

Acts 15:22-33

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- **INTRODUCTION:** Would you turn with me to Acts 15:22-35? Acts 15 is where we will be again this morning. What a beautiful day for Family Sunday. While you turn there, I have a few announcements to highlight. (Nauvoo at Night- PEOPLE ARE COMING, COME AND JOIN US! Kevin- Shiloh- Next week during Sunday School, Faith Promise on March 26!)
 - o Would you stand with me for the reading of God's word? (Read passage, pray, you may be seated, drink).
- A few months ago, I saw a meme on facebook. It was about what a letter to the church in America would look like. It then was adapted by a few Christian comedians and went semi-viral as people laughed about that idea.
 - o There were two general consensus's. Either it would be like the letter to the Corinthians condemning us, or, it would be super laid back and encouraging.
 - o Let me propose something though. Today, we see a letter written to the church in Antioch. It is short but it's really important!
- § The epistles overall are similar to one another, but one of the things that we forget about is HOW THE CHURCHES RECEIVED the letters! One of the unique aspects that we get to see today is HOW THE CHURCH RECEIVED THEIR LETTER!
- So, here's a thought. Instead of wondering about

WHAT A LETTER TO AMERICAN CHURCHES
WOULD LOOK LIKE, what if we considered *HOW* we
would react to being convicted of mistakes and
shortcomings?

o Today, as we walk through this passage, I have three
headings that I want us to walk through.

§ You may have noticed the Greek words in your
bulletin today and had your eyes glaze over, but these
three words are **EXTREMELY IMPORTANT** for our
passage today.

o These words are:

§ ἡγουμένους- **Meaning- GUIDE**

§ ἀγαπητοῖς- **Meaning- BELOVED**

§ ἀπελύθησαν- **Meaning- SENT**

• **We are emphasizing these words because not
only are they important in this passage, they
provide us a “Roadmap” for our OWN FAITH!**

• **BODY:** Acts 15 really is a powerful chapter. I love the
way that we see the early church working together so
deliberately in this chapter.

o From Antioch to Jerusalem and really, all around the
Mediterranean, the believers were all united around
JESUS! There was a hunger for unity and a **HUNGER**
for **TRUTH!**

o The first half of Acts 15, we saw the church in Antioch
troubled by false teachers. These false teachers upset
the hearts of many members of the church.

§ Further, they taught that Gentiles could not be saved
UNLESS they were “*properly*” *circumcised*; which
really meant that they had to live under the old

covenant.

§ That was never what Jesus came teaching! Instead of living under the Old Covenant, we have been set free. Instead of living in fear of the law, we are to interpret the law through the lens of Jesus!

- In other words, our salvation is secure *BECAUSE* of Jesus and we are to look at all of scripture applying it and interpreting it through what Jesus taught and through the Holy Spirit!

- o However, we are set free from the law; it no longer is the main controlling influence on our life!

- o The Jerusalem council convened together to uphold this very important doctrine!

- As we begin looking at verses 22-35, we see that the council decides to send some messengers. *“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.”*

- o Before we dive into the letter itself, let’s talk about these first few phrases because they are **EXTREMELY IMPORTANT!**

- First, we see that Barnabas and Paul are sent back to Antioch, but they are sent with *Barsabbas and Silas* who are leaders of the church in Jerusalem and the surrounding area!

o I love the word for “leading men.”

§ The word is *ἡγουμένους*, which is an accusative aorist participle that could be translated as, “Men who lead,” OR, “Men who guide.”

o Barsabbas and Silas are being sent to **GUIDE THE BROTHERS AND THE SISTERS IN TRUTH!**

§ It’s what they are responsible for in the first place!

§ What we see here is a reflection of why we should even go to church in the first place!

· We gather together to learn and to be **GUIDED!** We are guided first and foremost by **GOD’S WORD** and then by men who have been appointed and gifted by the Holy Spirit!

o Let’s be clear; that’s what we see in Acts 15!

Barsabbas and Silas are not appointed because of skill or because they are willing. They are appointed because the Holy Spirit has **APPOINTED THEM AND GIFTED THEM!**

§ And it’s a good thing that God has given us guides!

