

Series: Acts

Lesson #: 56

Title: Gifts From Jerusalem

Scripture: Acts 15: 22-35

Date: February 12, 2009

Place: Sovereign Grace Baptist Church in Princeton, New Jersey

Proposition: Christ Jesus the Lord is working right now in the midst of his church through the Holy Spirit--in you, in me and in the whole body.

I will start with this scripture tonight and end with it because this is what the saints were taught at Jerusalem and Antioch and this is what we are being taught now.

Philippians 2: 12: Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. 13: For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.

The brethren at Antioch were troubled. Men came in attempting to turn them from Christ and bring them under the law of Moses--really to bring them under the power of men. But when those false prophets came to Antioch, Paul said, "No." So the brethren at Antioch sent word up to Jerusalem for help. And the church at Jerusalem sent down help. Help came back to them from Jerusalem in three ways:

I. Faithful Witnesses Came From Jerusalem--

Acts 15: 22: Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; *namely*, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

II. An Epistle--a letter was given to them.

Acts 15: 23: And they wrote *letters* by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren *send* greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: 24: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment: 25: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26: Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27: We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell *you* the same things by mouth. 28: For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; 29: That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

III. The Pastor's Which the Lord Had Provided the Saints at Antioch--Paul and Barnabas returned, with many others who the Lord had provided in Antioch also.

Acts 15: 30: So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:...32: And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed *them*. 33: And after they had tarried *there* a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. 34: Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. 35: Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

Seeking Help From Jerusalem

The place these new Gentile converts thought to seek help was the church at Jerusalem. It is indeed good to have brethren to help in times of need, to have churches to help one another. But brethren, where do we go in times of need? Where did these brethren point the Gentiles? They pointed them to Christ. Where is Christ now seated?

Hebrews 12: 22: But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,...23: To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, and to God the Judge of all,...24: And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than *that of* Abel.

Galatians 4: 23: But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman *was* by promise. 24: Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. 25: For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. 26: But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

Joel 2:32: And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.

Now, what happens when you seek the Lord in heavenly Jerusalem? He PERSONALLY answers the call of his redeemed the same way he answered the brethren in Antioch. Christ through the Holy Spirit Abides In Us Where We Are from heaven.

I. Faithful Witnesses Who Came *From* Jerusalem To The Brethren

Acts 15: 22: Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas,...Now both of these are just men; men who really went down from Jerusalem to Antioch. They were prophets of the Lord, chief among the brethren. It was Christ through the Holy Spirit working in them who moved the apostles and brethren to send these two eminent men to Antioch from Jerusalem (28:) **For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;**

What I want you to understand is this: just as real as Peter and James sent forth, Judas with Silas to teach the brethren, so too Christ through the Holy Spirit, from heavens Jerusalem, abides with us from heavens Jerusalem. God the Father has entrusted, given all power to Christ and given the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, Christ teaches, corrects and leads his people continually, bearing witness in our hearts.

A. Sometimes if we look at a persons name in scripture it will help us to see Christ as we consider the context of the passage.

- Judas means "he shall be praised";
 - Barasabas means "the son of his oath" or "the son of the Sabbath."
 - Judas Barsabas was a prophet
 - Chief among the brethren
1. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God the Father's oath.

Hebrews 6: 17: Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:

- The word for "confirmed it by an oath" is he set forth a Mediator, his Son, the Son of his covenant.
- After Christ Jesus purged his people of their sin by his sacrificial death at Calvary
- He entered into the veil--the holiest of all--the presence of God--FOR US.
- He is our High Priest forever--eternal, no beginning of days or end of days, after the order of Melchisedec--the Son of God's oath.

2. He shall be praised.

Philippians 2: 9: Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

Psalm 45:6: Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. 7: Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

Isaiah 9:7: Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Daniel 7:14: And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed.

3. Christ Jesus the Lord is THE PROPHET of God--as it is written, "they shall be all taught of God."

Matthew 11:27: All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him*.

