

## **Acts (Part 8) – The Nature of the Gospel**

Matt Chandler – March 30, 2014

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[Video]

In Jerusalem, AD 30, Jesus died on the cross, resurrected on the third day, and then ascended into heaven. Fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, the Holy Spirit fell on the apostles, giving them power, purpose, and a plan. Out of joy, the church was born. Empowered by the Spirit, Peter gave his first sermon, and 3,000 hearts were transformed. Hearing, receiving, and repenting, the young church walked in unity and garnered praise. Out of joy, the gospel creates community.

Peter and John then continued to spread the gospel through preaching and miracles, and the church grew by 5,000. In AD 31, Stephen gave a powerful sermon connecting the Old Testament to Jesus and rebuking the people for their hard hearts. Enraged, the people stoned Stephen, making him the first Christian martyr.

In AD 34, the gospel continued to multiply through Philip's ministry in Samaria and Caesarea. Meanwhile, on the road to Damascus, the Lord transformed the heart of Saul, a man who persecuted countless Christians, and Saul became Paul. After this conversion, the gospel continued to spread through the ministries of Paul and Peter. God gave Peter a vision and used him to first reach the Gentiles.

In AD 44, King Herod Agrippa the First executed the apostle James and had Peter arrested, but an angel rescued Peter, leading him out of the prison. As the believers were scattered because of persecution, the center of operations for Christianity turned from Jerusalem to Antioch where many teachers and prophets gathered. Around AD 48, Paul and Barnabas were then called to go out on their first missionary journey. Many Jews and Gentiles believed after hearing the Word preached, while others drove Paul and Barnabas out of the cities.

In every day and age, the church faces both persecution and praise, because all multiplication comes at a cost. But we must fight for and pray for unity to flourish within the church. To advance the gospel, we must be shaped by the gospel. We must be prayerful and openhanded. We must continue to move forward for the good of the church and the sake of the gospel. Out of joy, the church multiplies.

[End of video]

If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them. If you're starting to get nervous about how long that bumper video is going to end up by the time we're in Acts 28, don't worry about it. It's not going to be like 40 minutes long and then me coming out and going, "That" and then just heading back.

The reason we're showing you what we're showing you in that bumper video is that if you've been with us for the eight weeks we've done Acts, then you've heard us cover all of that, but if this is your first morning with us, we didn't want you to come in with the feeling like you're an hour late to the movie, wondering who is who. So that's just a brief overview of where we've been and what we've covered on the kind of historical timeline of what we're covering.

What I want to do today is camp down in Acts, chapter 15. If you have your Bible, let's grab those. We're just going to cover 35 verses, which is nothing coming off of four chapters, two chapters, and now just 35 verses. I want to do this the way I usually preach, which is we're just going to walk through it line by line and talk about it.

One of the things I picked up on about two years into ministry is there seems to be something inside of us, maybe our flesh or our pride or whatever, something like that, that makes us take what is the best news in the universe and, either out of fear or a sense of control, add to that, and in adding to that best news in the universe, we literally take the greatest news in the universe from *being* the greatest news in the universe and twist it to being useless news and not good news at all.

There have been several moments over the last 20 years where I've been in a moment where I've gone, "Gosh, this is wrong. I understand it, but it's just wrong." The first one of those actually was at what's called a True Love Waits rally. It promotes basically keeping yourself pure until your wedding night. The guy, a kind of famous traveling itinerant guy, got up and started his sermon by pulling out this rose and smelling it and talking about how pretty it was.

Then he threw it out into the crowd, and then he began to give a bunch of statistics on venereal diseases. What he said about the rose... He was like, "I want you to smell this rose. Make sure you touch its petals. Get a good whiff of that." He just kept going on, and it was all fear based. It was all, "These are the bad thing that can happen. Do you want to know what it's like having a kid when you're a teenager? Imagine this."

