



Guarding the Gospel- Part 4 Strengthened by Our Unity

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Well, picture with me a football team, a disorganized football team, where the players don't agree on what plays to run. They don't agree with what positions each member should play. They don't even at times agree to what the rules of football are. Picture a conflicted business, a business where the managers and the executives and the workers, they all have different ideas about what the product should be, about the policies of the company, about the values or the direction, or even the mission statement of what the company is all about. Or picture an orchestra of musicians and they're cantankerous and angry and arguing and they don't agree on what music they ought to play. They don't agree on, when they do play music, what tempo it should be or what, you know, what volume it should be.

I mean, that would be a horrible thing to be a part of that football team, that business or that orchestra. You wouldn't want to be a part of it. And certainly no one would want to watch your games or buy your products or, you know, listen to your concerts. No one's interested in all of that because it's a mess. It's not only not fun to be a part of those things, it's not something that you're going to want to receive the products of. You don't realize that that is true across the board with just about every single thing you could think of, including the church. The church is a place where if the church is not on the same page, if they're not unified, if they're not all pulling in the same direction, if they don't all agree as to why we're here, who we are, what this is all about, no one's going to want to be a part of that church, not for very long at least. And certainly it's not going to be a fruitful church.

Let me say it inversely. If a church is not unified, it is inherently weak. If a church is not together and just welded to the mission of what they're there for, they don't agree doctrinally, they don't have a unity and a sense of being all together and all on the same page, it's not going to be a fruitful church. I mean, they won't be able to accomplish its mission. God's got a set of tasks for the church. We will not be good at that. We will not accomplish that if we are not all unified. That's what Jesus prayed so much about this, John 17. There's so much spoken of this in the New Testament, even back in the Old Testament, the idea and the value of an organized, unified, agreeing group of people who love God and serve God, that's just of the highest possible value.

Thankfully what we've watched and been studying here as we've been studying the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 is that we have a lot of potential for the weakening of the Church. We saw conflict, we saw disagreement. We saw people being unsettled as to what we should be and what we should do as a church. And we've worked through that. We've seen what happened and how they solved the problem. How they went from conflict to peace, how they went from really a potential weakness and derailing of the progress of the Church to unity and strength. And what we've learned from this has been, I hope, helpful to know where the corpus, the center, the hub is, where we know what is it that unifies us and what is it that we need to be rallied around?



But as we finish this series and look at this last section beginning in Acts Chapter 15 verses 30 through 35, what I hope that you pull out of this is some of the things that result from it and how to maintain that result. In other words, the Church is called to be unified and we know that makes it strong and can make it fruitful. But we want to make sure that whatever they did there in Acts 15, that we do that here in our church, that we make that happen here for us and that it's maintained and that we keep in that particular place of strong, unified, fruitful ministry. So I want to learn a little bit about that and make sure that what we observe happening in this passage is that is something that it's clear to us, we can double down on it and we can say, this is where we need to be and this is what we need to emphasize.

So take your Bibles if you haven't already and turn to Acts Chapter 15. And what I'd like you to do is to start here in verse 30. Follow along as I read this text for you from the English Standard Version as we get a little bit of context here, because we've got a pronoun right out of the gate we need to define. So let's make sure we remember the context. Verse 30. Acts Chapter 15 verse 30. Follow along as I read it to see if we can't learn a few important things about how to sustain this kind of strong, unified church that we've seen take place here in Jerusalem and it's about to spread to Antioch. Acts 15 verse 30, Are you with me?

"So when they were sent off," now the Jerusalem Council took place in Jerusalem, obviously, and "they" if you look back to where we've been, we've got Paul and Barnabas going home to Syrian Antioch up north about 275 miles north of Jerusalem. And we've also got these two guys now. We got Judas called Barsabbas, that's his nickname, and Silas. So we've got four heavy hitters in the entourage who are going to take this journey back to Antioch. And in the next phrase you are reminded that though it's north, they say "down" because they're leaving this high elevation city of Jerusalem, both geographically, it's going down to Antioch and it's also in terms of the importance of the city. No more important city could exist than Jerusalem in the minds of people in the Bible. So they're going down to Antioch, but of course, that means going north. And you can picture that in your mind. No map was needed on the worksheet today, but at least you get that idea.

They're heading back up to this hub where the Christians were first called Christian. The disciples were first called Christians at Syrian Antioch. And Paul's about to take his second missionary journey before we get out of Chapter 15. But for today, we're going to see these people, most significantly Barnabas and Paul, Silas and Judas, all being sent back to Antioch, two who were from there and two who we're not. Verse 30, "They went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together." So they gathered all the people there in Antioch together, a big church. Right? A lot of Gentiles, some Jews. "And they delivered the letter."

Now, the letter was the product of the Jerusalem Council that basically said, in short, in brief, no, you don't have to keep the ceremonial laws. You don't have to have the converts to Christianity become proselytes to Judaism. You don't need the converts to Christianity, trust in Christ for salvation, be converts to Judaism. Now you got to eat kosher. You got to get circumcised. You don't need those things. Right? Because those have been fulfilled in Christ. The ceremonial law is fulfilled in Christ, you don't need to do that. That was the bottom-line conclusion. And then we had the appended set of things that were to be done so that you did



not violate the conscience of those Jewish-background Christians who were concerned about if the meat was sacrificed to idols or whether you're marrying your first cousin or not.

So those were the things we saw in the Levitical law. We went over all that in the past sermons, but now we get to a place where the letter is delivered and let's see what happens. Verse 31, "And when they read it," so they read it to them, "they rejoiced," the congregation, "because of its encouragement." And that's a good thing. It's a really good thing. They're happy about the conclusion that was reached. More on that in a minute. Verse 32, "And Judas and Silas," now, remember, they weren't from Antioch, they were from Jerusalem, "who themselves were prophets." We've talked about this a lot. Prophets were the people in the New Testament preaching New Testament truths, but they couldn't defer to Galatians Chapter 2 or Romans Chapter 4. They couldn't quote, you know, Mark Chapter 10. So they had to teach New Testament truths without a written New Testament. And so they were called prophets. They were speaking and teaching these with authority, these principles and truths from the authority of teachers in the Church.

But they couldn't defer to the text of Scripture until the apostles and the prophets wrote these down and we had our 27 books now. And thankfully, as we talked about last time, we're beyond that period of time. And thankfully we can defer now to the written word and we can just reiterate the prophecies of those New Testament preachers. "Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words." So they preach there for a long time. This wasn't their hometown. They were staying at people's homes or wherever they were staying to be these guest preachers for some period of time. Verse 33 tells us, "And after they spent some time, they were sent off in peace." That's a good word too. So they were encouraged. They were strengthened. They rejoiced. And now there's peace, they say, "It was great having you guys here preaching."

