



DEVOTIONAL FOR ACTS 15-16; GALATIANS 1-3

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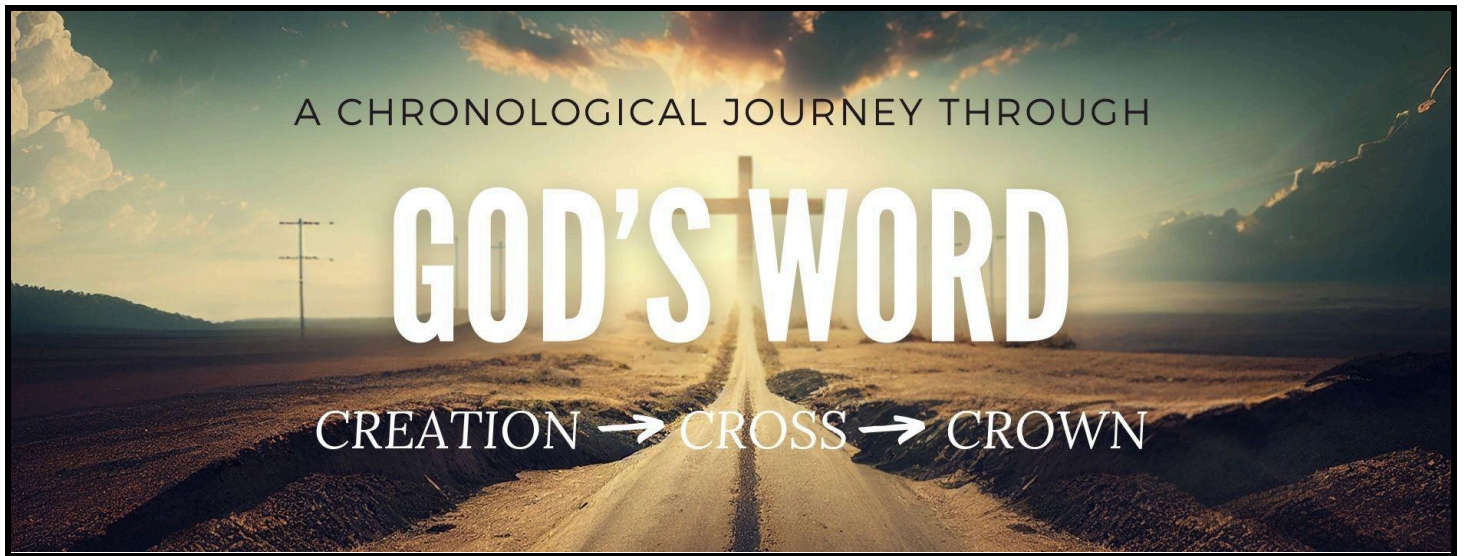
Today we read about the significant meeting of the early church leaders, referred to as the Jerusalem Council. They convened to resolve a dispute in the church regarding whether Gentile converts to Christianity need to follow the Mosaic Law and practice circumcision, among other things. Members of the church in Antioch were teaching the Gentile converts that they must be circumcised and follow the law of Moses in order to be saved. This was creating quite a bit of conflict.

Peter, an apostle, stated that God had shown him that the Gospel is for all people. He also said the Gentiles should not be burdened with the Law. James, the brother of Jesus and a leader in the Jerusalem church, suggested a compromise. He stated that the Gentiles should not be forced to observe the Law but should abstain from certain practices, (idolatry, immorality, things strangled, and blood.) This decision was recorded in a letter sent to the Gentile churches. The apostles and elders wrote a letter to Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, stating that salvation is by grace through faith, not by observing the Mosaic Law.

Thankfully, we have been saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (Romans 3:22). If salvation were based on good works and following rules to outweigh the bad, then no one would qualify. Peter clearly said that, "But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus." (Acts 15:11). Jesus' death and resurrection did something for us that no law could ever do. He is writing His law on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33). By saving us through grace, He is transforming us into new people in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The Bible says, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). As he fled from Saul, David said, "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth." (Psalms 34:1-2). I do not know about you, but I know at times I just do not have the strength to praise God. It can be hard; life in general can be hard. We all can find ourselves in situations that are unpleasant, but that is when the Holy Spirit reminds me that He is my strength; I can do nothing apart from Him; I can rely on Him.

As a result of Paul and Silas' obedience,, the jailer received salvation, along with his family – a reminder that we all have a testimony; let us show others daily what God has done for us. May we be the light for Jesus that He has



created you and me to be. May we learn from this passage how to work through our differences and come to resolutions centering on God and loving others. Happiness is fleeting, but true joy cannot be taken away (John 16:22).

Questions:

1. What "freedoms" could you give up as a means of displaying the love of Jesus to those around you?
2. Are there steps in your own life you need to take to be nearer to God, to hear His voice, and to allow Him to work in and through you?
3. Could your own traditions or rules be causing unnecessary burdens on yourself or others? Can you back these up in Scripture?