

HOLD THE LINE 7 – “WHAT DOES A SUPERNATURAL CHURCH LOOK LIKE?”

(OR How Not to Be a “Meh” Church)

INTRO. START OFF SERMON SECTION - VIDEO HONORING VETERANS (HAVE VETERANS STAND AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO ARE AWAY SERVING)

WHAT BRINGS ABOUT THE COURAGE, SACRIFICE, SERVICE OF A VETERAN? FOR ONE, UNITED IN BELIEF IN FREEDOM. LOVE FOR FAMILY, COUNTRY, CORE VALUES OUR NATION WAS FOUNDED ON (BUT MORE DIVIDED ESP. SINCE THE ‘60S)

***BUT WE KNOW THERE CAN BE STRENGTH AND INFLUENCE FOR GOOD WHEN UNITED AROUND A COMMON CAUSE.**

SAME CAN BE SAID ABOUT FIRST CENTURY CHURCH AFTER JESUS’ RESURRECTION THAT SOUGHT TO INFLUENCE THEIR CULTURE AND THE WORLD FOR GOOD PLUS GIVE THE HOPE OF LIFE BEYOND THIS ONE!

AFTER THE TURN AROUND GOD DID IN SAUL’S LIFE IN ACTS 9, THE GOSPEL MESSAGE BROUGHT TO

THE GENTILES BEGINNING WITH CORNELIUS IN ACTS 10, THE CHURCH BECAME UNITED BETWEEN JEW AND GENTILE. THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKED THROUGH THEM.

- **OF COURSE WHERE HUMAN BEINGS ARE INVOLVED – DIVISION AND DISAGREEMENT BOUND TO SURFACE AS IT DID 10 YRS. LATER AFTER THE CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS IN THE CITY OF ANTIOCH (LIKE VEGAS – A MISSION FIELD OF THE EARLY CHURCH.) WHERE PETER, BARNABAS, AND PAUL WENT AFTER GOD REACHED OUT TO THE GENTILES.**

SO TODAY WE ARE GOING TO LOOK AT HOW TO BE A "SUPERNATURAL CHURCH" FOR GOOD, FILLED W. THE HOLY SPIRIT, UNITED IN A COMMON PURPOSE (OR SUBTITLE – HOW NOT TO BE A “MEH” CHURCH) IF DON'T KNOW WHAT I MEAN BY THAT, WATCH. . .

(SHOW SIMPSONS YOUTUBE CLIP HERE)

NEW WORD I LEARNED THIS WEEK – EXPRESSES APATHY, DISINTEREST. WE DON'T WANT THAT TO BE SAID ABOUT OUR CHURCH SO. . .

- I. **ACTS 15:1-2 AND 4-5**

Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”² This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

⁵ Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised *and required to keep the law of Moses.*”

A. SO THE CHURCH HAD ENJOYED THIS TIME OF PEACE BETWEEN JEW AND GENTILE WITH A COMMON PURPOSE UNTIL THE “LEGALISTS” STIR UP TROUBLE. (LEGALIST = SOMEONE WHO MAJORS IN THE MINORS. MOST OF THE TIME TRY TO TURN GRAY AREAS INTO BLACK AND WHITE. They practice strict adherence to the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law.)

B. THEY DEMANDED THE JEWISH CUSTOM OF CIRCUMCISION BE PRACTICED BY THESE NEW GENTILE BELIEVERS IN ADDITION TO FAITH IN CHRIST IF THEY WANTED TO BE SAVED OR ACCEPTED BY GOD (EVEN THOUGH GOD HAD ALREADY SHOWN HIS ACCEPTANCE BY HIS HOLY SPIRIT FILLING THEM.)