"They sent them off in peace by the brothers," so everything's copacetic, everything's harmonious, everything's in agreement, "to those who had sent them." Right? Remember, they were sent from Jerusalem. So in just the interpretation of this they were going back to Jerusalem. Verse 35. "But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord." There's more, more teaching, more many words, more prophetic concepts of New Testament truths being articulated and explicated to these people. And we already met the teaching staff there. They named some of them when we got introduced to Syrian Antioch, "with many others also." There are a lot of teachers there, they've got a teaching staff, big church, and they're all teaching there, most notably Paul and Barnabas, particularly after Judas and Silas went back to Jerusalem. Great. Good. Positive. Optimistic. Fantastic. It's a great text. Very positive. I'm like, "Yeah, that's awesome. That's what we want."

Okay, well, let's make some observations here and see if we can't tease out a few things that we need to make sure we maintain so that we have the kind of strength and unity they had there in the church at Antioch and really by extension, the church of Jerusalem and every other church in Cilicia and everywhere else where they're going to take this message. Okay. First, let's look again at verses 30 and 31 and let's understand what's happening here. They

go to Antioch. They gather the church together. They read this letter, which was clarity about all these people who were saying one thing and you had other people saying something else. "And when they read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement."

Now, be careful when you read commentaries on this passage, if you happen to read any or even your study Bible, depending on what study Bible you have. It may be that you think, as so many people say, "Hey, they're happy because, you know, they didn't have to get circumcised. Yay!" And if your appointment was for next Tuesday and they come and say, "Hey, you don't have to do that," it's like, "Yeah, that's awesome." I don't think that's why they were rejoicing. I don't think that's why they were encouraged. Although I can't argue there's a little bit of encouragement in that, I suppose, maybe a lot. But I don't think that's what Luke's trying to tell us. Why in the world were they rejoicing at the encouragement? Because here's what I know, that they were so devoted to this Christ who died for them and rose again, that if Christ said to do something that was difficult, like you got to eat kosher for the rest of your life, they would have done it gladly.

If they said to you, hey, you got to go up in front of people, get dunked in water, you know, be soaking wet like a wet cat and tell people you're a follower of Christ, even if it's embarrassing, I think you would joyfully do it. I'm going to go get baptized. If that's what Christ said, I will do it. So this wasn't, you know, like, "Yay! I love bacon. I'm just so glad we got this report." And I think, unfortunately, a lot of commentators on this passage, even preachers, say things like that and I think it so minimizes what's really happening in this passage.

Look at the words that were used. Think through what we've been through, people were upsetting and troubling their minds. There were people being agitated, not knowing what to think. They were saying, "Hey, if you want to be saved," that's the word that started all of this in Chapter 15, "you've got to keep the Mosaic law." They said, "Okay, if I'm going to be forgiven, I've got to do this. But I've been having someone else tell me if I want to be forgiven I have to do this. So I have conflicting news, I have conflicting ideas. I have people saying things, speaking for God, and they don't mesh."

So what did they have here? Clarity. Clarity. Here's the letter. Here's the answer. We've gone together. We've looked at Scripture, right? They had one passage, at least that they quoted, Amos Chapter 9. They were talking about what the Spirit was doing miraculously putting his imprimatur on what the apostles were doing. And they said, "We know the revelation from God. And that is this: you do not have to keep them the Mosaic law. You don't need to keep the Levitical laws of cleanliness and uncleanness. It doesn't matter. You don't have to eat kosher, you don't have to get circumcised. You do not have to become a proselyte to Judaism to be saved and convert to the Christ who is the Jewish Messiah. You don't have to." God has spoken.

Why would they be encouraged with that? Well, you would be encouraged at that. Right? Because now it's like you have a piece of the New Testament, which, in fact, you do. Right? This is a piece of the New Testament, this short little letter that was read that we studied last week. That is it. It was twice repeated in this passage. They're reading a piece of the New



Testament. It is codified. It is there. It is propositional. You can read it. You can understand it. And now they know. And to know and to be certain that they know, there's great encouragement in that. And I would say this to underscore that at the outset of what we're talking about here in terms of the unified, strong Church, I think is important and it's not missed on a generation like ours.

You have to be strengthened both individually and as a church by, number one if you're taking notes, by knowing that you know. We need to be "Strengthened from Knowing That We Know." Now, we talked a little bit about relativism last week and subjectivism and the idea of your truth, my truth and everyone wanting to live in their own little island of truth. But let me stop and just take this a step further. It is important that we in a generation where everyone is trying to be the arbiter of their own truth, that really to me I am someone who gets to say what is true, because it's true for me and it may not be true for you, that we have in this text something that should remind us that we as Christians never live in that world, even though just to kind of put a little layer on this so that we understand it's not just a two-dimensional thing. It's nuanced that there was something that happened back in the Enlightenment, right? Think back to the 16th century where we had something taking place that gave birth to so many things as Christians led this whole scientific push to say we are not going to rest on the conclusions of former generations simply because they said what they said. We're not going to defer to the authority of men to figure out what is right and what is wrong. And out of that, we saw a lot of good things happen.

And early on, guys like Francis Bacon would say, here's what we're saying with this whole movement and kind of being released from the past conclusions and being able to think about the facts rationally and objectively. We're never saying, and Bacon made this clear, we're never saying that we're divorced from the authority of God because God has spoken not only in his book, this book we call the Bible, but he's also spoken in nature and those rules are clear. He has spoken in those laws of nature. And therefore, we are subject to those things, and we can't rebel against those things. As a matter of fact, science initially coming out of the Enlightenment was the whole point of trying to think God's thoughts after him. Whatever God has said, we're subjecting ourselves to that and we believe and affirmed these rules and laws. We're learning about God even by learning about these things. I'm not just going to take somebody's thoughts from the past and say, "Well, I'm just going to accept those because I'm just living in the wake of other people's scholarship."

And what came out of that was great. A lot of things were coming into a new realization of that period of time, right? We had a geocentric solar system at one time in the minds of people, geo, the world, the earth was at the center, and all these planets and the sun they all rotate around the earth. But then we said, "No, wait a minute, we're going to question things and we're going to rethink things." And here's what happened in astronomy, right? Our calculus started to make more sense when we really did what we should have done and that is take all of this and not just rely on past ideas, but say, how does this add up? Hey, maybe it is that the sun is the center of this solar system, and we became a heliocentric scientific world at that point.