§ Look all around us at the culture and the era that we live in! Culture is lost. It needs a guide so badly!

· We have confusion over so many things. Gender, the meaning of good and whether there is truth; the role of a family, what the purpose of life is and so much more!

o What we need is a guide!

o Let’s rejoice though because **GOD HAS GIVEN US A GUIDE!**

§ The guide that we have and need is the gospel; the good news that we are saved through **FAITH IN JESUS!**

§ All of these confusions can be linked to something from Genesis 3! It can all be linked to the sinful fall of humanity!

§ In the same way, all of this can be redeemed only through 1 THING! JESUS! ONLY THROUGH THE GOSPEL CAN WE BE SAVED!

o So because of this very truth; that we need guidance and that God has given us people who can help guide us, we see a letter sent to Antioch, Syria and Cilicia; in other words, to the region of Antioch to combat this false teaching.

§ Now, it may not sound like a big deal, but a LETTER IS SENT!

· Understand, letters were very expensive to send because PARCHMENT WAS EXTREMELY EXPENSIVE!

o The church is still facing persecution, but they decide that this is worth the literally high cost and they send a LETTER TO THE BELIEVERS!

§ How important is salvation through faith in Jesus alone? It's so important that the church in Jerusalem sends not only the letter, but also Barsabbas and Silas!

§ Likewise for us, look around! Our community and our world needs people to bring the gospel and to bring truth! That can be us, just as the early believers brought truth!

· But, what's the cost? Well, for the church in Jerusalem it was sending people out! For us, it may be sending people out, it may be dedicated prayer, but here's what we can agree on. If we want to reach the world with the

gospel, in the way that the early church did, then we need to GATHER TOGETHER so that we can be on the same page!

· Let's look at this letter! This is how it starts after their 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, 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.”*

o This letter begins by addressing the false teachers that have entered the church in Antioch.

§ The false teachers have troubled them, unsettled them and have claimed to have had authority that no one gave them!

· This same thing happens today! We must be on guard! There are genuine false teachers today who have crept into the church. They twist and distort the gospel and they claim authority that they do not have!

· Do not disregard this warning in Acts!

§ They send Paul and Barnabas back with this letter, where the leaders have come together to AN AGREEMENT!

· They solve the problem and they send out *“BELOVED” Paul and Barnabas!*

· The word used here for beloved is *ἀγαπητοῖς*. This is the agape form of love, or a form of love with no limits,

with nothing held back!

o This is the same form of love that Jesus has for us!

o This very statement is really a testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit! When Stephen was stoned, it was PAUL who stood watching with approval.

§ Now, he is *agape loved* by the Church! When we are read in Matthew 5:44 that we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute you, this should come to mind!

§ When you think of that person in your life who just doesn't get it, who openly rejects Christianity, who lives a life ACTIVELY AGAINST GOD, THIS EXAMPLE SHOULD COME TO OUR MIND!

· Paul's entire testimony is a result of GOD WORKING POWERFULLY IN THE LIFE OF SOMEONE THAT WAS FEARED!

· GOD WORKED IN SAUL/PAUL AND GOD WORKS TODAY!

o No one is "too far gone" for Jesus! Our culture is not "too far gone" for Jesus! We are to submit those thoughts to God and to PRAY FOR THOSE AROUND US!

§ THE POWER OF PRAYER IS REAL AND TANGIBLE! WE MUST BE IN PRAYER CONSISTENTLY!

· Not only does the Church in Jerusalem send back their beloved brothers Paul and Barnabas who have risked their lives for the gospel, they send back Judas and Silas who go to further emphasize what has been taught. The letter then tells us what topics they should

teach on.

o *“For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us 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.”

o That’s a pretty straightforward list of recommendations.

§ Let’s be clear, the Holy Spirit gives **NO BURDEN, BUT, THE HOLY SPIRIT DOES CONVICT!**

· What the Church in Jerusalem is passing on is a list of convictions given by the Holy Spirit.

o Our convictions matter!

o But listen, before we talk about convictions, if you feel burdened by rules in your walk with God, let me challenge you to run to the Holy Spirit! You may be convicted about something, but you may also have added rules on!

