. As it turns out. Soda drinkers aren't really health conscious. They're not really in it for the vitamins.

So the product was discontinued. Just a few years later. And now it's forgotten into oblivion. And you know of course from a mile away. Everybody could see that Diet Coke Plus.

Was a total mistake. But you know in the spiritual realm. The danger is always there. To add.

[5 : 03] A little something of our own. To put some sort of plus. Into the spiritual equation. And you know though we might not say it explicitly.

At the heart level. Don't we often. Really doubt. Whether Jesus. Is enough. Oh faith in Jesus Christ is good.

So far as it goes. But it's got to be that. Plus something. Doesn't it? In order to really belong. In order to really be sure. Of God's acceptance. In order to really have peace within.

We need Jesus. Plus. Plus. Well. Fill in the blank. Baptism. Good works.

A certain political persuasion. Right or left. A particular emotional or spiritual experience. Like speaking in tongues.

[6 : 02] Or being baptized in the spirit. Whatever it is. We act as if there must be something put on top. Of faith in Jesus. In order. To really make us right with God.

God. I wonder. Do you know. What you yourself. Are prone. To add. Of course.

This tendency. Of our inner legalists. Always striving. Always striving. To add something on top. Of Christ for our salvation. Often goes. Completely unnoticed. Totally. Under the radar. We don't even realize. We're doing it.

That is. Until we meet a group of Christians. Christians. Who are very different from us. Like what happens here in Acts 15. Last week.

We saw that the Gentiles. Were putting their faith in Christ. And coming into the church. In large numbers. And then Luke tells us. In verse 1 here. That some Jewish believers. Had come down to Antioch.

[7 : 01] Where there were a large number. Of Gentile believers. And said. Hey it's great. That you guys have come. To believe in Jesus. But you know. In order to be saved. You need to get circumcised. And keep the regulations.

Of Moses. And like a bomb. This is what ignites. The events. Of Acts 15. And the so-called. Jerusalem council.

On the surface. The question is this. Do Gentiles. Have to become Jews. In order to be true Christians. The Pharisee party. In verses 1 and 5. Seems to be advocating. The ceremonial laws of Moses.

Especially circumcision. Really as a way. For those dirty Gentiles. To clean up their act. And join the family. But you know.

If on the surface. This seems like a historically. Kind of remote thing to us. We really have to see. That it actually strikes. A much deeper question. A question that is relevant.

[7 : 58] For every age. And for every heart. And it's this. Is faith in Jesus. Really enough. Or do we have to add.

Something of our own. In true. In order to be truly. Accepted by God. And welcomed. In full standing. Into the people of God. That's a big question.

Driving this chapter. And that's the main thing. We're going to focus on. This morning. And what unfolds. In this chapter. Is one of the most. Significant. Theological events. Not just in the book of Acts.

But probably in the whole Bible. Because what we see here. Defended. And defined. Is the very nature. Of the gospel of grace.

Now before we get to this. Sort of momentous decision. That they make. And how they came to it. And what some of the practical. Implications are. I think Luke wants us to see. In verses one through five. That the gospel. Will always face this threat.

[8 : 57] Of works righteousness. This is the first point. Of five. That I'm going to make. Uh. Your roast will burn. In the potluck oven downstairs. No I'm kidding. We'll move quickly. Five points. First.

This. The gospel. Is always going to face. The threat. Of legalism. Of works righteousness. Now. Think of all the challenges. And dangers. That the church has undergone. Just in the last three chapters.

Of Acts. I mean. In chapter 14 alone. Paul and Barnabas. On the one hand. Had been persecuted. And thrown out of towns. And on the other hand. Worshipped as gods. They like can't win. No matter which way they go.

There are all sorts of external problems. But. Those external threats. Are really nothing. Compared to this internal threat. And did you notice.

That Paul and Barnabas. React that way. There's no small dissension. And debate. We read in verse 2. Luke here. Not trying to cover up.

[9 : 53] Or sort of. You know. Whitewash. The events of the early church. No. There was no small dissension. And debate. You see. The greatest danger.

To the gospel. Isn't necessarily. Irreligious paganism. On the outside. But actually. Religious legalism. On the inside. Do we really.

Think that. When it comes to. Clarifying. And preserving. The gospel. Against this threat. The apostles. Are fully. Engaged. And they take it.

With all seriousness. And so should we. And you know. One of the reasons. That legalism. Is so dangerous. Is because. As we said. On the one hand. It's so pervasive. Isn't nearly.