I mean, even Newtonian physics, for instance. Right? I mean, we were open to at least coming out of the Enlightenment, the value of saying just because this worked in a certain situation, it doesn't mean that Einstein's theories couldn't be confirmed because I'm not just saying if it doesn't agree with Newton then forget it. The Enlightenment was important, the scientific discoveries of the Enlightenment were important. But men who started this made it very clear, it doesn't mean that we can rebel against what God has spoken in nature or in his word. And today yet that happens all the time. I can identify as a frog, I can identify as a woman, I can identify as a Native American or whoever I want. And you're going to have to respect my truth because it's true. It doesn't matter if you can show me my chromosomes under a microscope, I'm going to say, "Well, you can say that, but I'm rebelling against that because I authenticity means I get to state what I want." I mean, we live in this world now, right?

How did this happen? If you look back to, you know, Kierkegaard or René Descartes in particular or guys like David Hume, we kept on saying that not only are the gains of not just trusting on the past authority of men making decisions is a freeing opportunity to reevaluate what God has written and what God has done and encoded in nature. But they were saying, let's just throw off all authority. Right? And so Descartes, of course, as you remember his famous line, "I think, therefore I am." Right? It grew into this whole hyper-skepticism of philosophy. Like, we can't really know anything. We can only know what we can figure out with our senses. And really, if I doubt everything, all I'm left with is like I can just at least know that I exist because I can still think, right? That's a, you know, a shorthand conclusion. You can listen to many lectures to kind of get the depth of what Descartes was saying.

But Descartes was getting around to the fact that we should question everything. Should you question that the earth is the center of the solar system? Yeah. Let's do our calculus. Let's do our observations. Let's get the truth. But when it came to even the extension of Descartes all the way to Kant or let's talk about David Hume, the ultimate; he's an anti-God philosopher. We don't need that authority. And you think about, you know, all that happened with Darwin and everything else that came out of this, we're going to be freed from the shackles of any kind of authority beyond us. Human beings are the authority. And we can sit here through reason and human reason and the senses to figure out what's right. They then threw off the authority, first of all, of the written word, and they said, "We're not going to believe that." And then even today, we don't even care about, like, facts.

And I said last week, you cannot be a relativist, you cannot be a subjectivism, you know, philosopher at the teller at Chase Bank. Right? You're stuck with the facts. And so it is whether it's your gender or whether it's your ethnicity or whatever it is, we are stuck by the fact that God has made things and those truthful things have hard edges. And it's true also for the book that was starting to be discarded by the Enlightenment philosophers, as we said, well, we don't care. And then basically what it led to is we don't know that we know. And today we are the product of that when no one can know anything. And if you say that you know that you know, that's a bad statement. They think you're an arrogant person.



And so that's why I want to slow down and say, wait a minute. The Bible has clearly asserted, as you read in your Daily Bible Reading this morning. Smile at me if you're still reading through our Daily Bible Reading. It's a good time to get back at it if you haven't. We just started the Psalms this morning and we read Psalms 1, 2 and 3 and we said Psalm 2 talked about the fact that all these people on the earth want to rebel against the strictures, I like to call them, the binds and the cords of God's truth, and they want to cast those off. And what did it say that God did? He laughs, holds them in derision. Why? Because you're dumb, right? I mean, that's a Mike Fabarez's paraphrase. You're just dumb. You can't fight the truth and you can't fight the God who is the truth.

And coming off of what we read and finished yesterday, what did we finish yesterday? The book of Job. Remember that? Job wants answers and Job's demanding a hearing with God and it ends with God's like, "Okay, I'm here." But he doesn't just say I'm here. He says, "Remember who you're talking to and who you're talking about." And so all of this resume gets spilled about animals. We don't even understand the behemoth and Leviathan and who feeds the wild goats and all that. And it's like Job finally puts his hand over his mouth in two scenes there in Job and it's like, "I repent. I'm sorry, I don't... you're right, you're God and I'm not in it. You speak and you decide and you choose, then who am I to answer back to you?" I mean, that's the right thing to understand authority.

Now, what happened coming out of the philosophical grandchildren of the Enlightenment is that we don't defer to any of that. And to say, "No, there is a God, he has spoken and it's clear, therefore that settles it for us," which is really what's happening in Acts 15. We now found out how do you get right with God? I don't care how much you want to feel like you have to keep the Levitical law to be saved, God has spoken and it is clear and the mic has been dropped. Right? We're done. We've settled this issue. Now we can know that we know. Now we can go out into Cilicia. We can go out into Asia Minor, we can go across to Macedonia and we can teach this message and no one can tell us differently because we know that we know. And if God has spoken then we can say that. And there's something affirming about that. There's something, here's the word, strengthening about that. There's something that we can be unified as a strong movement, if we can say, "No, no, no, no, truth is truth." This is an epistemological discussion. I understand that. But truth is truth and God is truth. And God has spoken his truth. And we can look at that truth and affirm that truth.

If the Bible says in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, I can be the last guy on earth to affirm that, right? But if you and I together want to affirm that we will be the strongest coalition on the planet if everyone else wants to say something else. If we came here by some big explosion and we were just primordial slime and there is no God, he didn't create us, there is no designer, right? They can say whatever they want. And all I can tell you is that God is laughing and we're holding onto his word because God is God.

One passage in this, go to Isaiah Chapter 40 with me, please. Isaiah Chapter 40. It's a familiar passage for you if you are old like me and you used to listen at Christmas time to deeper lyrics than Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer or Santa Claus is Coming to Town or Frosty the Snowman. You used to hear stuff like the Handel's Messiah oratory. This great



operatic symphonic masterpiece of Handel, who steals so many of these lines about prophetic statements that are coming. They're written in the Old Testament, but they're coming in the New Testament. Just glance through the first few verses here of Isaiah 40 and you go, oh yeah. And if you're old like me you can remember hearing these things in Handel. You can picture some portly, you know, tenor singing this from the front with a robed choir in a 120-piece orchestra in front of you. Yeah, I've heard that, these words. Well he got them from many passages and a lot of them in Isaiah and a lot of them from this particular passage. You remember this. This is a soft part of at least the first part of Isaiah 40.

But in this particular passage, we have a promise to Israel. Let's just jump into the middle of it. Let me catch up with you here, Isaiah Chapter 40. Let's start, I don't know, in verse 5, verse 5. "And the glory of the Lord," of Yahweh, "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh will see it together." There's a statement of vindication. There's a statement of God coming and showing himself. Remember, the historical period at this particular point. You got the northern tribes being attacked by Assyria, you've got the southern tribes in time are going to go off to a Babylonian captivity. It looks like the good guys or God's covenant people are losing. And here is the promise. Hey, the glory of God is going to show up.