§ Be like the early believers and go to the Holy Spirit seeking wisdom and direction!

§ So let’s talk about these convictions that are passed on. Food sacrificed to idols, blood, what has been strangled, and sexual immorality.

· At the time, these were the pressing issues. The first three were all major problems that divided the Jewish heritage and the Gentile background believers.

o So let’s classify those as ***PEACEKEEPING CONVICTIONS.***

§ We see these heavily in 1 Corinthians 8.

o Secondly, we see sexual immorality. Let's be clear; that is **DIRECTLY FROM SCRIPTURE!**

§ So we could have a second form of conviction; a *SCRIPTURAL CONVICTION*.

§ Let's look at these two categories of convictions.

· Our *Peacekeeping Convictions* probably will not involve food sacrificed to idols, or blood, but there are other things that it will involve.

· So what could a *Peacekeeping Conviction* be?

o Maybe it's alcohol. Scripture doesn't draw a super direct line on what to do with alcohol. Opinions on drinking as Christians varies.

o For some, alcohol is a major issue. It may be from a battle with addiction, or having experienced the after-effects of someone else's addiction.

§ On the other hand, someone may see no issue with it. So this can be a divisive issue. What's a possible solution to it?

· Maybe it's to not drink, or maybe it's to be careful about who you drink in front of!

o This is where the HOLY SPIRIT is our GUIDE!

o Ultimately, *The goal of a Peacekeeping Conviction is to KEEP THE PEACE in the Church!*

§ It's to prevent any form of division from beginning!

§ The food sacrificed to idols was not inherently evil.

§ But, as Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians 8, some see food sacrificed to idols as a stumbling block, just as drinking might be a stumbling block to some.

§ So listen to Paul's decision. "Sinning against your

brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.”

§ So, Paul chose not to eat meat sacrificed to an idol!

§ His reasoning? To support his brothers and sisters.

o To summarize, a Peacekeeping conviction, is a conviction, led by the Holy Spirit, to abstain from something, avoid something, or do something differently, with the end goal of PRESERVING UNITY!

§ On the other hand, we see that the final conviction of the letter is about sexual immorality.

· In scripture we directly see this precluded. Think of 1 Corinthians 5 in this case. By the way, if you want to learn more about what scripture says about convictions, read 1 Corinthians!

o 1 Corinthians 5 tells of members of the church in public sexual immorality and who are proud of it!

§ Paul directly condemns this. Why? Because sexual immorality is clearly a sin in God’s eyes! It’s clear throughout scripture. That’s a clear difference between these two categories of convictions. One is directly spoken about in scripture and one is not.

· Was it common in culture? Absolutely! But, that doesn’t make it right!

· The same thing is true today! Sexual immorality is apparent in our culture. That doesn’t make it right!

o So what is the scriptural challenge we are given? We are told to *FLEE*, to *RUN* from sexual immorality!

§ Think of the example of Joseph! When faced with sexual immorality, HE LITERALLY RAN OUT OF THE HOUSE! That’s a conviction!

§ Ultimately, this conviction starts based in scripture but then it is also **BECAUSE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S LEADING!**

· Let me be clear, *A Christian without convictions is like salt that has lost its saltiness. A Christian with no convictions will look and act just like the world!*

o We are to look different though, **BECAUSE** we are set apart by God!

§ Let's guard our heart with **SCRIPTURAL AND PEACEKEEPING CONVICTIONS, LED NOT BY OURSELVES, BUT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT!**

· Before we move on, let me just further emphasize one last thing. Convictions do not come from us. They come from the Holy Spirit!

