

THE CHURCH ON MISSION: THE GOD WHO SENDS

Week of October 3, 2021

The Message: Christ Alone

The church in Antioch praised God for His grace to Paul on his first missionary journey. Though Paul and Barnabas were strongly opposed in some places, many people heard the gospel and believed. Paul and Barnabas took the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. But a problem arose when some Christians began saying that the new followers of Jesus—the Gentile believers—needed to obey the Law of Moses in order to be right with God.

Paul and Barnabas debated this issue with other church leaders in Jerusalem. They met together to answer a tough question: Can a person be saved by faith alone or was something more needed? When Paul addressed the council, he insisted that God saves Gentiles the same way He saves Jews: through the grace of the Lord Jesus.

Paul testified to the things God had done among the Gentiles. God had given Gentiles the Holy Spirit. James cited the prophets Amos and Isaiah in support. The group agreed that because of Jesus' death and resurrection, He alone is all we need to be saved. They also agreed that they should not make salvation more difficult for Gentiles by adding unnecessary rules.

The church chose two men—Judas and Silas—to go with Paul and Barnabas to the church at Antioch. They wrote a letter for the Gentile believers there, encouraging them and giving them instructions for how to live as followers of Christ.

The church leaders met in Jerusalem to answer a tough question: Can a person be saved by faith alone or was something more needed? The early church agreed that because of Jesus' death and resurrection, He alone is all we need to be saved.

The message for the Gentile believers was important: Whether Jew or Gentile, salvation comes only through faith in Christ. No one is saved by the law but by grace alone. Emphasize to your kids that, while the Bible does give us plenty of instruction for how to live, sinners are made right with God only by the grace of Jesus. Salvation is a gift. To receive this gift, Jesus is all we need.

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Week of October 10, 2021

Paul's Second Journey

Paul was back at the church of Antioch in Syria. The church had sent out Paul and Barnabas to preach the gospel to Jews and Gentiles in places like Lystra and Derbe. Then they returned to the church of Antioch. Some time passed, and Paul wanted to return to some of the cities he visited on his first journey to see how the new believers were doing.

Silas accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey. The pair traveled through Syria and Cilicia (sih LISH ih uh), encouraging believers and strengthening churches. The number of believers in the churches increased daily.

The Lord called Paul and Silas to go to Macedonia, so they obeyed. Two major events happened while Paul was in Macedonia. First, a woman named Lydia became a believer. Paul and Silas had gone to the river to pray. They spoke to the women at the river. God opened Lydia's heart to the good news of the gospel.

Then, a jailer became a believer. This happened when Paul and Silas were thrown into prison after Paul commanded a fortune-telling spirit to come out of a slave girl. Late at night, an earthquake rocked the prison. The prisoners could have escaped, but they stayed where they were.

This was a huge relief to the jailer. Had the prisoners escaped, the jailer would have been punished. In fact, the jailer was ready to kill himself when Paul shouted, "We are all here!" The jailer asked Paul and Silas how to be saved. They told him, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." The man believed and was baptized.

Lydia, the jailer, and many others were saved because they heard the gospel and believed in Jesus. Paul and Silas preached the same message to all people, no matter who they were: "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved."

THE CHURCH ON MISSION: THE GOD WHO SENDS

Week of October 17, 2021

Paul Preached in Europe

Paul and Silas had been released from prison in Philippi (FIH lih pigh). Before leaving the city, they met with believers at Lydia's house and encouraged them. Then they traveled to Thessalonica and stopped at the synagogue to explain to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah. A large number of Greeks and influential women believed in Jesus.

Before long, Jews in the city became jealous and forced Paul and Silas out of the city. Even though the Jews opposed Paul's preaching, the number of believers in Thessalonica grew and the church there was established.

Paul made his way through Berea, where people heard the gospel and believed. The Jews from Thessalonica followed him and caused trouble, so Paul went to Athens. Athens—about 200 miles from Berea—was a cultural center. People in Athens loved to hear about and study the latest ideas. The Jews and the philosophers in the city were interested in what Paul had to say, but Paul was troubled by what he saw. Athens was full of idols to every kind of god. There was even an altar to an unknown god.