As a matter of fact, look up at verse 4, which you'll also remember from Handel's Messiah. "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain." I quote that all the time from the platform. I just love that. Why? Because it is a rectification of what sin is. Sin is by definition that things are not the way they ought to be. And when God comes and shows and fixes it and the whole world sees it, he's going to make the wrong things right. Right? And so all of that is a fantastic statement but what I didn't read were the last words of verse 5, which, if you can on your electronic Bible or you have a Gutenberg Bible, underline it and star it. Here it comes. Here's the mic drop. Ready? "For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." BAM. Right?

In other words, it may look bad. People may not believe it. They may think you're the underdog. But here's the deal. "I'm going to make the wrong things right and I'm going to show up and everyone's going to see it." That's just a prophetic promise in the future. But God is saying you can take that to the bank. And you know why? Simply because I said it. Right? The Lord has spoken. What does that do? It brings strength and it allows fruitfulness in mission. Next verse, "I heard a voice," verse 6, "says, 'Cry!'" like yell out, shout, "and I said, 'What shall I cry?'" What shall I yell and shout? Well, here, let's start with this, "All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers and the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it." Right? So you got grass, we're all people here, but we're all temporal. We all live for a while then we die. We've got some really fancy, smart people that then know a lot of stuff, that's like the flowers of the field. They're like the intellectuals, like the influential, like the celebrities, like the professors at the Ivy League universities. There are the flowers. Look at them bloom. Wow. They're amazing. You wouldn't want to argue with them.

Well, listen, "The grass withers, the flower fades." The Lord is going to say you're done because everyone's temporal here on earth. Surely the people are grass, "the grass withers

and the flower fades." But verse 8, "The word of our God will stand forever." And you can trace that back up, make a line back up to the bottom of verse 5, "The mouth of the Lord has spoken." If God has stated an issue like, "You don't have to be circumcised to be a Christian, you don't have to eat kosher to be a Christian." Right? Then it's settled. And you know what that brings to people? Great encouragement. It's good we've settled that. We get it now. There's clarity. We can know that we know that you don't have to be circumcised to be a Christian. In this case we know that we know that God is going to show up and make all things right. I mean, that's the basic promise of God's promise of salvation, right? If you trust in him, you're going to win.

And he goes on to say, "Now you've got a mission. Go out there and get it done." Verse 9, "Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald the good news." What's the good news? God's going to make it right. God's going to fix this thing. "Lift up your voice with," here's our word, here's our theme for the morning, "strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, 'Behold your God!' Behold, the Lord God comes with might." Well, it hadn't happened yet, and it's going to be centuries before it happens. But hey, he said it. He dropped the mic, right? He said, "The mouth of the Lord has spoken." The word of God stands forever so they can trust in something huge.

"Behold, the Lord comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him." Think that out clearly. He's going to reward those trusting in what he has said and he's going to bring recompense, back to your Daily Bible Reading this morning in Psalm 2, he's going to bring judgment on those who sit there and go, "I don't want anything to do with this God. We don't believe that. We don't trust that. We want to do our own thing." But judgment has come. And what about us who've trusted him? Well, "He's going to tend his flock like a shepherd," even though it may be a little flock, as Jesus said, a little flock. It may be a narrow road, it may be a small gate. But that flock that is his, "He's going to tend that flock like a shepherd; he's going to gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom." Well it doesn't feel like it. We're being attacked by Assyrians and by Babylonians. It doesn't matter. "Gently will he lead those with young." Right?

"Who has measured?" By the way, who's talking? "Who's measured the waters in the hollow of his hands?" Just to tie together our Job reading. "Who's marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure, weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who's measured the Spirit of the Lord, or what man shows him his counsel?" He's not consulting with me. Verse 14, "Whom did he consult and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice?" Was it university professors, Harvard Economics schools, or the philosophers at Yale? No, no, no, no, no. Nobody taught him any of that. No one needs to. He is truth. He is all knowledge. "Who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, showed him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations," everybody, not just now, not just America, all throughout time, all throughout history, "the nations are like a drop from a bucket. There are counted as dust on the scales," something you blow off a scale that can't even be measured.



"Behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. Lebanon," where all those trees are, the big forest, the big fat tree stumps out there, hey, that "wouldn't suffice for fuel, nor its beast enough for a burnt offering," even that, it would be no big deal to God. "All nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness." Who are you going to compare God to? And he goes on. The idea of us having a word that is clear from God. And again, so many sermons and so much logic and so much rationale should go behind this, right? God exists and God has spoken. And in that word that he spoke, even if it's this little tiny section of Scripture where they read it in Antioch and they say, "Here's what God says. No, you don't have to keep the Mosaic law." Right? Well, then the mouth of the Lord has spoken and it has settled it for us.

Now we can go on our missionary journey, missionary journey number two for Paul and we can declare this fearlessly. We can declare it confidently. Well, what if the intellectuals at Athens, when you get there, if they don't agree with you? I don't care if they agree with me. We're not going to lead this thing by polls. We're not going to take a census. We're not going to take a vote at a denominational meeting. We're not going to find out what people want. We don't care because in the end, what matters is we get them rightly aligned with what God has said.

God has spoken and we know what we know. And I get it. It's not very popular today to have that kind of confidence. We've come through iterations which are just echoes of the whole enlightenment, hyper-skeptical, philosophical movement, where people don't think you should have certainty about anything. As a matter of fact, they think, "Well, if you get enough people who seem certain that what we're doing is wrong, then I've got to change it." Here's the deal. If you don't know that you know, you don't have the confidence that we know what we know and we know it because God has revealed it, then we will eventually capitulate. We will give in, as we said last week, to the pressures of the world, to the pressures of the culture, to the voting and the polls and the people who think that we shouldn't say this, that or the other about gender or about gender roles or about, you know, whatever it might be in our day.

And we say, hey, listen, if we're going to play footsies with the world, it ends up that we're going to have one foot here trying to please you and one foot trying to please God, we'll have religious talk with a capitulation to the world's pressure, it's just a matter of time. And usually, historically, it takes a decade or two before those institutions become completely irrelevant. And they do become completely irrelevant. Right? Because at some point, why would I listen to an organization that claims to speak for God and really all they're doing is reflecting what I say I want? And that's what happens in seminaries and denominations, in missions organizations and in churches. I don't care how big they are today, if you want to say I am not going to say what God says, I'm going to figure out what you want us to say and I'm going to be embarrassed about what God said, we're eventually going to be in a place where it will have, as so often happens, big parking lots that will be empty. Big auditoriums that'll be empty. They become increasingly irrelevant, and rightly so.

But that's not what happens in Isaiah 40. That's not what happens in Acts Chapter 15. They say we know that we know and we rejoice greatly that we know that we know. And that's the



beginning point for all of this. Their hearts are rejoicing because of the clarity of defined theological truth. There's precision in their thinking. That's the unifying factor as we learned last week. And what does that do? It makes a church strong, makes people strong, makes us together be strong, makes us be ready for fruitfulness and effectiveness in the mission that we're called to. Just like a football team moving the ball down the field, like a business creating a product and putting it to market, and just like an orchestra playing a beautiful musical composition, all of that's got to happen when we're convinced that this is the right thing that we're doing.