· A conviction and an opinion are **TWO VERY DIFFERENT THINGS!** I may not like Kesha's music, but I'm not convicted against listening to it; I just don't enjoy it.

o On the other hand, I am *CONVICTED* not to go to a strip club! It isn't an opinion, it isn't a preference like how I want my steak cooked, it's a conviction from **SCRIPTURE** and **LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT!**

o Let's be deliberate in forming convictions by *PRAYING, STUDYING SCRIPTURE AND LETTING THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDE US!*

· Truthfully, the letter is short! It's direct! The letter covers these convictions and then abruptly ends saying, "FAREWELL."

o Why? Because Barnabas, Paul, Silas and Barsabbas are **COMING** with the letter! They are tasked with

EXPANDING ON THIS LETTER AND AIDING IN UNDERSTANDING!

· Verses 30 and 31 say, *“So when 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.”*

o The group of 4 men and anyone else who has come from Antioch; if you recall, it does seem like at the beginning of Chapter 15 there are some other brothers from the church who go, return.

§ Upon their return, the brothers gather the congregation together! They come together to hear the letter.

· Notice that even in a world full of other things that need to be done and a world that is not friendly to believers, **THE CONGREGATION GATHERS!**

· Here’s an honest question. Do you come together and gather? If you don’t what are you giving your time to?

o In the list of challenges given to the Church in Antioch, we saw one about food sacrificed to idols. In America, we may not have that as an option, but a modern day equivalent **COULD BE** our willingness to sacrifice Christian community and fellowship in favor of other ways to spend our time.

o This letter is read, clarifying salvation and then giving direction for what life should look like. How does the church react? **THEY REJOICE! THEY REJOICE BECAUSE THEY ARE ENCOURAGED!**

§ This letter is direct but they get a clear answer to their

trouble! They have been confused and have been struggling, but **NOW THEY KNOW THE TRUTH!**

- That's a reason to rejoice!

- Here's an honest question, when we are confronted of doing something wrong, do we **REJOICE?** I don't usually, but shouldn't we?

- o After all, it's God working to further our sanctification!

§ I love the definition of Sanctification in the New City Catechism. *Sanctification means our GRADUAL GROWING RIGHTEOUSNESS!*

- That's a great thing for us! Isn't that exactly what we should be experiencing!

- o Salvation isn't just for heaven, the **GOSPEL** as we keep saying, **SHOULD TRANSFORM US!**

- o The gospel isn't just about heaven, it's transformational for us **EVERY SINGLE DAY BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN SAVED!**

§ Our salvation **BEGINS HERE, NOT IN HEAVEN!**

- In verse 32 and 33 we read, "*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.*"

- o Judas and Silas; that is Barsabbas and Silas come and they encourage the believers! They take the time to speak and care for these troubled believers.

§ There is such a deep servants heart. The unity of the early church that so often is discussed was not only in one location; it truly transcended locations and cities!

· There was genuine Christian love around all of the known world! Supporting one another was **INFINITELY** more important than who got credit!

o After taking time with them to strengthen the believers, Judas and Silas are sent off.

§ Now, this is the last of the three Greek words I want to talk about. This word is “*ἀπελύθησαν*.”

(Apeluthesan)

· This is an aorist, passive indicative verb. Now, I know those are a lot of words that we don't often talk about, but here's what that means:

o Aorist- Something that has previously happened, but, it is not always a PAST-TENSE. Greeks did not have a true past-tense verb, so this tense is used when talking about a previous event

o Passive- Something happens to the subject- the subject is Silas and Judas. If it was active, they'd either be fleeing or they'd be **FORCED TO LEAVE!**

o Indicative- There was definitely an action!

§ So when we combine this all together, we see that as Judas and Silas are sent off in peace, they were sent back in deep love; released from their duty to the Church in Antioch.

· Another way to say it is, “Judas and Silas were released from their commission to return home.”

· They are sent out in peace and **LOVE** by the Church in Antioch!

o The reason that I emphasize this is that their mission was always temporary.

o The need for additional support was always supposed

to be temporary, because, it would mean that the church in Antioch understood and applied the TRUTH of the GOSPEL!

o In other words, as they are SENT OFF, it is a sign that they have allowed the Spirit to work in their lives and they have grown!

§ Their sanctification has moved forward THROUGH THIS PROCESS!

§ Sanctification is just that; it is a process and one that we should ALWAYS be growing in! What was the definition we just used for it? “Sanctification means our gradual growing righteousness!”

