

The First Church Council - Acts 15:1-35
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

As followers of Jesus, we need to be constantly aware that there are threats to the Gospel happening around us (and in us) all the time. Some of these threats come from within the faith, as devoted people seeking to be faithful will end up adding requirements to faith for salvation. We can end up with layers of religious performance at the heart of our spiritual experience and these things quickly become the basis for our acceptance before God. I've seen all sort of these things, from the length of a woman's skirt (and oh, wearing pants is definitely out), to the consumption of alcohol, gambling, playing pool, and the list goes on. Generally this happens because people, who are reading the Scriptures and genuinely desire to honor God determine that people really need to become like them in order to be faithful. Yet, the outcome is often the loss of the Gospel of justification by faith in Christ alone. Let me define that. At the heart of our salvation is this basic truth. We are saved by Jesus, nothing else, by believing in Him. To trust in Jesus means I turn from my attempts to save myself and my sin and trust wholly and solely in Jesus. Nothing I do adds to my salvation nor is it the grounds for my salvation. So, any time we add anything to this the outcome is that we actually end up with a different Gospel. Jesus + anything = hell.

On the other hand, we also have threats to the Gospel coming from outside of the church. Generally this happens as the culture around us defines its values, beliefs, spirituality, idolatry, and purposes. The church should desire to reach the culture, but often in doing so Christians have slowly catered to the culture, softening core doctrines and ideas in order to make the Gospel more acceptable to a lost world. Couple this with the conversion of people who came out of spiritualities and lifestyles of a given culture and we can see why this is so easy to do. But when a church "baptizes" the spirituality and idolatrous practices of the lost culture around it quickly loses any distinctive identity it has as the outpost of God's Kingdom in a city and culture. In doing this the church will lose the Gospel itself. The church may be more acceptable to the world around it, yet, it has nothing left to offer the people in the world that can change their lives and offer them redemption and forgiveness.

These threats are real, and our doctrines do matter. When local churches or the larger universal church is not careful, it can quickly drift toward these two ditches and lose their fruitfulness, or worse, lose the Gospel altogether. There are times when leaders in the church must come together to wrestle with the questions of the day, open and wrestle with the Scriptures, and seek to come to a Biblically faithful yet culturally relevant understanding of the true Gospel. Our text this week gives us the first time an event like this took place. For the first time in history, significant numbers of Gentile (non-Jewish) people trusted in Jesus, were filled with the Spirit, and joined the faith community. But this did raise a serious question. If God had given His promises to the Jews, didn't these Gentile believers also need to become Jewish. This would mean accepting circumcision and embracing the whole of the Jewish Law. So the equation would be Jesus + keeping the Old Testament Law = Salvation. But as we have already seen, and as the Jerusalem Council affirmed, this is another Gospel (read all of Galatians, especially Galatians 1:6-9). In fact, Peter declares that for Jewish Christians to be saved, they actually need to be saved in the same way as their Gentile counterparts, by faith in Christ alone (v. 9-11).

Yet, this is not all that happened at this Council. Gentile believers did not need to become Jewish, but the Council did put restrictions on these new Christ-followers, and these restrictions seem weird. At first, it looks like they are adding requirements, but what is commanded will make more sense if we see how the four things listed in this text are tied together. Specifically, all of these things are associated with the worship of the various deities associated with the pantheon of the Greek and Roman gods. Every city had a temple

to some mythological deity, and the worship at these places involved festival meals, and in most cases, much sexual activity. The call to avoid these things is a clear call to Gentile believers that coming to Jesus means leaving their old spirituality and idolatry. The Jerusalem Council was clear that we cannot add anything to Jesus or we will lose the Gospel. But it is also clear that we also cannot add Jesus to anything else, mixing belief in Jesus in with the other spiritual beliefs and practices of the day.

The Jerusalem Council is the first of a myriad of events like this throughout church history, moments where leaders came together, heard the stories, argues over issues, searched the Scriptures, and the sought to faithfully define and defend the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. We can learn much from these councils and gatherings, and by reading the creeds and confessions that have arisen out of these moments. They will help us remain faithful to define and defend the Gospel at our peculiar moment in His story (history).

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Hebrews 8	Hebrews 9	Hebrews 10	Hebrews 11	Hebrews 12	Hebrews 13	Jonah 1

Reading from this past week: Acts 15:1-35

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Acts 15:36-41

Family Worship

Song - *Build My Life*

https://youtu.be/QZW4_8_zCBE

Gospel Project

Unit: King Solomon

Story: God is good to give mercy

Big Picture Question: What is mercy?

Answer: Mercy is when God does not give us the punishment that we deserve.

Scripture: Luke 18

New City Catechism

Question #35 Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through faith alone, where does this faith come from?

Answer: From the Holy Spirit.

Verse: Titus 3:4-6

Scripture

Acts 15:1-35

- What was the central issue raised in this chapter of which Paul and Barnabas argue with other people? Why would they argue rather than just seeking peace?
- What is the decision of this gathering, given by James? What does the decision teach us about the Gospel itself?
- What are some challenges in our culture to the core beliefs of Christianity and to the Gospel itself? Where have you experienced religious attempt to add to the Gospel? Where have you experienced the pressure to deny central truths of the Gospel and core doctrines of our faith by those in the culture around us?

Prayer

*Pray that our church would both love doctrine and hold our beliefs with compassion.

*Pray for the city of Eureka

*Pray for your Elders.