**Unstoppable - wk 25 – The First Council**

**Acts is Jesus: The Sequel. Luke Vol 2 – The “what now?”**

**Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

**Roughly 20yrs since Jesus. P&B are back at Antioch but in Jerusalem things are starting to boil over.**

**The 1st believers were Jewish and were under the impression Jesus came for Jewish people exclusively.**

**But then gentiles (nations) were receiving Jesus.**

**“Okay, you must convert to Judaism, then believe in Jesus.”**

**\*\* Which means a lot of traditions and requirements.**

**With no NT yet – how are they then to live? What follows is the first council (the apostles present) to figure out what to do?**

**Acts 15:1 Certain people came down (elevation) from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: (great – but what they were saying was turning heads) “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” (Men of all ages never raised w/ this - to be a Christian I need to what? I would’ve liked to know this before I came to church - that affect our altar calls - added qualifiers) 2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them.**

**The Issue of circumcision (Comes up a lot in the NT)**

**1st mentioned in Gen 17 w/ Abraham - later commanded by Moses in Lev 12**

* **Practical - Protecting a people – health benefits in ancient times.**
* **Spiritual – Set apart a people – consecrating of self to God in the most of private places. My legacy and future are yours.**

**To Jewish people - it was a sign that you belonged to God.**

**It was a physical reminder, representing the cutting away of the heart (Deut 10) / set apart unto God – your most intimate life is God’s.**

**It became the ultimate test of Jewishness and the center of the debate in the early church. (Paul talks about it often in his letters).**

**As you can imagine, to Greek believers this is no small thing!!**

**\*\* Just a thought – Conflict is a reality of ministry (working with others)**

**Even in church - even among Christians - you can't run from it.**

**Acts 15:2b So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, (a group) to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. (Something must be done!)**

**\*\*\* Some issues are not debatable and are not optional**

**Some issues are not worth dying for... others are.**

**This was a big deal. Right in the middle of Acts – tipping point on which our faith teeters. Our faith rests on this issue.**

**The real question / the big issue – What must I do to be saved?**

**Still debated today - denominations split. What are the requirements? What are the rules? What’s my part?**

**Some churches still add qualifiers to knowing God.**

**Jesus is the bar - when we become a Christian, we are Holy in Christ - But we often given weights - read like this / dress / bow / knell this way / pray this way / use these words…**

**Acts 15:3 The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. (Along the way – looking for the origin of the teaching. Telling Jewish disciples how God was saving non-Jewish people. Praise God!) 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles (the 11) and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. (We want to tell you about what God is doing!)**

**5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.”**

**Some pharisees had become followers of Jesus as Messiah, they lived their whole life teaching the importance of the law. They were not giving up their commitment to the law.**

**That is great they accepted Jesus, but did you circumcise them? Did you tell them to learn and obey the OT rules / laws?**

**15:6 The apostles and elders met to consider this question. (1st council with all the big-guns – the purpose – first of many in the follow several hundred years)**

**The core issue is who is supreme - Moses or Jesus**

**1/3 of the NT is about this very issue... a hot bed issue**

**Peter’s Defense**

**15:7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. (Remember Cornelius, Acts 10) 8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. (Acts 2 - sign to Jewish people that the messiah was for all nations) 9 He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. (Faith in Jesus, not their efforts, actions, or the law of Moses) 10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? (Shackles of guilt, sin, and shame were not remedied by the law of Moses, instead they’re a burden. None of us could keep them.) 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”**

**How Then Are We SAVED? What must I do to be saved?**

**Is there anything to add to faith? Are Christians made right by faith alone or by a combination of faith & obedience to the law?**

**v9 …for he purified (cleansed) their hearts by faith. / v11 …we believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”**

**\*\* Peter says clearly - We are saved by grace – through faith (in Jesus)**

**When we add something to grace, we deny the finished work of Christ - saying Jesus isn’t enough.**

**Paul later writes and affirms the same (Galatians 3:2-3) - Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.**

**The requirements for salvation are simple:**

**Repent (an act of grace) & Believe (an act of faith)**

**Jesus is not a step to salvation he is salvation**

**It is not Jesus plus rules it is just Jesus = salvation.**

**Paul & Barnabas’ Defense**

**(Then P&B told them about their mission trip) 12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul (BTW - Barney name is first as he carried more significance than Paul to them) telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. (God is saving them!)**

**James’ Defense**

**13 When they finished, James spoke up. (Half-brother of Jesus, sitting as the head of the council) “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me. 14 Simon (Peter) has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. (From the nations) 15 The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: (Amos 9) 16 “‘After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, 17 that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, (lit. called by my name) says the Lord, who does these things’ - 18 things known from long ago. (God’s foreknowledge and purpose.)**

**Purpose of Israel was to prepare a people for the Messiah *(Jesus)* who would then reconcile His “called ones” from all the nations.**

**(After hearing from testimonies and searching the word – James says) 19 “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. (Why do we make things so difficult to come to Jesus?) 20 Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, (food not in original – the pollutions of idols) from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. 21 For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.” (This is the custom among many Jewish believers over Rome.)**