· Now, let’s wrap up this passage. You may notice that verse 34 is missing from your text. Verse 34 is not present in the majority of early manuscripts.

o You may see it in a footnote in your bible. It simply clarifies that Silas chose to remain in Antioch.

§ Why was it added? No one is sure, but probably by a scribe in an attempt to clarify what has happened. Does this destroy the reliability of scripture?

· Not at all! It absolutely does not. We won’t get into the translation reliability, but the reliability of scripture in translation is monumentally HIGHER than any other book written during a similar time period.

· Because of the questions about this verse, the modern translators have pulled it to the side, so that we can see the most accurate form of scripture!

· Verse 35 concludes our section by saying, *“But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others*

also.”

o Even as Judas is sent back to Jerusalem and as Silas has fulfilled his mission, Paul and Barnabas show that the teaching and preaching ministry of a local church is never finished!

§ They share the responsibility between one another and many others.

o Rather than focus on that aspect, let's focus in on the first phrase.

§ Paul and Barnabas **REMAINED IN ANTIOCH!**

· They are **UNITED WITH THEIR LOCAL CHURCH!**

o If you have not noticed, even as we've talked heavily about convictions, we should also see the emphasis that is put on **GATHERING TOGETHER** with the local body of believers!

o We are made for community!

§ That should not be a surprise to us.

§ So, before we take a minute to make some final applications, let me give a blunt challenge.

· **BE HERE!** Be here! Come and join us! Come and gather together; join in fellowship, young and old, regardless of background.

o **COME AND BE HERE!** We are here on Family Sunday because we are just that; **WE ARE A FAMILY!**

o Regardless of what your experiences with family have been like, let me challenge you to **JOIN US AND BE A PART OF OUR FAMILY** as we **FOLLOW GOD TOGETHER!**

· **CONCLUSION:** This passage is full of so much to unpack. Let's make this as simple as we can.

o We talked about three Greek words that meant:
Guide, Beloved, Sent.

- These three words also reflect much of the Christian walk.
- First, we have a guide. (Scripture- points us to our need for Jesus and what it looks like to follow HIM!)
- Secondly, we are called beloved! 1 Peter 2:9 talks about this heavily! “Holy Nation, People for HIS POSSESSION.”
- We are beloved by the God of the Universe as individuals and corporately. The CHURCH IS BELOVED! Do you join with other believers? Do you see the CHURCH globally and locally as BELOVED? Or, is it just a task.
- That’s why we call on you to be here! Because we are beloved in God’s eyes and in the eyes of one another!
- We truly are meant to be a family and that means that we LOVE ONE ANOTHER!
- So join us!
- Thirdly, we are sent. We are sent out! God has given us a mission.
- Yes, this just became a missions sermon! Why? Because OUR LIVES ARE MISSIONAL! Every sermon that involves our response is a missions sermon!
- Great Commission, Acts 1:8! BRING THE GOSPEL (GMC Sierra- God, Man, Christ, Salvation) BRING IT TO YOUR KIDS, TO YOUR FRIENDS, TO YOUR COMMUNITY!
- BRING IT TO NAUVOO WITH US!
- People are coming from our community. Are you?

Are you joining with us to pray that God would STIR UP OUR COMMUNITY?

- Remember, the reason we gather on Sundays is so that we are encouraged, equipped, taught and SENT OUT AGAIN! So, BE SENT OUT! Go take the gospel with you this week!
- Let me pray for us now.
- CHILD DEDICATION (AFTER SONG) Call parents up, have them introduce their child
- Proverbs is a book written from a father to a son. Proverbs 22:6- “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”
- 1 Samuel 1
- Parents have a unique role. They are to train a child up. The impact of a parent is huge!
- (Encourage parents to rely on God. Not because I know, but because that’s what we see in scripture!)
- As a church we have a responsibility too! If we are to support one another and be a CHURCH FAMILY, then we need to support these parents. Welcome them, support them, PRAY FOR THEM!
- Have Ken come up too. Ken opens, I close, dismiss for lunch.