Acts 15. In Acts 15 verse 32, I'll make an argument from silence here, if I can. It's certainly true. Certainly in the rest of Scripture affirms this. We've got Silas and Judas, a.k.a. Barsabbas. They've come from Jerusalem. They're Jews. They have all of this representation of a very Jewish church in Jerusalem. Right? James, Peter, you've got all the key players down there and they come up to Antioch, a lot of Gentiles, a lot of converted Gentiles. You got Paul up there and Barnabas doing their ministry. They've just gotten back from all of this ministry in Gentile lands in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. Next, they'll go to, you know, Greece before we're done with the next journey. And they're doing all of this up in Antioch. So we got a hub up Antioch. We got a hub down in Jerusalem. We got two guys who come. It says here in verse 32, "who are prophets." Right? So they're New Testament preachers without a New Testament. They're extrapolating. They're expositing. They're expounding on the truths of New Testament truth, and that "encouraged and strengthened the brothers," and they did it not with a few words, but "with many words."

"And after they'd spent some time." So they came in and they did it for some time, a period of time. And Luke likes to use this phrase sometimes for years. I don't know if we have all that much time in this verse, but for a long time. "And then they were sent off in peace to the brothers who had sent them." Now we have guest speakers come some time and they come, they stand up here and they preach to you for 50 minutes. And we go, "Oh, that was good." And you probably say, "Oh, they agree with what our pastors teach here." And that's usually the case.

Can you imagine though, if we got guest speakers who come here and they preach for months, week after week, hours and hours of lectures and teaching, and they don't even have, in this case, the written New Testament? They've got the Old Testament prophecies, they have the New Testament truth, they have the apostolic affirmation through the miracles that were conducted that they know that they're teaching the right thing and they teach with certainty. And all these people up in Antioch are listening to these Jewish preachers and they're preaching the same thing and they high-five them on the way out. I mean, there's like sparkler tunnels as they're leaving to go back to Jerusalem. Like, "Yeah, you guys were hitting it right on the head. Just exactly what Paul and Barnabas and all the other pastors here in Antioch were saying."

What was happening? Well, the word is "peace." They had peace. They sent them off in peace. Why? Because all the words they said, all they did was encourage and strengthen them in believing and affirming and settling what Paul and Barnabas and everybody else were



saying. They were on the same page. And they were strengthened by the fact that these guys from another city with a different background were saying the same things. They weren't in conflict. I can hardly get through one guest speaker coming here sometimes with the hypercritical nature of some people listening to them and going, "Wow, here are the five things that I found that I don't think that our pastors would agree with." And all I'm telling you is that this is a place where they are absolutely unified around what they're teaching. And the people are saying, we see the continuity, we see the connection, we see the harmonious doctrine that they're preaching and there's no conflict.

All I'm telling you is, I'll prove this point in a minute. It's an argument from silence. I get it. But let's write it down. Number two, we need to be strengthened, we need to "Derive Strength from the Absence of Conflict," from the absence of conflict. And I know that because when you think about the situations in the Bible where there is conflict among God's people, and it started at the beginning of Acts 15, there was conflict. Right? All that does is turn our attention to deal with that conflict. All the capital, all the energy, all the focus, all the discussion, all the talk on the patio, all the small group discussions, they end up being forced in dealing with the conflict. What happens when we have agreement? Well, it strengthens us to put our attention where it belongs. Right? A company can make its widgets, the band can play its music or the football team can worry about moving the ball down the field. We get no more conflict in the huddle, right? We got it figured out in the huddle and now we're going to move forward. And all I'm telling you is that's a huge, huge deal.

Go to Galatians 5 just to prove this point. As you're turning there, Galatians 5, might be good as you pass by Galatians 3 to remember a weird little word that Paul used to describe the problem in Galatia. Remember, Galatia is a region, not a city, it's a region. And Paul had been there in southern Galatia on his first missionary journey, and we have a lot of the same themes that are being dealt with there. This is probably prior to the Jerusalem Council, but he's talking about the problem of circumcision and people requiring circumcision and all the dietary restrictions to be saved. And he says something interesting in Chapter 3 verse 1, he says, "Who bewitched you?" Which is weird, right? For us old guys, talking a lot to the old people, I remember the Bewitched TV program. Tabitha and, you know... What was the mom's name? Darren and Amanda? Well what's her name? Yeah, that. I can't hear you when you're all talking at one time, but...

Bewitched. It's a weird word, right? And it's a weird word he employs it in this particular passage. And it is a little bit of what you envision when you think of that old TV show. It's like there's something like the spell has it been cast on you. You know, when Darrin would do something weird because he was under a spell. That's the idea. Obviously, that's an anachronistic illustration, right? That we hadn't yet developed the TV show. But the idea is you've got a spell. You're acting weird.

Which reminds me, speaking of acting weird, I went out for a walk last week, I wasn't feeling 100%, so I didn't go to the gym and I went on a walk. Not going to run or anything. I'm not crazy, but I was at a walk and trying to walk a faster pace than I normally would when I'm walking around my office or whatever. So I'm walking around, trying to get a little exercise and

you know, I don't live in Florida and I don't live in Georgia, so I don't expect to have happen what happened? And that is a weird, unidentified flying object, an insect, an ugly one, landed on my bare knee while I'm walking. It got my attention. Now I'm not a little girl or anything. I didn't scream. I didn't cry. But I quickly tried to get rid of it. Now I tried to do it in stride. But you know what? That didn't work. That guy was, like, stuck to my knee. And I looked at him and I looked twice. You know, you feel it. It's like, what is going on? And so then I try to shoo it away and it did not want to go. It put its ugly tentacles of legs on my knee and it wanted to stay. But I finally got it to go and it flew and it made this circle and then it landed on the back of my thigh.

Now I'm wearing shorts. I'm fearing now that it's going to crawl into unmentionable regions of my body, and I feel it. And you know what? At that moment, I'm not a little girl, I didn't cry. But I did this Michael Jackson impersonation and I started, like, just contorting into all kinds of like, "Ahhhh." Can I tell you that you're always on my mind because I thought someone from church is going to drive by right now and they're going to watch me out here in the morning with my T-shirt on, my shorts, my tennis shoes, and I'm, you know, moonwalking and flailing. And you're going to say, like, what kind of spell are you under? It was freaky. You know, I try to be cool but it was freaking me out.