****BY THE WAY, BY COMPARISON, THAT SHOULD MAKE WHAT WE ASK AS A CHURCH TO COME TO FAITH VERY EASY! WE JUST ASK YOU TO BELIEVE, REPENT AND PRAY TO RECEIVE CHRIST AND GET BAPTIZED (IN WARM WATER AT THAT!)**

***CIRCUMCISION = OUTWARD EVIDENCE OF “CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART” GIVEN AS A PRACTICE TO ABRAHAM, AND PASSED DOWN TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE. IT ALSO HAD CERTAIN HEALTH AND CLEANLINESS BENEFITS AT THE TIME.**

***BUT CIRCUMCISION WASN'T THE ENDGAME HERE. THE LEGALIST BELIEVERS BASICALLY WANTED GENTILES TO BECOME JEWS FIRST, BEFORE PUTTING THEIR FAITH IN CHRIST IF THEY TRULY WANTED TO BE SAVED. NEXT YOU WILL SEE THE CHURCHES REACTION AND THEME OF THIS PASSAGE. . .**

II. ACTS 15:6-11

The apostles and elders met to consider this question. ⁷ After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. ⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹ *He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.* ¹⁰ *Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?* ¹¹ No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

**A. V. 8-9 SAYS GOD DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE
*WHEN IT COMES TO OUR BACKGROUND OR
PAST.* HE HAD ALREADY PURIFIED THEIR
HEARTS BY FAITH ALONE! (MARK OF
RELIGIOUS CULTS TO ADD A BUNCH OF OTHER
DEMANDS ON TOP OF FAITH IN CHRIST SO
THEY CAN KEEP YOU ALWAYS INSECURE
ABOUT YOUR SALVATION, AND WORKING HARD
FOR THE ORGANIZATION.)**

**B. V. 10 – ASKS – WHY TRY AND MAKE IT HARDER
ON THESE NEW BELIEVERS COMING INTO THE
CHURCH BY ADDING THIS EXTRA YOKE/
BURDEN/BARRIER AS SOME KIND OF TEST OF
FELLOWSHIP BEFORE THEY COULD BE
ACCEPTED INTO THE CHURCH?**

***EVEN THE APOSTLES ADMIT NO ONE HAS
EVER BEEN ABLE TO BE SAVED BY THE LAW
BECAUSE NO ONE CAN KEEP IT PERFECTLY SO
WHY EXPECT THESE GENTILES TO?**

**{TAKE THE EXODUS 20 TEST (TAKE A COUPLE
OF LAWS AS EXAMPLE) - "WEIGHED IN THE
SCALES AND FOUND WANTING!" *I WOULD***

GLADLY STAND ON ANY SCALE IF JESUS STANDS WITH ME!}}

(N.T. EXPLAINS LAW WAS TO SHOW US WHERE WE FALL SHORT TO LEAD US TO FAITH IN CHRIST) IT IS BY GRACE WE ARE SAVED.

PAUL TO GALATIAN LEGALISTS – GALATIANS 2:16

know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in^[a] Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

LATER IN GALATIANS PAUL SAYS IF YOU TRY AND PLEASE THE LEGALIST YOU WON'T PLEASE GOD!

C. THIS PASSAGE EMPHASIZES HOW LEGALISM CAN QUENCH THE SPIRIT AND FORWARD MOMENTUM AS A CHURCH.

I HAVE COME TO BELIEVE. . .A supernatural Spirit-filled church is both DEEP and WIDE.

***WHAT DO I MEAN? WELL, WHAT DO MISSIONARIES DO TO REACH THE CULTURE AROUND THEM?**

- FROM THE BEGINNING WE HAVE WANTED TO BE A CHURCH THAT APPROACHES MINISTRY LIKE MISSIONARIES DO. REDLANDS IS OUR MISSION FIELD, ALONG W. STARTING CHURCHES AROUND THE I.E. IN THE NEXT 10 TO 20 YEARS MILLIONS WILL BE MOVING HERE BECAUSE THE BEACH AREAS ARE FULL AND THE WEATHER IN SO. CAL IS STILL DESIRABLE. THIS IS OUR ANTIOCH! **New churches that are not stuck in tradition can more effectively reach unchurched people in transition that are looking for connection.**

***BUT EVEN AS A CHURCH PLANT THAT HAS TRIED TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO NEW PEOPLE COMING IN, WE HAVE HAD OUR LEGALISTS IN THE LAST 10 YEARS.**

(AS A RESULT, I WILL HONESTLY TAKE A REFRESHINGLY OPEN, SEEKING UNBELIEVER WHO SEES THEIR NEED, OVER CALLOUSED CHURCH PEOPLE WHO THINK THEY KNOW IT ALL!)

