

Jealousy in Jerusalem

(Acts 15)

5/20/20; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

Jealousy is a horrible sin.

It destroys relationships.

It embitters the soul.

It makes an enemy of others without their knowledge.

The jealousy of Satan led to his expulsion from heaven, and that may explain why jealousy is such a weapon of the evil one even now.

Now look, people gets jealous for all sorts of reasons.

New cars create jealousy.

New homes create jealousy.

New jobs create jealousy.

New babies create jealousy.

New relationships create jealousy.

And it has been this way since the very beginning.

Cain essentially killed his brother because he was jealous of how God accreted Abel's offering but rejected his.

And that kind of spiritual jealousy is incredibly harmful.

Most people rejoice in the parables of Jesus.

Most love to hear his simple stories that are told to illustrate biblical truth.

But there is one parable that Jesus told that always get a rise out of people who listen to it.

I want to read it to you now.

So take your Bible and turn to Matthew 20.

Matthew 20, verses 1 to 16 contain the parable of the laborers.

And it is one of the most shocking parables that Jesus ever told.

Let's read it together.

1 “For the kingdom of heaven is like [a]a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 When he had agreed with the laborers for a [b]denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 And he went out about the [c]third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; 4 and to those he said, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ And so they went. 5 Again he went out about the [d]sixth and the ninth hour, and did [e]the same thing. 6 And about the [f]eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he *said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day long?’ 7 They *said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He *said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ 8 “When evening came, the [g]owner of the vineyard *said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.’ 9 When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a [h]denarius. 10 When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; [i]but each of them also received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, 12 saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.’ 13 But he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 Take what is yours and go, but I wish

to give to this last man the same as to you. 15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye [j]envious because I am [k]generous?’ 16 So the last shall be first, and the first last.”

There is no parable that give us envious eye like Matthew 20:1-6.

There is no parable that tempts us to jealousy like Matthew 20:1-16.

And why is that?

Because love equality and we want fairness in everything.

And when it seems that someone gets a better deal or a better toy, envy rises up in us.

Now the point of the parable is the last verse, which affirms the fact that the employer is not being unjust.

He is simply being generous.

The workers that got there last got the same pay as the the workers that go there first.

And the spiritual principle is that the person saved at 99 gets the same joy of heaven as the person saved at 19.

God is not unfair.

He is perfectly just in all his dealings.

He is simply very generous and gracious, and instead of resenting his generosity, we should celebrate it.

Now with in mind, let's turn back to Acts 15.

Because jealousy is at the heart of what leads to a problem in Acts 15.

Now to let you know, the point of this chapter in the book of Acts is to affirm salvation by faith alone.

That may sound familiar since that is what we have been studying in the book of Romans.

Which goes to show you how important this issue is.

Now the book of Romans was written after the events in Acts 15.

Which helps us understand why Paul was so committed to teaching salvation by faith alone to the Roman church.

In other words, Paul had battled for that truth for many years, and he did not want the Romans to have to have to battle for in their church as well.

Now why is this issue such a battle in the early church?

Couple reasons..

#1 - The human heart is so prideful that it wants to earn its way to heaven.

People feel a need to do something to save themselves.

People like to boast and salvation by works allows them to brag about their spirituality.

But #2..

A gospel of works comes from the jealousy of the Jews in the 1st century.

Think of it this way.

You were born in 20 BC, and you have been a faithful Jew all your life.

At 50 years in 30 AD, you have a lifetime of accomplishments and good deeds.

You have decades of keeping the law.

And now here is a man named Jesus claiming to be your Messiah.

He dies and He is resurrected and his followers preach that people can now go to heaven based on faith in his life, death, and resurrection alone.

For starters, this would seem so unfair to you.

Here are young adult Jews being able to go to heaven and they haven't done half as much as you.

In your mind, you are jealous.

They get out of the things that you had to do, and they get heaven by simply believing in their Messiah.

You could probably get over that with time, but here is the kicker.

These people preaching about Jesus are now saying that Gentiles can go to heaven based on their faith in your Messiah.

In your mind, how fair is that?

They have done nothing for the Lord at all.

They haven't kept the law.

They haven't gone to synagogue.