Paul here in Galatians Chapter 5. I'm going to tell you right here. And it's in the Bible. Galatians Chapter 5. Look at verse 7. "You were running well." Okay, walking fast in my case, Galatians 5:7. "Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" Right? In my case, the truth in the lane and in the pathway was this sidewalk, and it was some ugly unidentified Floridian insect that got me. "This persuasion is not from him who calls you." He's called you to walk in this path, right? "A little leaven," and I'm going to say it's a pretty big piece of leaven in my case, it felt like, "leavens the whole lump." My whole body was working, all my muscles were working. And, you know, everything was working. I had a symmetry. You just have seen my gait. I was looking like, "That guy's out on a good health walk right now," and all of a sudden now he just went nuts. Went nuts.

And by the way, the conflict, which is really what is on his mind here, is this conflict that all of his attention is turned to this issue. Right? And it's a mess. "I have," verse 10, "confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view." You're going to power through this. "But the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is." Right? Now, I'd like to say I squished him on the back of my thigh. But since you ask how it ended, I don't know how it ended. I think I passed out (smile). No, I didn't. Eventually he went away, but I did go from walking to running, let's just say that. I don't have any dramatic ending to the story, but only because you ask that I tell you that's how it ended.

But here's Paul saying, listen, that bug's going to get squished. Right? "But if brothers I still preach circumcision," which was the conflict, both in Acts 15 and here in the book of Galatians, "why am I still being persecuted? In that case, the offense of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettle you," talk about squishing the bug, "would emasculate themselves." Verse 13. By the way, the appendage to the Jerusalem Council, those four things. "You were called the freedom, brothers. Only don't use your freedom as an



opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," that one word love. And here's the thing. The whole point of the Jerusalem Council statements were not the moral laws. That's why I say even the point of sexual morality didn't deal with the moral law, which was always wrong. Sexual immorality, depending on what it is, is always wrong. But the issues of the Levitical marriage laws, that was the thing.

So those were things. Just listen, I know you can eat your bacon and you can eat your ham, but listen, just don't do it in front of these guys. You need to sensitively bow to the conscience of people and not unnecessarily trample on their sense of propriety and their scruples. So that's what he's saying here. Same thing. But if you guys are to continue to fight, here's the real upshot. "If you bite and devour one another, watch out that you're not consumed by one another." That's a good statement. It's a bad statement, but it's a good illustration is what I'm saying. All the attention and all the capital and all the focus of Galatian churches doing what Paul set them up to do, and that is to multiply, to keep growing. It's like Titus. Paul leaves Crete and he's got this guy here, Titus, this pastor to lead it, and all he's focusing on is to get out there and fix this thing and build this thing and appoint leaders and grow this thing and just dominate that island. Right?

Instead, here in Galatia, he'd done the same thing. They're trying to set up a missionary expanding ministry, and instead they're fighting with each other. They keep fighting about doctrinal issues. They keep fighting about whether or not they're stepping on each other's conscience issues. And it's a mess. And with all that energy you've taken all the focus of tearing down the territory of the enemy and advancing the ball down the field, and you're sitting in the huddle fighting each other. You're going to devour each other. It's a waste of time.

You want to be a strong church, right? We've got to not be sitting around arguing about doctrinal distinctions. We're going to go to the word and we're going to look at the word, we're going to teach the word and we're going to say, God has spoken. We know what we know and we know that we know what we know. And we're going to teach that and we're not going to argue about that. We're going to be on the same page, we are going to be united. And I quoted last week First Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 10, which, by the way, you say, well, this church is pretty doctrinally strong. Our pastors seem to know what they're doing. And so we are all falling in line doctrinally. Well, if you think it's only doctrinal conflict that can lead to biting and devouring and slowing down the purpose and pulling us into a position of weakness, well, then you haven't read First Corinthians.

Because even the verse I quoted, Chapter 1 verse 10, if you start reading there, verse 11 starts to talk about all the things that happen in a church when they're simply dividing and being factional splintering over personalities in the church. "I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Cephas," Peter, and Paul just has a fit. "What are you guys doing? Did you get baptized in my name? What are you doing? What are we? Who is Paul? Who is Apollos? Who is Cephas? We're just servants trying to get you guys to see your need for Christ and to make that known.



You're ambassadors, take that message and go. And instead you're sitting here arguing with each other about people on your staff. What are you doing that for? Stop it."

And I'm just telling you, if we're not on the patio arguing about the latest conflict in the church, if we're not in our small groups arguing about some doctrinal hobbyhorse that someone's on, then we can focus on what matters. We can move forward. We can produce the product that God has called us to, reaching people for Christ, right? Teaching people to be like Christ. Training people to serve Christ. And we can make some progress and this church can be healthy, it can be strong, we can be fruitful. But it's going to start with us not fighting with each other. Conflict. Did they have some different accents? Of course they did. Right? The people in Syria spoke differently than the people in Judea. Right? Jerusalem and Antioch were 300 miles apart and yet we're on the same page. We're going to look past things that don't matter. We're going to focus on doctrinal unity.

We're even going to focus, to add in First Corinthians Chapter 1, relational unity, as Paul does here in Galatians 5. We're not going to step on each other's scruples. We're not going to deal with each other as though we don't care what you feel. But we're going to be focused on the truth, which is where we go in the last verse of our passage. Go back to it. Acts Chapter 15. Let's finish it with this, verse 35. Acts Chapter 15 verse 35, "Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also." As I said, Antioch, we've already had by name some of the pastors who are preaching in that church. And now Barnabas and Paul are there. They're back in there after the first missionary journey, after the journey to Jerusalem, to the Jerusalem Council. They're all back in there. Their teaching team is together and they're teaching and many others are teaching. And it goes on and on and on. "They remained in Antioch teaching and preaching." And in verse 36, "After some days," then they're going to go into the next missionary journey.

More on that in our next series. It'll start in verse 36. But what were they doing there? Preaching and teaching. Look at the things that were said here, many days, "after some days," verse 36. Look at the words again in verse 32, the last two words, "many words." They didn't just stand up and reread the letter over 100 times to the same people. They move past the letter. They got the letter. They laid it down as a foundation. And they kept building on that with exposition of biblical truth, with application in areas of their Christian life, with strategies for evangelism. They just went on and on and on in teaching New Testament doctrines.

Write this one down, if you would. Hebrews Chapter 5 verse 11 through Chapter 6 verse 2. That's a good section right there. The end of Chapter 5, the beginning of Chapter 6. If you think of Chapter 6, if you know your Bible well, you know that starts with "we've got to move past the elementary principles of God's word." Right? Things like repentance. It talks about the basics. We ought to move past that. Why? Because he just exhorted them that they were not growing in their knowledge the way that they should. And they were, here's how he illustrates it, you're still drinking milk when you should be eating solid food. You should be eating the meat of the word.