Every relationship. That we have. Based in some way. On our performance. Our acceptance. Comes from what we do. Or what we are. At work. At school. And sadly.

[10 : 46] Even among our friends. And family. It seems that. That's just the way. The world works. So why wouldn't we. Just map that on. To our relationship. With God. Martin Luther said. This is basically. The default mode.

Of the human heart. That I think. My acceptance. Is based on my performance. Pervasive. But on the other hand. It's dangerous. Because it seems.

So plausible. Doesn't it? I mean. After all. Why wouldn't God. Want us to. Chip in. And do our part. Doesn't he want us.

To live good lives. Why wouldn't that. Kind of calculate. Into the equation. Didn't God. Give the law of Moses. In the first place. It seems so plausible. So easy to believe.

That we would have to make. Some sort of contribution. To our standing. Before God. It's pervasive. And it's plausible. Well. How does the church respond? And how should we?

[11 : 43] Luke tells us. In verses 6 through 21. This sort of long. Second section. Of his narrative. And this is really. Our second big point. And what we see here. Is that. From the very start. The message.

Of the apostles. And therefore. The message. Of the true church. Has always been. That salvation. Is through faith. In Christ.

Alone. Apart. From any. Sort. Of works. That nothing. Needs to be added. And nothing. Can be added. To what Christ. Has done for us.

That we're brought. Into God's family. Holy and completely. By God's gift. By his grace. Through believing. In his son. Now Luke shows us. How they came to reaffirm this. In verses 6 through 21.

First. Peter. Sort of steps forward. And he says. Hey look at what God has done. And then James. Comes forward and says. Listen to what God has said. God's acts.

[12 : 39] And God's words. Both aligning. To affirm. The gospel of grace. Jesus. Look in particular. Verses 8 through 9. This is sort of the heart. Of Peter's speech. Peter says.

Look at what God has done. Utterly apart from circumcision. Through faith. And faith alone. God has cleansed the hearts. Of the Gentiles. And given them the Holy Spirit. You know. There that Peter's referring back.

To his experience. With Cornelius. The Gentile Cornelius. And his household. That Luke told us about. Back in. In Acts. 10 through 11. You see. When Peter shared the good news. About Jesus with them.

Before they had really done. Anything. No circumcision. No baptism. No altar call. No decision card. Simply through hearing.

The gospel preached to them. And believing what they heard. God's spirit fell upon them. His Holy Spirit. Dwelt in them.

[13 : 33] Giving evidence. That God had made their hearts. Clean. And fit. For his own holy presence. To reside. Within them. God. You see.

What's going on here. As I alluded to earlier. Is that. You know. Most first century Jews. Especially those who would have been more theologically aligned. With the Pharisee party. Consider the Gentiles. As a whole.

Unclean. Pretty much. Unfit. For God's presence. Unfit. For God's presence. But what the advocates of circumcision. In verses 1 through 5. Didn't seem to realize.

And what all of our inner. Legalists. Don't realize. Is that the cleansing. We actually need. Is more than just an outward.

Ceremonial cleansing. You see. Our problem. As human beings. Is much more. Profound. Than that. What we need. Are our hearts. To be cleansed.

[14 : 30] And that's why. No amount of legal regulations. Or external law keeping. Can ever take away. The guilt. And shame. That we so often feel. You see. Our problem. Isn't that we just do. A few bad actions.

Here or there. And need to. Rehabilitate. Some behaviors. That's not actually. The biblical view. Of what's wrong with us. Of sin. Sin. Biblically speaking. Is a deep.

Heart. Problem. It's the tendency. We all have. To want to live. Our own way. And to be. Our own.

Lords. To define. Things. The way. We decide. To define. Things. And thereby. Whether we realize it. Or not. In so doing.

Rejecting. God's rightful. Rule over us. If you simply. Try to clean up. On the outside. Whether through religious.

[15 : 25] Rights. Like circumcision. Or just playing. Moral effort. Through doing good works. You're actually not changing. The root. Of the problem. You're not cleansing. The heart. And so you still feel.

Guilt. And distance. From God. Even though you're trying. Your best. To be good. And it's never good enough. And you know.

The sad reality is. Is that the very. Attempt. To clean yourself up. From the outside. Is actually just. One more expression. Of your rebellious. Self-reliant.

Heart. Trying. To be your own. Lord. And trying. To dig yourself out. And ironically. Thereby still rejecting. God.