That's what it was. Then about 30 minutes into his message, he was like, "Now where's my rose?" Some poor kid brought up this completely jacked-up rose. I mean, it was broken and all of the petals were melted. That guy, God bless him... He held it up and was like, "Now who would want *this*?" Do you see what I'm saying?

Now let's be fair to him. Because right now, you know, you're gospel people. I heard you gasp. But let's be fair to him. Here's what I mean by fair. The drive that led to his pathetic exegesis was a desire for probably his own daughters and sons to live a morally upright life. The desire is a good desire. I've yet to meet the man who has daughters who goes, "You know, I'd just really like her to have all of the experiences she can before she settles down."

I haven't met that dad. I haven't even met the dad who's like, "You know what I'd like for my son? I'd like for my son to get all of that out of his system and then settle down with a wife. I just think that's going to be healthy for him in the long run." The desire for moral purity is a good thing. It's a good thing to want that for our children.

Where he went wrong is he lost his confidence in the gospel's ability to shape and mold the souls of young men and young women. Instead, he attached to the greatest news in the universe fear, control, and (God help him) shame. For anyone who had already crossed that line in the crowd, that's devastating news. "Who would want this?" Awful.

The second time was actually here at The Village. Something sprung in me, and I kind of shifted how I did ministry after this day. It was a Saturday night, and I walked in. It was celebration weekend. We were doing a bunch of baptisms. As I'm walking to my seat, a heavysset young man comes and hugs me. If I hug you, here's what I like to do.

If you're a woman, we're side hugging. You can try to roll on me, but I'm going to try to roll with you. We're just not chest-to-chesting it. We're just not. That's for Lauren and that's that. If you're a

man, I'll hug you, but I want my arm in there. So I'm going to clasp and then...boom...we're in like this. But I didn't even see this dude coming, and he just got in there. He was like around here, and at that moment I'm done. Because that ain't happening. I was just kind of like, "Okay."

Then he pushed me back really fast and just said, "Hey man, I used to be homeless. I'm not homeless anymore. God has really done a work in my life. I just want to thank you, but I don't really have time for that right now. I just wanted you to know before the service got started that I brought a witch with me tonight. She didn't know where I was bringing her, and she's angry." That's my word, not his. I'm not using his word. That's my word for his word. "She's angry, and I just thought you should know in case something happened."

So I went and sat down and thought, "In case something happened." In my head, I'm trying to figure out, "What's going to be worse for us as a congregation? If she tries to Harry Potter us, or *when* she tries to Harry Potter us security tases her and drags her out? What's going to affect our ministry in the community more?" So here's what I'm thinking when, if you were back in the old Highland Village building, the screen raised and there were two women in the water and the first one began to give her testimony.

She said, "I want you to know for the last 20 years I've been actively involved in the occult and witchcraft, and here's why Jesus is better." I was just kind of speechless. She got out, and at that point as a pastor in Dallas, you think you're batting a thousand. A witch? Are you serious? Now adultery? Sure. Drugs and alcohol? Every weekend. A witch? When you think Dallas, you don't think "large witch population." Maybe there's a larger one than I'm aware of, but I was like, "Man, we're hitting a thousand here. A witch came to know Christ?"

From there, the next guy got in, and basically his story was he was an atheistic Buddhist who struggled with alcohol. I had a hard time listening to his testimony, because I was trying to reconcile atheism and Buddhism and whether or not you could be both simultaneously. Buddhists don't actually believe in a god; it's kind of a force. "No, no, no. Dial in. That's the ADD side of me." He told this testimony about how his life had been devastated because of drunkenness and what it had cost him and what had been lost. He just wept before all of us and claimed Christ as Lord.

Again, as a pastor in Dallas, I'm like, "If there's a church of the year award, we just won it. A witch and an atheistic Buddhist alcoholic in the same weekend? We are killing it." Then for the rest of the weekend, almost every one of the other baptistery testimonies were "Grew up in church my whole

life, went to vacation Bible school, went to youth camp, went to Disciple Now, went to fall retreats, and until five or six months ago, until someone started bringing me to The Village, I had never heard the gospel message."