The people obviously had a religious desire. Paul knew that their hunger for God could be satisfied—in Jesus. Paul began preaching, telling the people that they worshiped a god they did not know. He said that people can know God! God made the world and everything in it! “We ought not to think that God is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man,” Paul said.

Then Paul told them about Jesus and how God wanted them to turn away from their sins. Some people made fun of Paul, but others believed. Paul explained God's plan of salvation.

The men of Athens worshiped a false god whom they did not know. Paul explained to the men God's plan of salvation. He said that God is not like the Greek idols. Only God deserves our worship! Paul talked about Jesus and the resurrection. All people can know God because Jesus took the punishment for sin that separates people from God.

THE CHURCH ON MISSION: THE GOD WHO SENDS

Week of October 24, 2021

Paul's Third Journey

Paul's third missionary journey was unlike his first two because he didn't set out to plant churches. Instead, his mission was to encourage and strengthen existing churches. Paul wrote letters to the churches, but he knew some guidance was best given in person.

Paul's journey began when he traveled to the city of Corinth. To make a living, Paul was a tentmaker. Paul became friends with two other tentmakers in Corinth: a man named Aquila and his wife, Priscilla. In his business dealings, Paul was able to share the gospel with many people. The church in Corinth grew.

Paul took Aquila and Priscilla with him to Ephesus. Ephesus was a thriving city in the Roman Empire. Aquila and Priscilla stayed in Ephesus while Paul traveled to other churches and encouraged the believers. While Paul traveled, Aquila and Priscilla interacted with a Jewish believer named Apollos. Apollos was a leader in the early church, and Aquila and Priscilla helped him better understand about Jesus and the Scriptures. Apollos went on to greatly help other believers by showing through Scripture that Jesus is the Messiah.

The Holy Spirit led Paul to go to Jerusalem. This wasn't an easy call to obey. The Spirit revealed to Paul that imprisonment and suffering awaited in Jerusalem. (See Acts 20:23.) Hadn't Paul done enough? He had spent years preaching the gospel, and many people believed. Wasn't now a good time for Paul to retire comfortably on a beach somewhere?

But Paul did not cling to his own life. God helped Paul preach with courage even when he was in danger. Paul boarded the ship to Jerusalem, uncertain of the future but certain of the goodness and grace of the Lord Jesus.

As Paul traveled on his third missionary journey, he used every opportunity to tell people the good news about Jesus and to help the church. Paul was dedicated to Jesus, who called him to do the work of sharing the gospel.

LETTERS TO GOD'S PEOPLE: THE GOD WHO LEADS

Week of October 31, 2021

Paul Confronted Peter

Peter—one of Jesus' original disciples—had grown up in a culture where the Jews believed that God only cared about them, not the Gentiles or non-Jews.

Most of the Jews looked down on the Gentiles and refused to even associate with them because Jews believed Gentiles were unclean; Gentiles didn't live the right way to please God. Any Jew who did associate with Gentiles did so at the risk of being ridiculed by his own people. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, God shared with Peter that He loved not only the Jews, but the Gentiles as well. (Acts 10:9-16) Peter took to heart this message from God and began associating with Gentiles, even eating with Gentile believers. That is, until some Jewish believers came around. When he was among Jews, Peter did not eat with the Gentiles and even told them they were supposed to follow certain Jewish laws. But he knew that was not true! Peter also led Barnabas, known for encouraging believers and bringing them together, into acting the same way.

When the apostle Paul learned about this, he confronted Peter in person. Paul reminded Peter that they both knew that God accepts people not based on how they live but by faith. (Rom. 3:21-22) Peter's actions contradicted that core gospel message. Paul shared this story with the believers in Galatia (a major province of Rome in modern Turkey) to remind them—and us—of the same truth. Salvation is not based on ethnicity or external obedience to the law. Salvation comes from faith in Jesus Christ, a faith that is freely available to people of every tongue, tribe, and nation.

Peter was wrong to separate himself from the Gentiles. The gospel is for everyone, and we should show love to everyone. Paul reminded Peter that only Jesus can save people from sin. God accepts people who have faith in Jesus, not people who try to earn salvation on their own.

As you talk to your kids this week, encourage them not to wonder if they have what it takes to be saved. Salvation is found in Jesus. Remind them that because God loves all people, we—in Jesus—can love all people, too.