As the only Savior. And Lord. What a quandary. We're in. As human beings. But Peter's testimony.

[16 : 24] Is that. What we could never do. Through works. God has done. In us. Through trusting. In his son. That he's actually.

Cleansed. Our hearts. He's wiped away. The stain. Once. For all. And he sent. The Holy Spirit. To dwell within.

And God did this. Peter says in verse 9. Did you catch that? Making no distinction. Between Jew and Gentile. Look at verse 11. We believe. That we. That is we Jews. Peter's saying here.

Will be saved. Through the grace. Of the Lord Jesus. Just as they will. There's no difference. None of our law keeping. Up till this point.

Made a. Hell of beans difference. In cleansing our hearts. We needed the grace. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as they do. By the way.

[17 : 23] This is why the reformers. Spoke of salvation. Being. By grace alone. Through faith. Alone. In Christ. Alone. They were simply saying.

What Peter says here. In Acts 15. Amen. So Peter points to what God has done. To reaffirm the gospel. What God has done.

Is he's cleansed. Our hearts. By faith. Apart from circumcision. Then in verse 12. Paul and Barnabas get up. And they sort of. They sort of support. Peter's argument. By sharing some of their. Experience of what God has done.

Among the Gentiles. And then James. Stands up. James. Probably. As we know. From other. First century historians. An incredibly. Devout.

Jewish man. Scrupulous. About keeping the law. James stands up. And points now. Not to what God has done.

- [18 : 17] But to conclude the matter. What God has said. He quotes the Old Testament. Prophet. Amos. Where God promised. That one day. The true. Davidic king. Would at last come. That the broken down. House of David. Would finally be repaired. And restored. And then. Through that king. God would call out. A group. Of Gentiles. A remnant. From all nations. Every people. Every tongue. Every tribe. And he would put his name. On them. And they would belong. To the one true lord. Get this. As. Gentiles. That's the significant point. That James finally sees. In the prophets. That they become. God's people. And they do so. While remaining. Gentiles. And therefore.
- [19 : 16] They need not. Become Jews. Because God said. He was going to do it. All along. So do you see. How the church. Came to its conclusion. This critical. Moment. Of theological. And practical. Pastoral. Pastoral. Significance. What. What God did. To the apostles. Was what God. Had said he would do. Through the prophets. That God's words. And God's actions. Lined up. And that sealed it. And they knew. That the Gentiles. Need that. Nothing. To their faith in Christ. To belong. To the family of God. God. Now. Having clarified. The gospel. James begins. To apply it. Now this is our third point. And we see it. Not just in verse 19. After he quotes. The Amos passage. But also back in verse 10. Because we're saved. Through faith in Christ alone. We are freed. From the burden of the law. The law. Which Peter described. In verse 10. As an unbearable yoke.
- [20 : 12] Instead of getting circumcised. The Gentiles are free. But of course. There's more at stake here. Than merely the question. Of circumcision. It's that nothing. Needs to be added. To faith in Christ. And that means. That the burden. Of measuring up. Of meeting the standard. The struggle. And trouble. Of fulfilling the law. Of winning. Approval. That whole burden. Has been lifted. It's been cut loose. And you're free. You know. If you're here. And you're not a Christian. I wonder if you realize this. About Christianity. How radical it is. How unique it is. You see. What Christianity is all about. Is not. Following some clever set of rules. Or unique. Religious duties. In order to get God's approval. Like so many other. Religious systems.
- [21 : 10] That exist. Rather. What's. What Christianity is all about. Is about receiving. God's approval. Freely. Through another. And being freed. From the crushing. Weight. Of a performance. Based. Legalism. That's latent. In all of our hearts. It's about receiving. This is a gift. And of course. That's incredibly humbling. Isn't it? Our pride. Loves. The thought. Of contributing. To our redemption. And it recoils. Against. Thinking. That we have nothing. In our hands. To bring. But don't you see. How liberating. This is. That you can. Finally. Step off. The hamster wheel. Of what really. Amounts to self-salvation. That you can. Finally. Be set free. From hunting. For the latest.
- [22 : 10] Spiritual. Technique. To give you. A breakthrough. You can finally. Stop. Searching. For the latest. Ted talk. That will promise you. Success. And the secret.

Of fulfillment. And how to win. Friends. And influence people. And save the planet. As fine as all those things are. Finally. Sets you free.

From that latest. Fad. Whatever it is. That's going to set you apart. Lord. And mark you out. As in the know. And in the now. Christ says.