The whole point of this is their ongoing teaching ministry was a thing that centered them and guaranteed this strong and fruitful church. I put it this way, number three, you need to derive strength and we need to "Derive Strength by Adding to Our Knowledge." We have to add to our knowledge of Christ to quote Second Peter, we have to "grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." We need to always be growing. There was a time, by the way, when the Church was big, but it was weak. In the Middle Ages it was big, but it was weak. And it was weak because they did not teach the word. I mean, they needed a movement that really reflected the Enlightenment. Actually, the Protestant Reformation proceeded from Tyndale forward. All the people who were saying, "Listen, we can't just trust what the priests are saying. We got to look at what God has said." Just like we had in science, we had in theology taking place in the Reformation.

And think about that, what happened in the Reformation? These big cathedrals that had made a blasphemous idolatry of the Eucharist of the Lord's Supper, had put that at the center of their church cathedrals. Well, after the Protestant Reformation, something happened to the architect of those cathedrals. Churches that were now in line with the Scripture should be the authority, they moved the pulpits, which used to be perched up in the side of the buildings. Have you seen these old cathedrals? If you go to Europe, you still see some of them with their little places where they would read the Scripture and teach from often in Latin. Right? Even though they spoke different languages and English and the European, you know, development of the nation.

And the Protestant said, no, no, no, we're going to take the word of God, which is the teaching, which is the centerpiece, the teaching and preaching of the word for many days and with many different... We're going to put that in the center. And it was a kind of a visual reminder that the thing that keeps us on track and strong is not what people say about what we're doing, it's what the Bible says. And that's why in the Protestant tradition, even architecture changed where the pulpit was the main thing, right? The preaching of the word was the main thing because it's the Scripture that binds us together. It's the truth that sanctifies us. "Sanctify them in truth; your word is truth," to quote John 17. So the point is that we've got to maintain this increasing knowledge.

And I think it's almost an interesting parable what's said in verse 34 of this passage in Acts 15 to remind us that we need to keep growing. It's like in Hebrews Chapter 5. In Hebrews Chapter 5, he says, I want to talk about Melchizedek, but you guys would go to sleep if I started talking about Melchizedek because you've become "Nothros." You've become lazy in your hearing. You've become like undisciplined, and you don't even strive to go past the milk. Well, look at verse 34, read verse 34, and you'll see why it's a good example of the whole Melchizedekian thing. "You lost me at Melchizedek." No, but read verse 34. Do you see it's printed in your worksheet there is it not? Oh, it's not. How about in your Bible. Better check your Bible there. What does that say? Oh, it's not there either. Okay, well, some old timer has got a King James Bible and they've got it.

There are, I bet, even in the margin out of deference for your grandpa there is a statement there in small print and italics in the margin that says what verse 34 says. And what does



verse 34 say? "It seemed good to Silas to remain on in Antioch." Do you see that? How come you didn't put that on the worksheet? How come it's not printed in my Bible? Good question. And an answer that you're going to have to need to be able to say, I stand on the truth of Scripture, just like they needed to know that my great high priest is Christ, even though Christ was not from the tribe of Levi, he was from the tribe of Judah, you need that answer. Now you can just say, "I'm not going to worry about all that. That's all just detailed stuff." And I could say to you, well, there is no verse 34 and you'd go, "Oh, okay. Well, there you go."

It's a parable though, is it not? It's almost a providential inclusion in a passage like this, that the centerpiece of a strong church is a church that is learning and growing. And here's the thing. You may be a new Christian. If you are, it takes some time to learn this. If you're an old Christian, you should know this. By this time, you ought to become teachers, to quote Hebrews Chapter 5. And the point is, you should be able to explain to someone why verse 34 is not here. And the answer is not because your modern translation is Satanic and grandpa's translation is godly. That's not it. In the 1550s, 1551 I think it was, Stephanos, Robert Stephanos, who wrote a critical edition of the Greek New Testament. He put it together and he numbered the verses. For the first time we had a numbering system that would be followed from then on.

It was after Erasmus, who was a scholar who was working at Cambridge, had put together his version of the critical Greek New Testament, which means he took all that he had available, which wasn't much, of the Greek manuscripts that he could find back in history and he relied heavily on the Vulgate, which is the Latin version of the Bible, and he put together his Greek New Testament. That was in the early 1500s. So in the mid-1500s we get verse numbers. So both Erasmus and Robert Stephanos, I think he also had another name, but I call him Stephanos. He went by two names like Barsabbas and Judas. They had a sentence between verses 33 and 35 which read, "And it seemed good to Silas to remain in Antioch."

It was in a version of the Vulgate, and it was found in just a few Greek manuscripts, starting at like the fifth century. And it was a marginal reading that Erasmus decided that that should go in this text. He relied on the Vulgate, the Vulgate copy that he happened to have had that in it. So he put it there. It got the numbering system from Stephanos and from that point on we had it. And in 1611 when we came out and prior to that, for years before we came out with the King James Bible, the first edition in 1611, we had this verse there that had a number, verse 34, "And it seemed good to Silas to remain on in Antioch." And that's why it was in your grandparent's Bible, because the English dominant version was the King James Bible. Are you following me so far?

Here's the deal. It's not in your Bible because Luke didn't write it. It's not in your Bible because Luke didn't write it. I know Luke didn't write it, not only because there's no good attestation to this text in ancient Greek texts, it's not only in the majority of Greek tests, but a lot of people that say, I have a King James Bible that represents the majority of the Greek text. I guarantee you look this one up. It does not represent the majority of Greek texts. The Byzantine text family does not endorse this reading, right? This was a very rare reading and a bizarre reading. A bizarre reading because it doesn't match verse 33. Verse 33 has plural



pronouns about Judas and Silas going from Antioch back to Jerusalem. "They were sent out in peace." THEY went back. Right? If it's just that Judas went back and Silas stayed, it wouldn't be "they" would be "he."

And yet it was put in the text because in verse 40 when Paul chooses Silas, we know where Paul is. Paul is in Antioch and he's going to go north into his second missionary journey. And when Barnabas wants to take John Mark and Paul goes, I ain't taking John Mark, I'll choose Silas. He picked Silas and Silas and Paul go. So they said, some guy said back there in the fifth century, hey, maybe Silas stayed. So maybe it was late at night, maybe he had had a bad week. Maybe his dog was wanting to go for a walk. But he whatever he did, he put that in the margin. It became a part of the text that Erasmus codified, that the King James Version translators put in there. And therefore we had a verse 34, even though Luke never wrote it. And he's just trying to solve the problem of how can Paul choose Silas if Silas is in Jerusalem?