Maybe it was because Reid had just been born. Maybe it was because Audrey was about 3 years old. That was a haunting weekend for me. I'm thinking, "How can you grow up in church and say that? How could you spend your whole life...? How could you go from vacation Bible school to youth camp...? How could you spend all that time in the church and say, 'I never heard the gospel'? The whole point of the church is the gospel, so how could you possibly grow up in it and say you had never heard it?"

So I thought, "Okay, they heard it; they just didn't *hear* it." Do you know what that means? They heard it; they just didn't *hear* it. So I sat down with a big group of them (most of them are still actually here at The Village), and I said, "I want you to go back and find your student Bible. Find your little back-to-the-basics journal. Look through your stuff, and I want you to come back and show me or let me know whether or not you actually saw the gospel in there or not."

A lot of them came back and said, "Absolutely, we see it. Look right here, Pastor Matt. You've got the life of Jesus, you've got the death of Jesus, and you've got the resurrection. It's all right there. I just didn't hear it. So I heard it, but I didn't hear it." I was like, "Phew." Until there was this massive *other* group that came in, way outnumbering *that* group, and went, "Never heard it. Right here, Pastor. Check it out. 'Don't drink, don't go to parties, don't watch rated-R movies, don't listen to this kind of music, do this, don't do this, go here, don't go here.' All moralistic deism. All, 'This is how you behave.'"

It began to make sense to me why we had hundreds, if not thousands, of young 30-somethings, late 20-somethings, whose testimony was, "Yeah, I tried Jesus. He didn't work." Then I'm listening to what they're saying and I'm like, "No, no, no. You never tried him. You tried to be good, and the Bible says you stink at being good. It shouldn't surprise you that you couldn't do it. The Bible is saying from the beginning you stink at being good, and even if you're good at being good, you'll just become an annoying, self-righteous, self-absorbed, worthless piece of carbon. Even trying to be good ends badly."

At that moment I was like, "You know what? We're going to spend all of our time and all of our energies in everything we do at trying to orient the people of The Village over and over again

around the gospel." But that's going to be harder than we think it's going to be, because for this whole series, all this talk about planting churches, all this talk about rolling off a campus to be an autonomous church, for all of this mission, if our foundation is not solid, it doesn't matter.

It doesn't matter how beautiful the house is if the foundation is broken. Right? Has anybody had to deal with that mess yet? If your foundation is broken, your pretty walls crack. Your ceiling falls in. The house becomes unusable. It becomes imperative that we anchor ourselves in what is true and what is right, in the gospel, and that we don't drift from it ever. I know there are a thousand questions we have. "What about the dinosaurs?" I understand that, but I'm telling you, what you need more than you need to understand what happened to the dinosaurs is the gospel.

What do I know about the return of Jesus? I know he's coming, and I know we're closer. Brilliant men from all different Christian backgrounds will disagree on the pieces around that. It's not that I don't have my own opinion; it's that I think what you need most is the gospel and that all other studies should *lead* you to the gospel or you've wasted your time. Everything is *not* the gospel, but everything should lead *to* it. Are you tracking?

So right in the middle of this massive expansion of Paul's first missionary journey... If you remember what we covered last week, you had Paul and Barnabas released by the church at Antioch. They traveled some 500 miles away. Every city they stopped in, they preached the gospel. Men and women were saved. They established churches, and they moved on. We got about 500 miles away, and then we looped back to Antioch. When they get to Antioch, a disagreement breaks out. Let's pick it up in verse 1 of Acts 15.

**"But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.**

**So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged**

**to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.'"**

So here's the question that is arising as the gospel makes its way out of strict Judaism and among the Gentiles, i.e., you and me. For the Jew, their understanding was they were the called, appointed, covenant community of faith. That point of view was correct. They were called. God comes to Abram and says, "I will, from you, create a people of my own possession. I'm going to call you out and you will be my people."