They haven't been good Jewish boys and girls.

They haven't been circumcised.

They haven't kept the Jewish diet.

They haven't participated in the Jewish festivals.

So what do you do?

You have 2 options.

You can celebrate God's generosity and compassion in the gospel to save these Gentiles.

OR..

You can let your jealousy rise and try to make them do all that you have done to be saved.

Many chose option 2.

The Bible speaks of these people as Judaizers.

They were Jews who came to Christ, but attempted to hold on to the Jewish law and practices and diet and Sabbath and circumcision.

And then tried to make the Gentile Christians do the same.

And we will get to meet them in Acts 15 tonight.

I am going to read the first 12 verses of Acts 15 tonight to give us an overview, and then we will go back and draw some principles from what happens.

1 Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” 2 And when Paul and Barnabas had [a]great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. 3 Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. 4 When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. 5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, “It is

necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.”

6 The apostles and the elders came together to [b]look into this [c]matter. 7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brethren, you know that [d]in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; 9 and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. 10 Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.”

12 All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

What we see in these verses are the outcome of jealous hearts.

From the bad teaching of Christians needing to be circumcised to the long trip up to Jerusalem to the meeting of the apostles, all of this is a result of man wanting to feel like he did something to be saved.

It is the outcome of Jews being jealous of how apparently east the Gentiles have it.

Look jealousy will gnaw away at you but it will also cause trouble for others.

So let's be reminded that God is good and gracious and kind, and that is to be celebrated instead of being a source of envy among his people.

Now when we arrive at Acts 15, it is likely the late 40s AD.

The church is almost 20 years old give or take a few years.

The church began in Jerusalem and many of the apostles have made that city the base of operations for the church.

But the church has also moved out of Jerusalem.

In fact, this is what the book of Acts is all about.

It describes the expansion of the church in all directions from Jerusalem, but Jerusalem has been the hub of all the activity because many of the apostles remained there.

Now Antioch in Syria was also a hub of church activity.

Paul and Barnabas has taught that church, and they were sent on the church's first mission trip from that church.

And as we finished up last week in Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas had returned to that church to report about all that God had done through them in other parts of the world.

However, trouble came to to that church beginning in Acts 15, and it came in the form of false teachers.

Let's call verses 1-5..

I. The Split over Salvation (1-5)

Verse 1..

1 Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Now Judea is the area of southern Israel.

Jerusalem was in Judea.

And though they go north to get to Antioch, they have to go down since Judea was an elevated region.

And they go down to Antioch to spread their lies.

And what is their lie?

Salvation is impossible without circumcision.

In other words, you have to do some outward ceremony in order to be right with God.

A lot of folks do this with baptism today.

They say that baptism is required for salvation.

Now baptism is good, but noting makes you right with God but faith alone in Christ alone.

However, many people have attempted to add many things to Christ, and these 1st century false teachers were attempting to add circumcision to Christ.

However, Paul and Barnabas will have none of it.

Verse 2.

2 And when Paul and Barnabas had [a]great dissension and debate with them,

Let me stop right here and say this.

There are truths that demand our defense of them.

Though Paul and Barnabas and all believers are called to be peacemakers, some truths are non negotiable.

And certainly the requirements of salvation are one of those truths.

So Paul and Barnabas do not back down from this false teaching.

Look, every shepherd of the flock has a rod and a staff, and wisdom is required to know when to use each.

Sometimes, the shepherd uses the staff to gently guide the flock.

Sometimes the shepherd uses the rod to protect the flock.

These false teachers get the rod.

Paul and Barnabas are gentle shepherds but they will not seek peace over gospel issues.

And how a person is saved is a basic gospel.

So they stand opposed to the teaching.

Now that we have a standoff, what gives?

End of verse 2..

the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

In order to diffuse the situation, the church at Antioch sends the disputers up to Jerusalem.

Today, we would simply send false teachers to Scripture.

But in Acts 15, the New is still incomplete.

God is going to inspire Paul and others to write about salvation by faith alone, but that has not happened yet.

So the church turns to those who have been appointed and taught by Christ, and that would be the apostles.

Ephesians 2:20 describes the teachings of the apostles as the foundation of the church.

