

The Acts of the Apostles

Sermon Number: 25

Acts 16:1 – 40

November 20, 2011

The Gospel Spreads

In Acts 15, at the Jerusalem Council, the issue of whether a Gentile could become a Christian, except he be circumcised, it was decided that God makes **no distinction** between Jews and Gentiles in the matter of justification.

Justification is the theological term that describes the act of God, who takes the initiative, to seek and save a lost soul. A soul chosen before the foundation of the world, predestinated, called, convicted of sin, and regenerated by the Holy Spirit and thus enabled to comprehend their desperate need for the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Justification is always the opposite of condemnation.

Rom 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Justification is by grace through faith alone.

But aren't the Jews God's "chosen people?"

The answer is yes **if** you know what the Jews were chosen to be.

God did indeed call out a people to Himself and set them apart in the matter of worship, dietary rules, and Sabbaths. God blessed them with the oracles of God and they had many advantages as Jews [Cf. Romans 3].

But in the matter of justification, being declared not guilty, not condemned, the Jews had no advantage whatsoever over the Gentiles [non - Jews].

This issue about the privilege of the Jew had to be settled or else the church would have never grown beyond a Jewish sect.

Certain false brethren taught regarding the Gentiles: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." [15:1]

After a heated debate Peter made a statement that forever settles the question:

But we believe that we [Jews] will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they [Gentiles] will. Acts 15:11 ESV

Then James interprets the prophet Amos, saying that all the prophets agree, and referring to the rebuilding of the tent of David, to be fulfilled in the calling of Gentiles together with the Jews in the same body of Christ, the church.

The Jerusalem Council concluded with a letter being sent to the Gentiles which was the subject of our lesson last Sunday.

The Gospel Spreads

It is time for the Gospel to be spread into the Gentile world and as a result of a dispute between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark's trustworthiness, two missionary teams set out from Antioch. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus. Paul enlists Silas and returns to the churches Paul had founded in Asia Minor.

My design in this series of expositions is to give a broad view and try to distill the essence of each section. So if you find that I have not covered a section sufficiently we will charge it to that.

We come to Acts 16 and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit is seen in how a young convert to Christianity is introduced. We have the first mention of Timothy in the New Testament.

In the providence of God, after the issue of whether someone must do any physical act of obedience "in order to be saved" is settled, a test case is presented. After all of the debate over circumcision being necessary for the Gentiles, Paul then circumcises Timothy! What is going on here?

Timothy

Acts 16:1-3

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. ² He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. ³ Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

It has been five years since Paul and Barnabus visited Derbe and Lystra [14:8-21].

During that trip Paul had been stoned at Lystra and left for dead. Apparently there was some fruit from the preaching of the Gospel because in Lystra a young man named Timothy emerges and becomes very dear to Paul.

Timothy's name in Greek means "honoring God."

Timothy had been taught the OT Scriptures all of his young life.

2 Tim 3:14-16

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Please note that Paul says it is through the "sacred writings," the Old Testament, "...which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

Timothy's mother, Eunice, was a Jewish believer as was his grandmother, Lois.

2 Tim 1:5

I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

However, Timothy's father was a Greek and Timothy had not been raised in an orthodox Jewish home and consequently had not been circumcised.

But Paul circumcised Timothy after all of the turmoil at the Jerusalem Council precisely over circumcision! Circumcision is not necessary and then Timothy is circumcised.

To complicate the matter further, Paul circumcised Timothy and then in the case of Titus, Paul refused to have him circumcised!

Gal 2:1-3

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ² I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. ³ But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.

Why was Timothy circumcised when Paul refused to allow Titus to be circumcised?

In the case of Titus the Gospel was the issue as in Acts 15.

With Timothy it was an accommodation to the Jews so that Timothy would be accepted by them and listen to his message of Jesus Christ.

The principle at issue is explained by Paul:

1 Cor 9:19-23

¹⁹ For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

So in the case of Timothy it was an act of expediency for the sake of peace with the Jews. In the case of Titus, the issue was at the very heart of the Gospel; must a person do anything “in order to be saved.”

As I said, it is the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to immediately follow the Jerusalem Council with Paul going ahead and circumcising Timothy.

With the matter of Timothy resolved the missionary team was able to have success as they revisited the cities.

Acts 16:4-5

⁴ As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily

Being Led by the Spirit

Acts 16:6-10

⁶ And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

When I read 16:7 “.. but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them,” and we see in the same place that it was the Holy Spirit that did not allow them to speak the word, I am reminded of the very beginning of Acts where we read how it is all the work of the risen Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit that is recorded as the history of the early church.

Acts 1:1-2

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

How the Holy Spirit works is illustrated by the circumstances of the apostles.

There are four different Greek words used in these verses to show how the Spirit of Jesus guided the actions of the team.

koluo “to hinder, restrain, prevent, or forbid.”

We are not told just how He did it but the Holy Spirit prevented them from following their intended route into the province of Asia [6].

ouk eiasen “not allowed, not permitted.” They tried to turn north into Bythinia but again were not allowed the liberty to go [7].

horama dia nuktos “a vision through the night.”

The Greek indicates that Paul saw the same vision repeatedly throughout the night. He saw a man from Macedonia pleading with him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." [9]

sumbiabadzonte “we cause to come together, we infer, or, we conclude.”

The team evaluated Paul’s vision and considered the series of prohibitions they had met and concluded together that the Holy Spirit was sending them across the Aegean Sea to Macedonia, which would be the first stop on the European continent. [10]

The First Convert in Europe

Acts 16:11-15

¹¹ So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. ¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

The Greek indicates that they left immediately and sailed to Samothrace, a mountain island that rises 5,000 feet above the sea. They land at Neapolis which is the seaport for Philippi. Philippi was a Roman garrison mostly of military personnel.