Gentiles who wanted to worship the one true God would go through the process of complete obedience to the moral and ritual law of Moses, which meant they were to be physically circumcised and that they were to obey all of the ritual law on top of the moral law. So moral law, think Ten Commandments. Ritual law... Let me go through it very quickly.

There was a physical circumcision, and then there were very rigid, rigorous purity laws. You had to wash a certain way and a certain amount of time before you ate, before you went in to worship. There were laws around what foods were clean and unclean, and there was a total abstaining from anything with blood in it. That was the ritual law.

The argument being made in Antioch, a church that is primarily made up of Gentiles, was that these Gentiles were not saved, but rather in order to become Christians they must first become Jews. Well, Paul is not having it. So Paul and Barnabas, according to the text, made no little dissension with these brothers, which means there's a bit of a blowout. They argue and debate, and that leads to what in Christian history is called the Jerusalem Council.

So they go back to Jerusalem. Remember we're in Antioch. Now we go back to Jerusalem. We meet with the apostles and the elders, and we're trying to get to the bottom of this question...*Is there anything we must do for salvation on top of faith and grace alone?* Is there anything we need to add to what Christ has done for us in order to be saved? That's the first question. Do the Gentiles have to first become Jews? Do they have to obey the moral and ritual law?

The second question that has to be answered is...*If the Gentiles don't have to become ritualistically Jews, then how are we supposed to fellowship with one another?* What I mean by that is if one of you sees something as a freedom of yours and another one sees that same thing as something that defiles you, how are we ever to have fellowship with one another? The question is not around the

moral law of Moses. Paul, in all of these churches he plants, is going to talk about holiness and uprightness and God's expectation that we live a holy and pure life.

It wasn't the moral law they were debating; it was the ritual law. "Do these men have to be circumcised? Do they have to stop eating their steak medium rare? And do they have to get the bacon out of the house?" That's the question. "And if they don't, how are we supposed to table together? How are we supposed to do life together?" Those are the questions at stake. From there, we go to the debate. Let's pick it up in verse 6.

**"The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.'"**

So faith is what he used to cleanse their hearts. Verse 10: **"Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."** So around the question of, "Is there something on top of faith in grace necessary for salvation?" here are Peter's arguments.

Do the Gentiles have to become, ritualistically, Jews? Peter's first argument is Cornelius, back in Acts, chapter 10, if you were here... In Acts, chapter 10, Peter goes to Cornelius' house. Cornelius is a commanding officer in the Italian Cohort. He's some sort of "special forces" Italian general. Not to be trifled with, if you will. Peter goes and preaches the gospel, and the Holy Spirit falls, and they were saved.

Peter's argument right out of the gate was, "Hey, there wasn't anything ritualistic going on at Cornelius' house when the Holy Spirit of God fell and saved them. I didn't go and say, 'All right, Cornelius. Here's what you have to do. You have to be circumcised. You have to get that ham out of the oven. And brother, from now on, that filet had better be well or there's no part for you in the kingdom.' I simply preached Jesus crucified. The Holy Spirit fell, looked upon Cornelius' heart, and by faith in grace Cornelius was saved."

His second argument was like, "Brothers, are we really asking these Gentiles to do what the Jews have not been able to do?" That's his argument. The first argument was, "There was nothing ritualistic going on when Cornelius got saved. It wasn't adherence to the Mosaic law that saved Cornelius; it was faith in God's grace." His second argument was, "Brothers, we haven't been able to keep this law. Our *fathers* weren't able to keep this law."