SOME OBJECTIONS WE'VE ENCOUNTERED:

- **“They should have to change to come to us. We shouldn't go out of our way to accommodate****

them.” (WE WILL SEE HOW THE EARLY CHURCH HANDLED THIS ONE TODAY!)

- **No topical sermons or topical midweek studies. This is not really studying the Bible (we do both). Have had people leave over this.**
- **PIANO AND ORGAN ONLY**
- **WHY COMMUNION EV. SUNDAY? OFFERED VS REQUIRED**
- **We must believe that the 6 creation days were lit. 24 hour periods as an essential of the historic Christian faith – It’s Not! 2 Chapters on "how" in Genesis and 48 on "why". (while people are going to hell, kids parents are going through divorces, etc.)**
- **OTHERS = LEGALISTIC ABOUT BEING LIBERAL – IF WE DIDN’T EMBRACE CERTAIN SINS THAT THE CULTURE SAYS SHOULD BE CELEBRATED, WE HAVE HAD PEOPLE LEAVE. WON’T EVEN DISCUSS.**

****YOU CAN AVOID LEGALISM *BY SPEAKING WHERE THE BIBLE SPEAKS, AND BEING SILENT WHERE THE BIBLE IS SILENT.* PEOPLE ARE FREE TO USE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDED, SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES WHEN IT COMES TO GRAY AREAS.**

****LEGALISM = USUALLY A SMOKE SCREEN TO COVER UP DEEPER SIN – BITTERNESS, WANTING TO BE IN CONTROL, UNFORGIVENESS, PRIDE, ENVY, ETC.**

***THAT WAS THE ATTITUDE OF THIS GROUP OF BELIEVING PHARISEES IN ACTS 15. SO HOW DOES THE CHURCH ADDRESS?**

****THE DISCIPLES SIMPLY SHARE WHAT THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS DOING AMONG THE GENTILES TO SILENCE THE CRITICS. . .**

III. ACTS 15:12-15;17-20

The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³ When they finished, *James spoke up.*

“Brothers,” he said, “listen to me. ¹⁴ Simon^[a] has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. ¹⁵ The words of

the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: skipping to. . .

v. 17-20 that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, *even all the Gentiles who bear my name*, says the Lord, who does these things'^[a]—

¹⁸ things known from long ago.^[b]

¹⁹ “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.

A. JAMES THE HALF BRO. OF JESUS SPEAKS UP AND BACKS UP PETER, PAUL AND BARNABAS – HIS INFLUENCE WAS BIG IN THE EARLY CHURCH IN JERUSALEM.

B. AFTER CONSULTING THE HOLY SPIRIT TOGETHER, THEY WRITE A LETTER

***NOTE – THEY ARE GOING TO NARROW 613 COMMANDS FROM JEWISH TORAH DOWN TO SIMPLE FAITH IN CHRIST PLUS 3 COURTESIES FOR THE GENTILES TO FOLLOW!**

****JESUS BOILED THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS DOWN TO 2 THAT HE CALLED THE GREATEST COMMANDMENTS.**

1. LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD

2. LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS SELF

***THESE WOULD SUM UP THE REST. IF LIVING BY THESE, THEN THE 3 COURTESIES MENTIONED IN THE LETTER SHOULD HELP THEM KEEP UNITY BETWEEN JEW AND GENTILE.**

IV. THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH –

ACTS 15:22-35. (SUMMARIZE - Focus on v.28)

Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers. ²³ With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers,

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

24 We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. 25 So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul — 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. 28 *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us* not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29 You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

30 So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. 31 The people read it *and were glad for its encouraging message.* 32 Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers. 33 After spending some time there, they were sent off by the believers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. [34] [a] 35 But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