The Jewish population was too small for a synagogue. The custom required a minimum of ten men to have a synagogue. So the Jews met at the riverside for Sabbath prayers. This river is the Gangites where the apostles find some Jewish women and some God-Fearing Gentile women and told them about Jesus.

The focus of this episode is a woman named Lydia. She is a business woman, a seller of purple cloth. The purple dye required was produced drop by drop from a shellfish and was so rare that only the very wealthy could afford to buy it. She was herself a wealthy woman and the head of her own household.

The Lord opened her heart. This is true of anyone who hears the Gospel and is able to respond in genuine faith.

John 6:44-45

⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—

Lydia's heart was opened and she heard the Gospel. After she was baptized she invited the apostles to come to her home and others believed and were baptized.

Lydia was the first convert on the European continent.

A Slave of the Devil is Loosed

Acts 16:16-18

¹⁶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." ¹⁸ And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

The second convert is also a woman. It is important to note that the Gospel is for all social strata. A wealthy business woman and a slave girl are on the same level at the foot of the cross.

Remember the pairing of Nicodemus and the woman at the well in Samaria in John's Gospel. The "master in Israel" and the town prostitute have exactly the same standing before God and have exactly the same need of a sufficient Saviour, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

Tullian Tchividjian:

"What the Pharisee, the prostitute, and everyone in between, need to remember every day is that Christ offers forgiveness full and free from both our self-righteous goodness and our unrighteous badness. This is the hardest thing for us to believe as Christians. We think it's a mark of spiritual maturity to hang onto our guilt and shame. We've sickly concluded that the worse we feel, the better we actually are. The declaration of Psalm 103:12 is the most difficult for us to grasp and embrace: "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." To be convinced in our hearts, said Martin Luther, "that we have forgiveness of sins and peace with God by grace alone is the hardest thing." Or, as Corrie ten Boom once said, "God takes our sins—the past, present, and future—and dumps them in the sea and puts up a sign that says '**No Fishing allowed.**'" This seems too good to be true...it can't be that simple, that easy, that real!

It is true! No strings attached. No but's. No conditions. No need for balance. If you are a Christian, you are right now under the completely sufficient imputed righteousness of Christ. Your pardon is full and final. In Christ, you're forgiven. You're clean. It is finished."

(Brother Tchividjian is pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church)

Can you imagine yourself right there with the lowest of society and take your place as a guilty sinner in need of a Savior?

Indulge me to repeat a story told by Rolfe Barnard about a time when he was preaching in Texas. During the service the town prostitute got saved and she came down the aisle. Everyone knew who she was and they were aghast. After an awkward few minutes one of the town's leading women came and put her arm around the woman and said, "Welcome, sister."

Well this second woman was a slave both physically and spiritually. Her owners made a lot of money from her fortune telling. She followed the apostles for several days and was correct in her identification of them as "servants of the Most High God."

Paul became annoyed because she was distracting from the message of the Gospel and he commanded the evil spirit to come out of her in the name of Jesus. The spirit recognized the authority of Jesus and obeyed.

A slave of Satan is freed to be a slave of Jesus Christ.

Jailbreak

Acts 16:19-34

¹⁹ But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. ²⁰ And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. ²¹ They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." ²² The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴ Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

We are not told specifically that the slave girl became a Christian but the context surely suggests that she responded to the message that Paul preached about Jesus.

But her owners are very upset when they see that the money made from the slave girl is gone. The owners complain to the local authorities and appeal to their prejudices against the Jews. Paul and Silas are beaten and locked in a dungeon.

Instead of feeling sorry for themselves they worship God. They pray and sing and everyone hears them. Suddenly, an earthquake shakes the prison and the stocks and chains fall off of all of the prisoners. Now every prisoner could have escaped but none of them did.

The jailer was shaken awake and when he saw the doors standing open he assumed that all of the prisoners had escaped. In the Roman army if a guard allowed a prisoner to escape, regardless of the circumstances, he would be executed immediately. The jailer decided it would be better to kill himself rather than face execution. Paul stopped him.

"Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."

The right question!

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Whether the jailer had eternal life in mind or only deliverance from execution is not relevant. Paul answered him with the Gospel.

An Appeal to Roman Law

Acts 16:35-40

³⁵ But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." ³⁶ And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." ³⁷ But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." ³⁸ The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. ³⁹ So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

At daybreak the officials sent the police with orders to “Let those men go.”

But Paul knew his rights as a Roman citizen and was not about to let the magistrates off the hook. Paul insisted that the magistrates themselves come and acknowledge their mistake and personally let them out of prison.

In this instance Paul is being a Roman and not a Jew.

It is true that Christians owe their total allegiance to Jesus Christ, but they may exercise their rights as citizens as long as the Gospel is not compromised.

The matter of doing something “in order to be saved” is forever settled in the Word of God although we still have the modern Pharisees teaching that you must be baptized “in order to be saved.”

The Gospel spreads into Europe and we see that the first converts in Europe are women; one very high in the social order and the other a slave. A jailer in Philippi is saved and so is his entire household who believed in God.

Paul is invited to leave Philippi and he visits Lydia, encourages the brothers and heads for Thessalonica.

What a beautiful story of the “simplicity” of the Gospel. By simplicity I mean its application to anyone and its being free from works of the flesh.

Repent and believe in the Gospel.

Amen!