4. Judas was chief among the brethren. When Christ reveals himself in a wretched sinner, some may ask:

Solomon 5: 9: What *is* thy beloved more than *another* beloved, O thou fairest among women? what *is* thy beloved more than *another* beloved, that thou dost so charge us? 10: My beloved *is* white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. 11: His head *is as* the most fine gold, his locks *are* bushy, *and* black as a raven. 12: His eyes *are as the eyes* of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, *and* fitly set. 13: His cheeks *are as* a bed of spices, *as* sweet flowers: his lips *like* lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh. 14: His hands *are as* gold rings set with the beryl: his belly *is as* bright ivory overlaid *with* sapphires. 15: His legs *are as* pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance *is as* Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. 16: His mouth *is* most sweet: yea, he *is altogether* lovely. This *is* my beloved, and this *is* my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Judas and Silas were just men, but the grace of Christ Jesus is now flowing to the believer through the Holy Spirit sent down by God the Father, who abides in the believer and guides us into to the truth of Christ in all that we do.

John 16:13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

Remember: How was it that the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem had a heart to send Judas and Silas? Look down at verse 27: **We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell *you* the same things by mouth. 28: For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;**

Now concerning the truth which we are guided into, by the Holy Spirit, through the grace of Christ Jesus, we come now to the second thing sent down from Jerusalem.

II. The Second Thing We Are Given From Heavenly Jerusalem Is The Word of God--they sent down from Jerusalem a letter (v23-26.)

Acts 15: 23: And they wrote *letters* by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren *send* greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:

This was an epistle written by men who were moved by the Holy Spirit just as the Lord's word is comprised of letters sent down from heavens Jerusalem to us. The word of God, the holy scripture, is the Lord's greeting unto the brethren...Just as they were taught by this letter

from Jerusalem, we are taught by the word of God. We have looked at the contents of this letter but let me give you a few highlights

A. The word of God exposes all false prophets.

Acts 15: 24: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:*

How were these men exposed? Because they came speaking their own word, not the word they got from Jerusalem. Therefore they revealed they were not sent.

1. How do I know if God sent the man? Of whom does the man speak?

What did the Lord say to Isaiah? **Isaiah 8: 20: If they speak not according to THIS WORD it is because there is no light in them.**

According to what word?

Romans 1: 1: Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, 2: (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) 3: Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh

If the man comes declaring "except YE...ye cannot!"...it is "troubling" for the believer because the believer knows if it is "except YE" then it "excludes ME." **Psalm 39:5...verily every man at his best state *is altogether vanity.* Selah.**

2. What had the apostle Paul preached to the Gentiles? They had begun to come into the synagogues and to hear the law of Moses read. Paul said, "I have some better news than that!" **Acts 13: 38: Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: 39: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.**

3. What did Peter say at Jerusalem? Peter, who was a Jew, who was born under the law of Moses, who was already saved in the sense that Christ had brought him to faith? **Acts 15: 11: But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.**

- Peter was saved in the sense that he was converted. So were the Jews to whom he spoke and the Gentiles of whom he spoke.
- But believers continue the same way they begin--through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ working in us, in our brethren, keeping us in him and separate from this world, just as we see Christ doing here at Jerusalem and in Antioch
- Through grace the Lord Jesus Christ has saved us, is saving us and he shall saves us.

2 Corinthians 1: 8: For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: 9: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: 10: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us; That is why when the Gentile Galatian believers began being enticed back under the law for sanctification. Paul said to them, "**Having begun in the spirit are you now made perfect by the flesh.**"

4. How do I know if God sent the man? IF he is sent by Christ, if Christ is working in him, he declares one name. Acts 15: 26: **Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Illustration: "We preach a Christ-centered gospel."

Is that a good term? Christ-centered? That word "centered" bothers me. To me it says "we *do* preach a few other things besides Christ. Sometimes we are a little to the left or to the right but mainly we are Christ-centered?"