***FIRST REACTION WAS PROBABLY, “WHEW”,
NO CIRCUMCISION NECESSARY TO BE SAVED!**

**A. THEY SENT BARNABAS AND PAUL ALONG W.
THE LETTER. YOU KNOW TEXTS AND EMAILS
CAN SOMETIMES BE MISINTERPRETED
WITHOUT THE PERSONAL TOUCH RIGHT?
ALSO SENT DISCIPLES BY THE NAME OF
JUDAS (NOT THE BETRAYER – HE DEAD!),
AND SILAS TO SHOW THE LEGALISTS THAT
THIS WAS A LEGITE DECISION, NOT JUST
MADE BY BIASED GUYS WHO ALREADY
WERE MISSIONARIES SPECIFICALLY TO THE
GENTILES.**

**B. NOTICE HOW THE JERUSALEM CHURCH
ARRIVED AT THIS DECISION – V. 28 – “It
seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. . .”
THEY ARE NOT LEADING BY THEIR OWN
WISDOM, BUT DEPENDENT ON THE SPIRIT’S
WISDOM – INVOLVED PRAYER, DISCUSSION,
AND THE APOSTLES TEACHING (THE NEW
TESTAMENT) TO MAKE A GODLY DECISION.
THE DECISION *WAS NOT TO ADD ANOTHER
BURDEN OR BARRIER BEYOND FAITH IN
CHRIST AND THESE 3 COURTESIES:***

1. ABSTAIN FROM MEAT SACRIFICED TO IDOLS (PORTIONS SOLD IN THE MEAT MARKET USED IN IDOL WORSHIP = OFFENSIVE TO JEWS SEEKING AFTER ONE GOD). EATING A BIG PHILLY STEAK SANDWICH W. YOUR VEGAN FRIENDS OR AVOIDING PUTTING YOUR TRIPS TO THE BAR ON FACEBOOK WHEN YOU HAVE ALCOHOLIC FRIENDS TRYING TO NOT BE REMINDED OF WHAT TEMPTS. JUST PART OF BEING CONSIDERATE.

2. AVOID EATING MEAT FROM STRANGLED ANIMALS STILL W. THE BLOOD IN IT. GROSS TO JEWISH PEOPLE. BELIEVED LIFE WAS IN THE BLOOD BECAUSE WHEN BLOOD DRAINED, SO DID LIFE. (SOME OF THESE LAWS WERE GIVEN TO PROTECT THEM FROM RAW MEAT THAT WAS TOO RARE, OUTBREAKS OF E COLI VIRUS, ETC.)

3. ABSTAIN FROM SEXUAL IMMORALITY – RAMPANT IN ANTIOCH ALONG W. STD'S, ADULTERY AND EASY DIVORCE, TEMPLE PROSTITUTION. THEY ARE SAYING DON'T

**ADD YOUR FAITH TO AN UNCHANGED LIFE.
AVOID HYPOCRISY AND WALK IN LOVE
REFUSING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ONE
ANOTHER'S LUSTS AND WEAKNESSES.**

AND THAT'S IT!

**FOCUS: BE ACCEPTING WITHOUT
COMPROMISING LOVE FOR GOD (which would
include obedience to the "essentials") AND
LOVE FOR OTHERS. PUT JESUS FIRST AND
BE CONSIDERATE OF OTHERS FOR THE SAKE
OF UNITY.**

CONCLUSION:

**IF YOU WANT TO BE A SUPERNATURAL,
SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH THAT GOD BLESSES,
THIS IS WHAT IT TAKES! IT INVOLVES AN
OUTWARD FOCUS (NICK WILL TALK MORE
NEXT WK.)**

**IT MEANS ACCOMMODATION OF NEW PEOPLE
WITHOUT COMPROMISING THE ESSENTIALS
(LISTED IN OUR STATEMENT OF FAITH ON**

WEBSITE – WHAT WE BELIEVE/“GOING DEEPER” SECTION)