I've said this to you a bunch; I want to say it to you until God calls me home. The Mosaic law, both the moral law and the ritual law, was given to us not so that by them we might be saved but that by them we would realize in us there is no salvation. You're a liar. That's not a question. You *are* a liar. You lie, right? Yeah. Now I know the game. "No, I'm not a liar; I just lie." Yeah, we're liars. I'm a liar, hopefully less now than I used to be and hopefully less then than I even am now, but I'm a liar.

I have coveted. So cards on the table. There have been times that bad things happened to people I thought deserved bad things and I liked it. That's coveting. There are times that good things have happened to people I didn't think deserved it and I got frustrated at that. That's coveting. That's a wicked accusation against God that he doesn't know what's best for them or for me. It's me trying to ascend to his throne. I've never murdered anyone, but I've felt the urge. Don't judge me. I've never murdered anyone, but I've thought, "If I could just punch him in the throat repeatedly, if God would give me that grace..."

Sometimes I find myself reading that last chapter of Nehemiah about when he lost his mind and pulled the beards out of their faces and beat them with sticks and try to go, "Could I make that a ministry in the New Testament?" I could just recruit guys. Ministry of pain. I think that would be awesome. "We have a brother. We have to take care of him. Are you guys ready? Mount up." I just think that would be awesome. I've had the urge. I've never cheated on my wife, but I have to guard my eyes. Do we need to keep going?

I'm guilty of them all and you're guilty of them all in the only test that matters around the moral law you fail, and you fail because it's designed for you to fail. It was never meant that by them you might be saved but rather that by them you would understand you *need* to be saved. The ritual law is no different. It's too strict. You can't. There's good news in that there is a righteousness that supersedes the righteousness of the Pharisees and supersedes the righteousness you're capable of, namely the righteousness of Christ.

So Peter's argumentation is, "Hey listen, our fathers couldn't do this. *We* haven't been able to do this. The point of the gospel message is that God has done it for us in Christ." Then his last argument is that Cornelius was saved by faith, that God saw his heart and Cornelius put faith in God's grace. Peter's argument is "*We're* being saved the same way *they're* being saved: by faith in grace. That's how salvation works."

For Peter, his argumentation is, "God is already doing it this way. God has already saved Cornelius. We can't now 10 years later go, 'Can God do that?' He has already done it." Then Barnabas and Paul are going to join in with the argument, starting in verse 12. **"And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles."**

Once again, Paul and Barnabas just jump into the fray, and they begin to testify of all of these cities they've been to, of all of these men and women who have come to know Jesus Christ, of all of them who have been converted, all of these churches that have been established. Do you remember last week when we were reading who the leaders were at the church of Antioch? All of these different ethnicities.

In fact, I didn't point this out because we didn't have time. The only thing missing in that room was a white dude. Yet here these men are going, "No, no, no. They have to become Jews first." Barnabas and Paul are saying, "No, they don't, because they've already been saved. We know they've been saved. We watched the power of God working in them, flowing through them. *They're* the ones sharing the gospel now, and *other* people are coming to know Christ through their testimony. God is so at work in this group that this very question is nonsense."

Then from there, James begins. All of the hitters are on the gospel side. Ironic. Verse 13: **"After they finished speaking, James replied, 'Brothers, listen to me. Simeon [Peter] has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name.'"** That's profound language. That's Abrahamic, Genesis 12-type language.

**"And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, 'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.' Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God..."**

The first question just got solved. James' arguments are a bit different than Peter's, Paul's, and Barnabas'. His argument is, "God has told us from day one this is what he's doing," and he quotes Amos and Jeremiah to prove his point. God has said from day one that he would ransom from among all of the tribes, tongues, and nations on earth and that he would make a new people no longer singularly marked out by ethnic preference, but rather a new man that has, at its end, a desire to make much of Jesus in a variety of ways. This is what God has been up to since day one.

James' argument is, "God told us it was going to be this way from the beginning, so we will not ask the Gentiles to become Jews." Now that seems, "Yay!" But here's the problem. How are we then to table with one another? Let me use this word *fellowship* with one another. For the first century it would be called *tabling*. We don't table well together; we eat Pop-Tarts in our cars as we scream at our children on the way to school. That's not tabling.

