

SERMON DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS

JULY 18, 2021

Acts: The Kingdom Advances – Fighting for Grace

Pastor Connor Neigenfind

WARM-UP

1. Have you had an experience in life where, on a particularly important issue or concern with other people involved, you had a significant disagreement on a path to follow or a decision to be made, so much so that it didn't seem like it could be resolved? If so, what were the circumstances? Did you seek resolution through the use of a 'trusted third party', and if so, what happened and how did that work out? Was God involved? If so, how, and did this make a difference?

DIGGING DEEPER

Today, Pastor Connor continues his preaching series on the New Testament Book, The Acts of the Apostles. As Connor began, he reminded us that, 'sometimes, Christians disagree', and in this message, we find ourselves in Chapter 15, with a major disagreement surfacing in the fledging church. It appeared that maybe resolution to this primary disagreement might not be found, and could even 'split' the early church. Peter has a significant role to play, as does James, the stepbrother of Jesus, and Paul and Barnabas as well. At its core, the issue came down to God's Grace – what is it, what does it involve in the lives of those who become believers, and what does it have to do with the Gospel? Let's dig in to see what this early disagreement was all about and how, through the work of the Holy Spirit, it was resolved.

JESUS 'PLUS' – Read: Acts 15:1-6

2. Paul and Barnabas had returned to their 'home church' in Antioch following their first missionary journey. In this first passage in Chapter 15, what happened? What was the core issue or question that led to disagreement – was the issue really about circumcision? If not, what was it about? Why is this significant? Does this still happen in the church today? If so, in what ways?
3. The core and central question was, 'How are people saved?' and by extension, 'What does it mean to be a Christian?' This was not a 'agree to disagree' moment – rather, it was an impasse in the Antioch church. So, they sought a 'trusted third party' – the Jerusalem church. What would have made the church in Jerusalem 'trusted'? Connor suggested that in order for a third party to be effective, it must (1) be trusted by both sides; and (2) both sides must agree to submit to what the third party says. Do these two key conditions make sense to you? How might this have been the case with the Jerusalem church? (Hint: what is significant about Paul and Barnabas in verses 3 and 4?)

JESUS 'ONLY' – Read: Acts 15:7-12

4. What does this passage tell us about the thinking of the Jerusalem church, and Peter in particular? Why does Peter believe what he says, and when (and how) did he come to know it? And what contribution did Paul and Barnabas make, and why were their statements so meaningful?

5. Read Galatians 3:23-29. In this letter to the churches in Galatia that he founded early in his ministry and as part of his first journey, Paul is restating the Gospel, and its application to all people – what do you see as significant in this passage? Do you see the connections between what Paul writes here and Peter’s message in Acts 15?
6. Read Acts 15:13-21. What was the resolution of the disagreement and why is this so important? Why was it important that it was concluded by James? And why was it important that James quoted the prophet Amos?
7. Out of the Protestant Reformation of the 15th and 16th centuries, five core or central tenets of the Christian faith were summarized in what are known today as ‘the five solas’ – one of these core tenets is that forgiveness and salvation is by God’s Grace Alone – in Latin, Sola Gratia. What is God’s Grace? And what does this summary phrase, Grace Alone, mean? Is this clear to you? Read Ephesians 2:8-9. What does this passage tell us? Is this clear to you?

JESUS ‘COMPLETE’ – Read: Acts 15:22-35

8. There is a completeness about this story that comes in these verses – what are the key ideas and actions that transpired? In the letter to the church in Antioch, what is significant about verse 28? Does this make a difference in how you read the resolution? Also, do you see the completeness of this resolution in verses 30-35 – how so? Why is this conclusion so important for this early church in Antioch? What does this passage tell us about the thinking of the Jerusalem church, and Peter in particular?
9. Read Ephesians 2:11-22. In this letter to the church in Ephesus, written late in his life, Paul is once again restating the Gospel, and its application to all people – what do you see as significant in this passage? Has Paul’s understanding or message changed or shifted from his writing to the churches in Galatia nearly a decade earlier? If not, why not?
10. Clearly, as Connor said in conclusion, “We can’t take the Grace and Truth of Jesus out of the equation.” What does Connor mean by this? And in order to do this, what do we pray for and strive for as believers? Is this your prayer as you grow in your faith?

PRAYER

As Pastor Connor said, conflict in our faith is difficult. Some of us handle it pretty well; some of us don’t. And sometimes the conflict is over important things, and sometimes it’s not. As you pray over this message today, pray that God, through the Holy Spirit, would give you wisdom, courage, and discernment to know what is important to your faith and trust in Him, and how best to handle conflicts in the church that you might encounter. Pray also that He will continue to provide you with His Grace and Truth, and that from this provision, you might also share the message of the Gospel with those you encounter in your life. Pray that He would bring those encounters to you, and give you the right words to share, in His love and compassion for all. In this way, pray that the Holy Spirit would give you ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to respond to His call to you, in order to be His hands, feet and heart in this world.

In case you missed the service, here are the EAC, Facebook, and YouTube links:

edgewateralliance.org/watch-now

facebook.com/edgewateralliance/

youtube.com/channel/UCWvQTWUv1FD_qsUJUZn93kw