Come to me. All you who are weary. And heavy laden. And I will give you rest. I'm enough for you. Come to me. And you know.

For Christians. We need to be. Constantly reminding. And ourselves. Of this truth too. That we're free. From the burden. Of the law. And for at least two reasons. Real quickly. First. Because as we alluded to earlier. Whatever standard.

[23 : 06] We set up. In addition to faith in Christ. For genuine spirituality. For true salvation. Becomes the very thing. That will divide us. And destroy us. Pride and judgment.

Will spring up. In all directions. New believers. Will be troubled. And unsettled. By these self-made standards. That we have imposed. Their growth. Will flounder. And the greatest.

Saddest tragedy. Of all. Is that Christ. Won't get. The glory. For the salvation. He is one. But it will start. To sort of be taken up.

By ourselves. As we look down our noses. At those who don't measure up. As we congratulate ourselves. On all the good things. That we've done. Or all the sort of.

Insider things. That we've picked up on. And can now perform. That we're free. That we're free. That we're free. But you know. The second reason. Is that we need to. Constantly remind ourselves. That we're free.

[24 : 02] From the burden of the law. Is because. So many of us. Even as believers. Still live. Under the weight. Of a sort of. Unresolved. Guilt.

And shame. It comes from a lot. Of different places. But you know. We. We can often look at. Our sort of performance. As a Christian. Or look at our performance. As a spouse. Or look at our performance.

As a parent. Or as a friend. And we just find. That we don't measure up. Even to our own standards. Let alone. The standards. Of everyone else.

Who's blogging online. About how amazing. They are. Right. And here's.

Where the gospel comes in. And the gospel comes in. And says something at first. Utterly. Counterintuitive. Because the gospel comes.

[24 : 56] And says. You know. Cheer up. You are a lot worse. Than you think you are. You know.

Your sin. Goes a lot deeper. Than your little failures. And you're blowing it. With the kids. Every once in a while. And you're not measuring up. For all your vegan friends.

You. The gospel comes in. And says. You've rebelled. Against the God. Who created you. It's a lot worse. Than you think. But then the gospel.

Says this. Cheer up. You're more loved. Than you think you are. Seeing the depth. Of your rebellion. And the utterly.

Spiritually. Helpless state. You are in. Christ came. And died for you. Because he loves you. The perfect. Son of God. Took on your fallen.

[25 : 53] Human flesh. And died a death. In your place. That was totally. And completely. And utterly. Sufficient. To cover. And cleanse. All. Of your stains.

Past. Present. And even. Future. Future. Future. It is sad. That many churches. Today. Teach.

That something. Must be added. To faith. In Christ. In order for a person. To be truly saved. You know. Maybe you grew up. In a church like that. I don't know. A church that maybe. Talked a lot.

About Jesus. As a distant figure. Of power. Or maybe sort of. A chummy friend. That you should. Hang out with. And get to know. And emulate. When it comes to social justice. But at the end of the day.

All the emphasis. Was on what you have to do. And maybe. The church that you grew up in. Even told you. That it was presumptuous. To think. That you can know. Whether or not.

[26 : 48] God will accept you. In the end. Because after all. They say. You got to live a good life. And then God decides. But friends. Listen to this. That is not.

The gospel. That's not. What the apostles taught. God. And any church. No matter how big. Or how old. Or how nice. The people are.

Any church. That says. We're saved. By anything. Other than. God's grace alone. Through faith alone. In Christ alone. Is not teaching. True Christianity. In the passage.

We read earlier. That Myon Hwa read for us. Paul says. If righteousness. Were through the law. Then Christ died. For no purpose. If we could somehow. Give ourselves. A little push. Into the kingdom.

Why would the son of God. Have to die. For our sins. And so the cross. Becomes the great. Display. That our works.

[27 : 53] Can play no role. In God forgiving us. And accepting us. Either now. Or in the last day. And the cross. Becomes the great display. That the good news. Is so much.

Better than that. It's so much. Better than a works. Based salvation. It's the liberating. Burden. Lifting. Grace. Of Jesus Christ.

Christ. And of course. All this immediately. Raises the question. Doesn't it. For a lot of people. That. If we're really. Saved sheerly. By grace. Wouldn't that lead to.

Completely immoral. Lifestyles. I mean. Come on. If I knew that God. Accepted me. Totally through grace. Apart from what I did. If my works. Had nothing to do with it. Man.

Wouldn't I just. Do whatever the heck. I kind of wanted. But interestingly. That's not what we see here. At the Jerusalem council.