*Tabling* in the first century is fellowship. It's an extended dinner with good food and great conversation. If you've ever had the privilege of being in that room, where four or five hours spent with one another, laughing, enjoying good food, enjoying good drink... If that felt holy to you, it's because it is. It's because that's a good gift of common grace to his creation. They tabled with one another.

Here's what just happened. What if around the table what one enjoys in their freedom one views as defiling and crushing? How are they to table with one another? I'm going to use the easiest illustration there is in modern day. What if one of us loves a good cab? We just love a good bottle of wine. We like to open it and let it breathe. We even have one of those decanter things. We just let that thing breathe before we pour it. We love it.

Now you're well within your biblical right to enjoy that. Maybe you like a glass of bourbon over ice. You're well within your rights to enjoy that. There's nothing biblically sinful about that glass. Nothing. There are many who would argue against the wisdom of that, but no one can say that's sinful and have any sort of exegetical, biblical, faithful integrity at all.

But what if your brother or your sister doesn't enjoy that freedom? What if where you can have a glass, you can gather together for dinner and open up that cab, or you can bring that nice bottle of wine... (If you thought box, you're not talking about what I'm talking about.) You brought that bottle and opened it.

What if for you a drinking of that bottle of Silver Oak stirred up in you worship, but for your boy, one glass turned into two glasses turned into three glasses turned into a bottle, and next thing you know he wakes up in another state with a new tattoo? Do you still put the bottle out? See, that's the question at hand.

The Jews viewed blood as a defilement. They viewed certain aspects of sexual immorality that were prevalent among the Gentiles as defiling. So not only were they defiling for the Gentile, but for them to be around it was also defiling. How are we going to solve that issue if the Gentiles are free and can enjoy their freedom as God has designed it? Let's look at what he says. Look at verse 19 again.

**"Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues."**

Now we have to do something here, because something really goofy just happened. James just said, "We're not going to put on them the rituals of the Jews except for *this* set of rituals of the Jews." By the way, it's all of them, pretty much, except circumcision. "We're not going to make them do the rituals except these rituals." What just happened here?

What happened here is a beautiful picture of what Christian community should look like, which means my rights are gladly laid down for your good. We've had this talk often. The nature of our... Specifically in the local church context, although I do believe this extends to the Church. You and I, by nature of God's covenant love, are a covenant people. We're not a contractual people; we're a covenant people.

A *contract* is "If you do this, I'll do this," but we're in covenant with one another in God. So rather than saying, "You'd better do these things for me," my posture is "I'm going to become this for you." There's something very beautiful and stabilizing about a place that operates that way. Think about it. The wedding day vows are amazing. Do you ever listen to them? Like, really listen to them?

*For better or for worse.* You're acknowledging day one, "This could go badly." Doesn't that seem out of place on a wedding day? You have flowers and music, everybody is dressed up, and you're going

to acknowledge in front of everybody, "For better or in case you're crazy, girl"? You're going to lay that out there in front of everybody at the wedding? I mean, shouldn't we, because of the celebration, go, "For better or for even better-er"? That's not what we say. That's not covenant. Covenant is "It doesn't matter. I'm not going anywhere." For better or worse.

*Richer or poorer.* "Baby, if we're sharing a keg of Dublin Dr Pepper or we're splitting a can of Dr Thunder, I'm in with you. I'm not going anywhere." *Sickness and in health.* I personally praise God for this one. My wife Lauren and I have been married for 15 years. Let me just assure you of this. Me, barely dressed, lying on the bathroom floor trying to muster the strength to pull myself up on the toilet and vomit again could not have in any way registered in her mind as me being sexy.