And the reason for that is that these men had been taught directly by Christ.

So their teaching is the standard before the NT is complete.

Therefore Paul and Barnabas and others in the church along with the false teachers load up and head to Jerusalem.

We get a few details of the trip in verses 3 and 4..

3 Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. 4 When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles

and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

Every apparent inconvenience is simply an opportunity to share truth, so Paul and Barnabas tell believers along the way that God is doing amazing things in the world, just as He did in their cities.

So they arrive in Jerusalem, they continue their good report of what God has been doing in other parts of the world, only to be interrupted by the Judaizers in verse 5.

5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.”

This is the issue at hand.

Does God save apart from the law or does he save those who keep the law?

Let's move from the split over salvation to..

II. The Foundation of Faith (6-12)

Verse 6...

6 The apostles and the elders came together to [b]look into this [c]matter.

There were a number of church councils in the early years of the church.

Some addressed the trinity.

Some addressed the nature of Christ.

But this council in Jerusalem in the late 40s AD was the first.

And without it, the church may have been split forever over the issue of how someone is saved.

Half of the church saying faith alone, and the other half saying faith plus works.

However, the way of salvation is settled here for all to see.

Salvation is acquired by faith alone in Christ alone, and Peter is going to be the first to affirm this reality.

Verse 7.

7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that [d]in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; 9 and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. 10 Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."

We have missed Peter.

He has been absent from the book of Acts since chapter 12.

In that chapter, he was arrested by Herod and miraculously release by a miracle of the Lord.

After his escape, he left Jerusalem, but he is now back in town arguing for the gospel that he was taught by Christ.

And that is a gospel of faith alone.

To make his plea for a gospel of faith, Peter remind the church that he was used by the Lord to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

In fact, Cornelius, a Roman Gentile soldier, was saved through the gospel that Peter took to him.

And Peter affirms the salvation of the Gentiles by saying in verse 8 that God gave them the Holy Spirit.

In other words, God saved them and gave them His Holy Spirit apart from anything they did.

None of the Gentiles were circumcised.

None were told to keep the Jewish laws or customs or diet.

In fact, God told Peter through a vision of a sheet being let down from heaven that Jewish dietary laws were abolished in the church.

In other words, Peter says that he has taken part in and witnessed the salvation of Gentiles apart from the law.

It was simply on the basis of their faith in Christ.

Look back at the end of verse 9..

God cleansed their hearts by faith.

And furthermore, Peter asks in verse 10 why would God put them under a law that even the Jews had been unable to keep?

In other words, salvation has never been attained through good works.

We just saw that in the example of Abraham in Romans 4.

So why would God now put Christians under a law that cannot save and never did save in the history of the Jewish people?

Peter is simply saying that all salvation of all time is a matter of faith.

Anyone in the OT who is in heaven is there on the basis of faith.

And anyone in the NT who is in heaven is there on the basis of faith.

Does that ring a bell?

It does if you were here on Sunday morning because it is exactly what Paul will write in his letter to the Romans a few years later.

In fact, Paul was standing there as Peter addressed the council.

Look at verse 12.

12 All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

Peter is a tough act to follow so Paul and Barnabas simply affirm that God is saving Gentiles apart from any works of the law.

We will review that next week when we see what the council concludes.

For now, let me simply end with a few thoughts.

Conclusion

#1 - Stand for essential truths of Scripture.

There is much wisdom in knowing which hills to die on.

Salvation by faith alone is one of those issues, but the activities of other Christians on Sunday is not.

Salvation in Christ alone is one of those issues, but the entrainment choices of Christians is not.

Wisdom helps us understand which issues in the church are mountains and which are mole hills, and wisdom prevents us from making one into the other.

When it clear that the truths of salvation, the deity of Christ, the authority of Scripture are at stake, die defending those truths.

When it is not, show grace and love and patiently teach those who disagree.

#2 - Stand on the Word.

When disagreements arise, the word become the standard.

That may sound ironic in light of the church in Antioch going to the apostles for an answer to their disputes.

But understand that these men had been given the words of Christ.

Their lives and ministries wee built on what He said.

When you don't what is true, turn to Scripture before you turn to anyone or anything else.

Let us pray.