**Four things that seem strange – dealing with food and sex.**

**Don't worry about 600+ rules / just remember these 3.5 things.**

**Abstain from - 3.5 things**

* **Things polluted by idols – Things contaminated – for the purpose of… Abstain from things tainted by idolatry – false pursuits.**
* **Sexual immorality - Be sexually pure (married and singles)**
* **Eating meat from strangled animals (food preparation) Gen 9 (Noah). Inhumane. Life is sacred. This is about killing and eating an animal not drained of its blood. Which leads to the next…**
* **Eating Blood (bloody) – as a result of the prior (they go together) The ancients would often mix blood with wine in worship.**

**FYI - Rare meat with lots of juice is not blood - 75 per cent of meat is water and a protein in muscle tissue called myoglobin**

**BTW – denies the Transubstantiation. Jesus is not asking to literally eat his flesh and drink his blood.**

**They all have to do with pagan worship - idolatrous things, idolatrous lifestyle, idolatrous habits.**

**Two big questions were answered:**

**\*\* How then are we saved?? Is there anything to add to faith? (PPB)**

**Turn and have faith in Jesus as Savior. If not, how can we fellowship?**

**\*\* How then shall we live? (JAMES) 2 things are given.**

**Not about becoming saved or staying saved.**

**1. Live a sexually honorable life – immorality, any sexual activity outside God’s design. You were made with a purpose and with design. We don’t pick – God does. To do otherwise is idolatry.**

**Eph 4:1 …live a life worthy of the calling you have received.**

**2. Live a humble life - Things contaminated & food preparation issues.**

**The food issues – would inhibit common meals – the unity. Respect other’s convictions – Consider others above yourself.**

**Phil 2:3 - Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.**

**That means saying no to things for the sake of others.**

**Don’t intentionally offend others. Maintain unity with Christians if at all possible. Worship together - share meals together - prefer one another**

**Eph 5:21 – submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.**

**Paul clarifies in 1 Cor 8-10 - we are free to eat what we want – but when sitting with others who have diff convictions, lay down your rights for the sake of another’s spiritual journey and for the sake of unity.**

**The Council’s Letter to Gentile Believers**

**Acts 15:22 Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, (affirmed) decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) (brother of the guy not picked as an apostle in Acts 1) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers. 23 With them they sent the following letter: (Luke writes out his copy)**

**The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: (notice – this was not to all gentiles – regional. Not all Rome.)**

**Greetings. - 24 We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. (Those who said you must be circumcised - do not speak for us) 25 So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul - 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. 28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29 You are to abstain from food (things – food not in org) sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. - Farewell.**

**This will go a long way in keeping peace between Jewish & Gentile converts. The point is to keep the unity and peace of the disciples. \*Bound not by the law of Moses, but by the law of love.**

**Be willing to give up some freedoms so that others may grow in God and with you.**

**Acts 15:30 So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. 31 The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. 32 Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers.**

**The council and letter addressed three big issues**

1. **The issue of legalism – do not need to be circumcised or follow all the laws od Moses to be saved. You are saved by grace thru faith.**

**Haircut and style, tattoos and pork, witness quota, money, weights. God is not about rules but relationship with Jesus.**

1. **The issue of lawlessness – However following Jesus is not a free for all. Being a Christian does not mean we live without guidelines.**

**To live a live worthy of our salvation – reflecting God’s love, goodness, and design. Serve and sacrifice for one another.**

1. **The issue of the Law - What place does the OT have in our life today? Jesus did not come to do away with it, but to fulfill it. Matt 5:17**

**OT gives wonderful insight into God’s character and holiness.**

**The Old Testament - Show's us (Use the OT teach you God's...)**

**\* God’s Power - his omniscience, omnipotence, his sovereignty, power**

**\* God's Character - he is knowable / personal / good / and faithful**

**\* God's Heart - that he is caring / loving / faithfulness / patient**

**\* God's Holiness - His purity and our problem of sin – His standards**

**\* God's Plan- His purposeful provision for sin - the hope of a redeemer**

**With that in mind... realize**

* **The Old Testament alone cannot save us or remove sin**

**It only reminds us that our heart is wicked and horrible at rules.**

**The OT doesn't give a solution it only points out our need.**

**It's been said - The OT is a mirror not a ladder.**

**It identifies a diff weight - weight of sin. (Heb 9:14-28)**

**The cross of Jesus exchanged the weights of sin for grace.**

**GOOD NEWS - The weights have come off... (How's it feel?)**

**Acts 15:33 After spending some time there, they were sent off by the believers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. *[34 But Silas decided to remain there.]* (We later see that Silas stayed back) 35 But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.**

**Here is the heart of this letter and council:**

* **Don’t add to the gospel of Jesus (It is grace through faith alone)**
* **Live a life worthy of Gospel (Honor God with your life)**
* **Prefer and treat others above yourself.**

**It is in this spirit that Paul rights –**

**Ephesians 4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

**BTW - How did they settle this conflict?**

**A lot of talking, a lot of listening. A lot of searching God’s Word.**

**It would do well to do the same when we disagree.**

**I like how it says the others listened in silence – a willingness to listen. Humility and teachable.**

**Next week another dispute – this time between friends. Two friends go separate ways.**