

55. The Lord Multiplied Ministry Teams

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that we have been set free from the law. In other topics, we have seen that we have been called to freedom. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Here, we see that the freedom that the Lord gives makes it possible for Christians to serve one another in love. In this topic, we will see that the decision of the Jerusalem Council brought great joy to the Gentile believers.

In Acts 15:30-32, we read, “So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.” Paul and Barnabas along with the other men from Antioch traveled together with Judas and Silas back to Antioch. When they arrived in Antioch, they gathered all of the Christians together to read the letter and shared the report of what had happened at the Jerusalem Council.

Then, the letter from the church at Jerusalem was read to all of the Christians gathered together in Antioch. Most of these Christians were Gentiles. These Christians heard the words of Acts 15:23b-29 which say, “The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘*You must* be circumcised and keep the law’—to whom we gave no *such* commandment—it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” All of the Christians in Antioch rejoiced over the great encouragement that was offered by this letter.

Then, after the Christians in Antioch had heard the letter, Judas and Silas were asked to speak to the Christians at Antioch. We see that these two men are called prophets. The Greeks used the word “prophets” to speak of those who they felt had the ability to interpret the oracles or hidden things of God. In the New Testament church before the New Testament was written, this word was used to speak of certain men who would predict future events (Acts 11:27-28). However, “prophets” was used mainly to speak of those men who were moved by the Holy Spirit to speak, to instruct, to comfort, to encourage, to rebuke or to stimulate those who heard what they said. Here, we see that this is what Judas and Silas did as they spoke to the Christians. We see that these men did much teaching to encourage and strengthen the Christians in Antioch.

Acts 15:33-35 goes on to say, “And after they had stayed *there* for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there.

Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.” Judas and Silas stayed for a period of time helping to encourage and strengthen the Christians in Antioch. When Judas got ready to return to Jerusalem, the church at Antioch sent greetings with him back to the apostles in Jerusalem. Here, we see that they realized the importance of fellowship with others.

However, Silas decided that he would stay in Antioch for a longer period of time. That meant that Silas, Barnabas and Paul all continued to teach in Antioch. However, we also read that there were many others teaching and preaching the Word of the Lord in Antioch. Here, we see that the church at Antioch gives us a real picture of a healthy, reproducing church. In Acts 13:1-2, we read, “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’” At the time that the Holy Spirit led the church to send out Barnabas and Paul for the work that the Lord had for them, there were five men teaching in Antioch.

In these verses, we see that two of the five were sent out for the work which the Lord had for them. However, we see here just a few years later that there were now many others also teaching and preaching the Word of the Lord. A healthy church will be a church that is continually developing additional godly leaders who are able to teach and preach the Word of God. 2 Timothy 2:2 says, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” A godly leader will develop Timothys who can in turn develop a third generation (faithful men) and fourth generation (others also) of godly spiritual leaders.

We also see that godly spiritual leaders are able to both teach and preach the Word of God. The word translated “teaching” means *to give instruction*. Colossians 1:28 says, “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” Here, we see that the goal of teaching is to present each person perfect (mature) in Christ. The word translated “preaching” means *to bring good news* and is used particularly in the New Testament to talk about the good news of the kingdom of God and the salvation that can only be obtained through Christ. Acts 8:35 says, “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.” Here, we see that when a person shares the message of salvation that can be obtained through Christ, the person is preaching the Gospel whether that person is talking to one person or to a large crowd. Godly spiritual leaders both preach and teach. They know how to do both whether they are talking to individuals or larger groups.

Acts 15:36-41 goes on to say, “Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they are doing.’ Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and

departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.” After a short time, Paul suggested to Barnabas that they revisit all of the cities that they had visited since the letter from the Jerusalem Council was also written to the Gentiles in those areas. Paul realized the importance of reading that letter to all Christians wherever they were located.

Barnabas immediately wanted to take John Mark with them again. Barnabas reached out to give people a second opportunity. Paul felt that would not be a good idea to take Mark since John Mark had left them on their previous trip. Paul probably felt that his departure on the previous trip had hindered their ministry. Both men had a good point, but both showed a wrong attitude. The word translated “contention” means *a sharp disagreement*. Instead of speaking the truth to one another in love, this time they spoke with sharpness. A key thing to notice is that God did work in spite of the disagreement. Later, Paul recognized that Mark did have a profitable ministry (2 Timothy 4:11), because Barnabas gave him a second opportunity. As a result of the disagreement, two teams were formed to revisit the cities instead of just one team.

Barnabas took Mark and they went to the island of Cyprus which was the first place that Barnabas and Paul had gone on their previous trip. On their previous trip, Barnabas and Paul had visited the various cities on the island of Cyprus from one end of the island to the other. It was important for the letter written after the Jerusalem Council to be shared with those who had become Christians on this island, because there were a large number of Jews on this island. It would have been easy for those of Jewish background to try and impose the law on the Gentile Christians. As a result, those Jews who had become Christians needed to know the decision of the Jerusalem Council.

Meanwhile, Paul chose Silas to replace Barnabas on his team. This team then went through the areas of Syria and Cilicia to strengthen the churches. Those who had become Christians in these areas were mostly Gentiles. It would have been easy for them to be deceived by false teachers. Acts 15:1 says, “And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’” This teaching in Antioch had led the church to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and elders. This led to the Jerusalem Council. However, Paul realized that false teachers would quickly arise who would try to teach this false teaching wherever churches were established. Paul knew that all of the churches that they had established either already were experiencing this false teaching or soon would face this false teaching. As a result, Paul and Silas went to the cities where churches had been established to strengthen the Gentile Christians and share the letter written at the conclusion of the Jerusalem Council.

In the same way, we need to prepare our physical and spiritual children to explain the decision of the Jerusalem Council, because this false teaching of law-keeping is still taught in many places. Once we come to Christ, we are no longer under the law. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip others to explain the freedom we have in Christ.