[28 : 50] And this is our fourth point. That Luke shows us. That yes. The gospel of grace. Frees us from the law. But it compels us. To love. In verses 20 through 21.

James lists some things. That he says. Gentile Christians. Ought to avoid. Now this list was probably a bit. Maybe befuddling for you. And maybe kind of gross. Let's talk about blood.

And of course the question is. What is James referring to? Now some things. Some commentators think. That James is saying. Hey look. Stay away from things. That are going to needlessly offend. Your Jewish brothers and sisters. For the sake of unity.

You don't have to get circumcised. But you know. Stay away from like. Bloody cuts of meat. Because all your Jewish friends. Aren't going to really. Like that. It's going to be hard to fellowship with them.

So don't needlessly offend. But. So basically. So them. Curtail your freedom. For their sake. Out of love for them. But you know. Some think. Some commentators think. That James is describing.

[29 : 47] Not particular sort of. Old Testament Levitical codes here. But actually. He's looking. Outside into the pagan world. And he's describing. Pagan. Temple. Practices.

He's telling them. In other words. Not to stay away. From a particular menu. In the church. But from a particular venue. From those places. Where idol worship.

And the attendant. Sexual immorality. That often surrounded. Pagan temples. Where all of that. Would have been. Explicit and rampant. James is saying. Hey look.

Stay away from that. Steer clear. Now here's what's interesting about that. That seems kind of obvious to us. Right? But. That would have been an even bigger.

And harder sacrifice. For Gentile Christians. An even bigger act of love. Than staying away. From non-kosher foods. And here's why. Because so much. Of ancient civil.

[30 : 46] And social life. In whatever city you lived in. Revolved around your local shrine. Your local temple. It was the center. Of the sort of.

Not just religious life. It was the center of political life. In some cities. It was the center of economic life. And James in essence. Was saying. Hey. Now the gospel.

Shapes all your priorities. Even if it means. Becoming something. Of a social outcast. And all your friends. Thinking you're weird.

Because you won't go down. To sacrifice to the emperor. Or to the local. Sort of tribal deities. You can imagine. The conversations. That gentile Christians. Must have had. With their.

Non-believing gentile friends. What? You're not coming to the temple? Why not? Look. You don't have to sacrifice.

[31 : 42] Just come. Why? I mean. It must have been utterly baffling to them. Completely off the map. Why would they give up.

Such a thing. For the sake of those weird. Kind of fundy Jews. Who are keeping all those rules. That now identify with this king.

You call Jesus. And friends. The reason deep down. Why. They could do this. Is because they knew.

That this Jesus. The king. Their savior. Had given up his rights. And laid down his life. For their sake.

And now it was no small thing. For them to lay down their rights. And to lay down their lives. For their brothers and sisters. Even the ones who are very different from them. See the gospel of grace.

[32 : 41] Frees us from the law. And it compels us to love. If in Christ we have everything we need. Everything we need. If he's utterly sufficient for righteousness.

And life. And salvation. If nothing needs to be added. To what he's given us. Solely and completely through faith. If a heart resting in him. And cleansed by him.

And filled with the Holy Spirit. Of love. And joy. And peace. If that's a reality. If that's what you're full of in Christ. Then to give up certain things. Out of love for a brother or sister in Christ.

That becomes the most natural thing in the world. It becomes a glad privilege. To give up things. Because you really lose nothing.

In giving them up. Because you have everything in him. And you know this is something that legalism can never do. Legalism often gives the appearance of morality.

[33 : 42] Doesn't it? Of doing good. But ultimately isn't it self-centered? You see if you're doing good ultimately. To get a good standing with God.

Or to prove yourself. Then you're really doing good ultimately. For your own sake. Aren't you? You see only when the gospel liberates you.

From the need. Of self-justification. And earning God's favor. Only when you're free from that. Will you ever start loving other people.

For their sake. For love's sake. And not for your own sake. Isn't there a deep irony here? That some people are wary of the gospel.

Of utterly free grace. Because they think it might destroy. The motivation for good works. When in reality. Only. The gospel of free grace. Can give you the right.

[34 : 39] And good motivation. To actually do. A good work. And friends. If we've come to trust in Jesus. Who died. And lives again. Who gives us his spirit.

Then good works will flow forth. Finally. Then the last point. The last point. That we see in this passage. Is found in verse 30 through 35. After the council in Jerusalem.