- A. I THINK WE SEE FROM ACTS 15 THAT A CHURCH THAT WALKS IN THE SPIRIT IS *BOTH DEEP AND WIDE.***

LET ME ASK: WHAT BARRIERS MIGHT WE BE PUTTING UP UNKNOWINGLY AS A CHURCH OR INDIVIDUAL? DO CERTAIN PEOPLE HAVE TO MEET YOUR REQUIREMENTS BEFORE YOU'LL SHARE CHRIST WITH THEM OR INVITE THEM? I LOOK AROUND MT. GROVE – ARE WE MISSING THE MARK ETHNICALLY? DO WE SEE INSIDE WHAT WE SEE OUTSIDE? DO WE NEED TO OFFER MORE STYLES, HAVE A SPANISH SPEAKING SERVICE EVENTUALLY, AN EVENING SERVICE LED BY COLLEGE STUDENTS – FOOD FOR THOUGHT. DO WE IGNORE GUESTS BECAUSE WE ONLY SEE OUR FRIENDS ONCE A WEEK? DO WE SHORT-CIRCUIT POWER AND UNITY BECAUSE WE DON'T PRAY ENOUGH AND LISTEN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT, DON'T JOIN A SMALL GROUP AND PUT OTHER THINGS BEFORE GOD?

- B. *A Spirit-filled church that does supernatural things that glorify God will be full of Spirit-filled people (eventually).***

We might be able to fill a room using good music, message, videos, etc. on our own power, but we can't make you lovers of God. Only God can do that as you answer His call to you.

SOMETIMES WE MAKE IT HARD FOR GOD TO GET IN BECAUSE WE ARE MORE FOCUSED ON OUR METHODS THEN ON HIM (Me sneaking in to Citrus Plaza to hear my son lead worship - going through season of shutting me out). REV. 3:20**

Wouldn't you rather see 100 lovers of God who leave here determined to follow the Spirit and make a difference in this world than a thousand "spectators" who come, get a spiritual buzz, and by 1 pm forget what they have learned and experienced and live the same as they did last week?

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

Sometimes walking in the Spirit is obediently putting one foot in front of the other depending on God and trusting Him for the outcome.

That's what the early church did. "It seemed good to the Spirit and to us". They couldn't see the future of their choice, but 20 centuries later you and I have heard the gospel and responded because of their Spirit guided decision!

DON'T SETTLE FOR A "MEH" SPIRITUAL LIFE. THAT WILL RESULT IN A "MEH" CHURCH!

ACTS 2:42-47 AFTER THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME UPON THE CHURCH

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. (Happened just this last week!)⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

THAT'S WHAT A SUPERNATURAL CHURCH LOOKS LIKE! "NO PERFECT PEOPLE", BUT GROWING!

PRACTICE ACTS 2:42 TOGETHER AND GOD WILL BLESS OUR CHURCH W. LOVE AND UNITY. AS THE EARLY CHURCH INFLUENCED THEIR SURROUNDING CULTURE FOR GOOD ONCE THE SPIRIT EMPOWERED THEM, SO WILL WE.

WE CAN START TODAY AS WE HEAD INTO THE HOLIDAYS WITH SOME SPECIFIC STEPS.

INTRODUCE PRAYER COVENANT

THEN WE CAN SAY, “IT SEEMED GOOD TO THE HOLY SPIRIT AND TO US”, TO REACH OUT IN AN INCLUSIVE WAY WITHOUT COMPROMISING THE ESSENTIALS. AND WE WILL TRUST GOD FOR THE OUTCOME! LET’S SEE WHAT HE DOES!

IF YOU WANT TO FOLLOW GOD'S SPIRIT IN A CLOSER WAY OR FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE PRAYER ROOM IS OPEN TO MY LEFT AS YOU GO TO COMMUNION. . .IT STARTS BY PUTTING SIMPLE FAITH IN CHRIST.

ENCOURAGE YOU TO READ THROUGH THE REST OF THE BOOK OF ACTS TO SEE WHAT GOD DID THROUGH SPIRIT GUIDED PEOPLE AND SPIRIT GUIDED CHURCHES.

PRAY