How about, "We preach Christ crucified,...Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God (I Cor 1: 23, 24.) God's word--his letter--from heavenly Jerusalem to us says this is how you will know if I gave the command--he will come saying, "I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified!" Not "Except YE" but Christ Jesus the Lord who cried, "IT IS FINISHED!"

1. First, Christ through the Holy Spirit is working in our midst
2. Secondly, through his word false prophets are exposed.

B. Now something else his word does--it speaks of the yoke that is light and easy to bear.

Acts 15: 28: For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; 29: That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

I think it is called "no greater burden" because this is the light yoke of Christ.

Matthew 11: 28: Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29: Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30: For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

The yoke of Christ constrains us by his love for us--He is where our souls rest--and because of what he has finished on our behalf--we have no greater burden than a few necessary things.

- Things that will not hinder our standing with God
- Things that will not better our standing with God
- But things that will be a distraction for us and our fellow brethren from beholding Christ our All.

This yoke of Christ makes the believer who is born of his Spirit, meek and lowly in heart like him. Those in whom grace works are found to be gracious. All for these two all-important reasons:

1. That we may behold Christ, trust Christ, depend upon Christ, learn of Christ, follow Christ.
2. Secondly, that our brethren be not distracted from worshipping the Lord Jesus.

No greater burden than these necessary things--lay aside anything and everything that will hinder you or your brethren from worshipping Christ. When Christ is all your delight, you will find this yoke is easy and this burden light.

1. Christ comes down from heavens glory through the Holy Spirit and abides in us
2. He gives us his word of grace from heavens Jerusalem

III. Thirdly, This Work Was Done Through Christ's Ambassadors

A. Christ's Messengers Are Sent Men

Acts 15: 25: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send

B. Christ's Messengers Are Chosen By Christ for the Place He Sends Them

Acts 15: 25: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you...

C. Christ Messengers Are Beloved of Christ and of the Brethren

Acts 15: 25: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

D. Through The Grace of Christ, His Messengers Give Their Lives For His Name

Acts 15: 26: Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ....

E. Christ Messengers Get Their Word Directly From Heavens Jerusalem From Their Master For Those He Has Sent Them To

Acts 15: 30: So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch:

Illustration: This morning at 4 am. When I see Paul and Barnabas go up to Jerusalem, I am reminded of how often the Lord's messengers spend at heavens Jerusalem.

F. Christ's Messengers Are Delivery Boys

Acts 15: 30: Acts 15: 30: So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:...

Conclusion: As Christ Works In Our Midst From Heavens Jerusalem, Through His Word, Through His Ambassadors, He Does These Three Things?

First is in Acts 15: 31: **Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.**

The word "consolation" means exhortation, admonition, but it also means comfort. What commission has the Lord given his messengers? **Isaiah 40: 1: Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.**

Do you know what these saints heard when Paul and Barnabas, Judas and Silas and the others came delivering this word? Your "**warfare is accomplished,...iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.**" (Is 40: 2.)

The word which the false prophets came with was "troubling" to the believer because it required them to do something they had no power to do. But the word which "consoles" the believer is "troubling" to the false prophets, you know why? It requires them to do something they have no power to do--repent and submit to Christ in faith alone.

Second thing is in Acts 15: 32: **And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.**

Christ through the Holy Spirit from heavens Jerusalem--confirms his saints in the heart. The word means "to establish and to strengthen" "to ratify" by bearing witness. **Romans 8:16: The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:**

I John 5: 10: He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. 11: And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Third thing is in Acts 15: 33: **And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. 34: Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. 35: Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.**

Hebrews 13: 5: Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. 6: So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. 7: Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. 8: Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

Remember: As we behold the acts the apostles we behold the acts of our King from heavenly Jerusalem. Now let me read Paul's words one more time:

Philippians 2: 12: Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. 13: For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.