Well, I've chosen people from other cities, and then they come to my city and then we go do something. It happens all the time. Not to mention that phrase in the next verse, which is verse 36, I said it says, "After some days." We've already learned in Chapter 9 that he can say a phrase like after many days or after some days and it represented in that passage when Paul was in Damascus, he was there for three years out in the northern Arabian desert. So I know this there can be a lot of time built into verse 6. You know, Silas may have gone back and then, I don't know, maybe months later he came back to Antioch because that was the place he guest spoke for so long and also where I'm taking him. Or maybe he just said, I'm taking that guy who was the guest speaker in our church for so long. I'm going to tag Silas. I like that guy. He's going to on a mission or journey with me. And he chose him and he went.

Either way, this is a mistake to have this verse incorporated from some fifth century Beza manuscript put into a Latin text and put into Erasmus' text and then put into the Hampton Court King James translator's text, that was in your grandpa's Bible. It doesn't belong there. And that's why it's not there. And only out of deference to the numbering system, that Stephanus put together do we have it in the margin, because if we didn't have that or we changed the numbers in this passage no one would ever bring it up because it clearly doesn't belong there. Now, that's our Melchizedekian discussion, right? Because most people go, "Well, I didn't follow any of that." And the point was, if you didn't follow any of that, at least for these guys who had been Christians for a long time, the writer of Hebrews says, "Well, you should be able to track with this stuff, and if you can't, you ought to catch up." Why? Because we should always be growing in our knowledge of truth.

And so it is that even that becomes a parable of our need to keep growing. And I'm not saying everyone should be able to explain that in 5 minutes or less, because it probably took me 7 minutes to explain that. But the point is we need to be able to build on our knowledge. It's not just "Jesus loves me" and a couple of favorite verses and then that's it. We need to keep growing. We need to keep digging. That's why the centerpiece of church is long sermons in the middle of the stage. That's why every building on this campus has a podium with a place for people to teach. That's why we do things like Partners. If we do need to go back to lay the



foundation of the basic principles of the milk, we'll take you through that and then we'll build on that. We'll keep growing. That's the thing that unifies us.

And one thing that unifies us, not just as the teaching of all the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone of it all, to quote Ephesians 2, is Christ Jesus himself. And if we don't start with that we have no foundation, as Paul said in First Corinthians 3, that is the foundation. Christ Jesus himself being our foundation.

And therefore it's good for us to end this series, this section of our teaching before we get into some things in the summer here we're going to be doing, I want us to celebrate the Lord's Supper together. So the ushers are going to come down, they're going to pass out a piece of bread and a cup of the fruit of the vine. And what I want you to do is to hang on to those things, if you're a Christian, to prayerfully consider your relationship with God and to say I agree with the foundation of the Christian faith, which is Jesus Christ is the "Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." And we are saying this is the starting point. What joins Christians together is that we believe in the substitutionary atonement of Christ, that he took his life and laid it down so that my sin could be placed on him.

So they're passing these elements out. Hang on to the cup, hang on to the bread and in about 4 minutes, I'm going to come back up here and we'll take these elements together as we remember the thing that binds us together, the thing that Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me. This cup is a reminder in my blood of the New Covenant." This cup is representing the promise that I would forgive you and wash you clean and "give you a new heart," to quote Ezekiel 34 and Ezekiel 36. That's what God had promised. And we're claiming that promise because we're trusting in Christ alone. Not in ceremonial laws, not even in some resume building, moral law-keeping. I'm trusting that Christ did the work for me, and if that's the case for you, you hang on to those elements and we'll take these elements in honor and memory of Christ, the centerpiece of our theology in just the second.

For it to be well with our soul if you happen to know the song that's being played, you've got to be able to submit ourselves to what God has said, whether it's in Isaiah 40, believing that God is going to fix this. We're really believing that here, right? We're believing that the thing that represents the body and blood of Christ is pointing to a transaction that makes my sin and my guilt and the things that make me feel like I'm not acceptable to God, it eradicates that. We're believing that even though the proof of that and the ultimate proof of that being exonerated at the judgment I haven't experienced yet, I'm trusting in the word of God.

I'm saying the mouth of the Lord has spoken and I believe that. I was struck this week for some reason, I don't remember why I was there in Luke Chapter 1, but you know, Zachariah, this old-time priest, he was the father of John the Baptist, he was going to be, and he was told by the angel, you're going to have this kid and he didn't believe it. He kept arguing. And so God struck him, you might remember the angel had him struck mute so he couldn't talk. It's contrasted before we get out of that chapter with a teenage girl, a poor teenage girl named Mary, who is told she's going to bear the Son of God. Now, which one's harder? You're going to have a child in your old age, that seems like impossible and Zachariah had trouble



believing it. Mary hadn't had relations with a man and she's told she's going to have a baby. It's like that's just crazy. And yet she submits herself to it.

With a word she struggles, but then it's like, okay, "Be it done to your servant according to your word." She believes it. She submits to that truth to the word of that angel. Now, the difference is huge. One goes through discipline because he should have known better and trusted, and the other one believed and submitted herself to that and she's honored. Speaking of the Latin Bible, they call it the Magnificat, because in Latin the first word of her song of praise is Magnificat in Latin. In English it says, "O my soul magnifies the Lord. I magnify the Lord." She's worshiping God. And it's interesting all the themes of our sermons kind of come to play in this passage. She submits herself to believe the word of God. She knows that she knows and she trusts in that. And she talking about strength. She talks about the mighty arm of God. She talks about the goodness and favor that God has granted her and the goodness God gives to Israel. And she believes his word.

Obviously, it's not a blind faith, right? We're not leaping into darkness. There are reasons to believe that there is a God and that he has revealed himself, spoken in his word. We have that word and we embrace it. We say the word of the Lord stands forever and we believe it. It starts with believing this, believing the fact that these elements represent, they don't become the body and blood of Christ, but they represent the transaction that makes all the difference in the world. That I am a child of God, that I am forgiven, that I in the end of this life, I'm going to step into the presence of God and hear from him, "Enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Why? Because I'm a good person? No, nothing to do with my goodness. It has to do with the transaction of my sin on his cross.

So if you trust in Christ, do it believing his word, do it believing his promise, do it with that sense that the mouth of the Lord has spoken and I want to do this in remembrance of him because my trust is in the finished work of Christ, the Lamb of God, who, because of that horrible Friday afternoon, took on the penalty of my sin. Do that if you believe in him, you trust in him. Let's eat this bread and drink this cup together now.

God, we do want to sing "it as well with my soul." We'd like it to be well with our soul that my sin, "O the bliss of this glorious thought," this is my sin, not in part, but the whole was nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more. It is well with my soul. God make it well with our soul today because we're trusting in what your Son has done for us.

In Jesus name. Amen.