Sends a delegation. Back to Antioch. With a letter. Sort of outlining their decision. Luke gives us this description. Of what happens. Let's look at verse 30. So. They were sent off. They went down to Antioch. 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.

[35 : 32] With many others also. The last point that we see here. Is that working hard. To preserve the gospel. Is of utmost importance.

For the church's health. I mean no doubt. What we've just been reading. This council of Jerusalem. Was hard work. They discussed. And they debated.

They had long nights. Looking at scripture. Talking about what God had done. Hashing out the implications. They traveled long miles. And travailed long hours.

Over this matter. It was hard work. Just think how easy it would have been. For the church in Antioch. Simply to say. Forget this. We're just going to ignore. The church in Jerusalem. Because they're like.

So ten years ago. And we're the cutting edge. Sayonara. But no. They do the long. Hard work. Of coming. To an agreement.

[36 : 27] And of reaffirming. The gospel of grace. And the complete sufficiency. Of faith in Christ. But in the end. As Luke shows us here. It was totally worth it.

What's the result? A church full of joy. Verse 31. A church that strengthened. Verse 32. A church that comes and goes in peace.

Verse 33. Why all these things? Because they worked hard. To preserve the gospel. What about us friends?

Do we work hard with one another. To uphold and clarify. And reaffirm. The gospel of grace. In one another's lives. Or are we prone. To quickly. Just kind of write people off. Or to ignore.

Or to judge. Or to just go our own way. I mean after all. Think of how much time. Was spent on this issue. Paul and Barnabas. Could have been out. Planting churches. And making more disciples. Instead. They trekked the whole way.

[37 : 26] To Jerusalem. And dove headlong. Into a thorny. Theological debate. Not for the sake. Of merely being right. But for the sake. Of the church's health. Because they knew. That in the long run.

The vitality. Of the church. Depended on this issue. They weren't going down. To Jerusalem.

To argue about the color. Of carpets. And the pews. But they went down. To get the gospel right. And friends. The vitality. Of our church.

Will too. Depend. On the clarity. Of the gospel. You know. We talk a lot. At Trinity. About being a gospel. Centered church.

Of being. Gathered. Not by all the things. That we like. But gathered. By the gospel. Of Jesus Christ. We talk about being changed. Being changed. Not by. Sort of hard effort.

[38 : 22] Although there's some of that. Not being changed. By the next trick. Or fad. But being changed. By the gospel. Of Jesus Christ. And we talk about being sent out. Of going forth. In mission. Not merely because we want to.

Do good works. Although that's great. But we get sent out. Because of the gospel. Of Jesus Christ. Why do we talk so much. About being a gospel. Centered church.

This is why. Because as we see. In verses 30. And 35. It's the gospel. Clarified. Taught. And celebrated. That brings joy. And strength.

And peace. To the church. Today we're heading into. What many church traditions. Call holy week. This is the week.

When we remember. The central events. Of Jesus's death. And resurrection. Easter. Coming in a week. Good Friday. On Friday. Let me challenge you. To do something.

[39 : 21] This week. That will deepen. Your understanding. Of the gospel. The church email. This week. Included some devotionals. For holy week. That would be a good place. To start. Lots of books.

Down stairs. In the book stall. Four. Gospels. In your new testament. To read. You just pick one. Maybe you want to meet.

With a friend. This week. To talk in depth. About how the gospel. Of free grace. Is at work. In your lives. And pray together. That it would take. Deeper root in you. Some of you might be thinking.

That's the weirdest thing. I would ever ask someone to do. But now I just gave you permission. So it won't be weird. She's like. Hey. Remember how Pastor Nick. Said that weird thing. We should do. Let's do that. Okay. Great. I'll try it. Whatever you do.

Do something. But know this friends. That whatever hard work. You invest. Will be worth the effort. Here it is.

[40 : 20] Joy. Strength. And peace. Are you wanting those things. In your life? Do you want those things. In your relationships? Do you want those things. In our church?

Then hold firm. To the gospel. And dive into its depths. And let it expose your inner legalists. Let it do that uncomfortable work. Of showing you all the ways in which you're prone to add things.

To what Christ has done. Dive into it together. And then experience again. the freedom from the law's demands and the power to actually love.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for giving us in Jesus a sufficient Savior. Forgive us for how we add to what you have done.

God, open the eyes of those who are maybe even now seeing for the first time that salvation comes freely and wholly by grace.

[41 : 23] Father, by your Spirit, do that work among us, we pray. Amen.