In the middle of all of that horrific, "How is this going to end?" she brought in a cold wash rag. Your dignity goes so fast when your strength is gone. She'd put a little ice pack on my back and she'd wipe the vomit off my face. She just loved me, because it was a covenant love; it wasn't contractual. It wasn't that ridiculous bullcorn Hollywood garbage that so many of us drink up. Thank God it wasn't emotive. Thank God it was covenantal. Thank God it had roots. In sickness and in health.

This is covenantal love, and this is how we are to walk with one another. "I am for you. I long to serve you. I long to become this for you. I long to encourage you in your ongoing maturation. So if this would cause you to stumble, if this would cause you to grow weary, if this would make you lose heart, I would never enter into that. If you come to my house, we're serving tea. If you come to my house, you're getting water. You're not getting that Dublin Dr Pepper, I can tell you that. We're just not going to tempt you."

Even as the pastor of this church there are certain decisions I make that I am free to go beyond but I just won't do it. I drive a very simple car. Can I afford more? Yeah. But my fear is that if I drove a nicer car, some of you in here, hardened by the brokenness of this world, would use that as an excuse to not trust the church and submit yourself gladly to its leaders. So give me my '08 Honda Accord with the peeled tent in the back, and I'm perfectly content. I live a mile from here. I don't need seat heaters. I'll be fine.

Do I have a right? Absolutely. Am I going to take advantage of my right? No. I'm going to try to live as simply as possible. Why? Because I want to encourage you in the Lord. We should constantly be laying our freedoms down so that our brothers and sisters might flourish. Where it's about me and

what I want and what I deserve... "It's not a sin; how can you tell me not...?" You just reveal you have a wicked, selfish, life-sucking, all-about-me type of attitude that is contrary to the gospel.

James isn't trying to lay ritualistic law down. He's saying, "Consider your brothers when you walk with one another. Consider your brothers at the table. Consider your sisters at the table. Don't do anything that would rob them from being able to enjoy the company and enjoy the Lord." Then from there we finish this out, starting in verse 22.

**"Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, with the following letter: 'The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings.**

**Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them 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 themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth.**

**For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.' So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.**

**And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also."**

Let me try to explain what has just happened here. Where doubt and fear were reigning, the gospel was reintroduced to the church at Antioch, and they celebrated. I want you to hear me say this.

From the moment you became a Christian to your last breath on earth, you will need to over and over again be "re-gospelized." You'll need to be reminded of what God has done for you in Christ.

You are going to look around for the rest of your life, and you're going to see those who seem to be farther along than you, those who are more passionate than you about the Lord, those who are more disciplined than you. You will have your own struggles in the realm of morality. You will have your own struggles in the realm of the life of your mind.

You will have your own struggles in regard to your pursuit of God and, at times, why it's super high and other times it's not high at all, and in the middle of that wrestle, what you will need most is to be reminded of the gospel. We just tend to forget it. So week in, week out, what we do here is so ridiculously simple. We just try to re-gospel you every weekend.

I don't know how long you've been here. Has anybody else picked up yet I really just have one sermon; I just keep coming out of different texts and occasionally throw in a new illustration? It's the same message, because it's the one you have to have. Without this one, how could we even have a conversation about marriage? Without this one, how can we have a conversation about kids? Without this one, how do we talk about money?

Without this one, any of those pain points in your life... How can we discuss any of that if we don't have *this*, the initiating love of God made visible in the coming life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? We can't talk about suffering without a view of that in place. We can't talk about ecclesiology or how the church functions without that in place. We need to be re-gospelized week in and week out, lest we drift away from it and with good hearts start to with fear and control try to manipulate moral agents.

We're not after conformity; we're after transformation. Man can conform; only the Holy Spirit of God can transform. The man whose knuckles are white from trying to modify his behavior is not free. He's not. Now are there seasons of our lives where we're going to have to white-knuckle some things? Sure. But the Lord should, in time free, that up and rest our hands a bit.

Might our foundation be found on the gospel and the gospel alone, and from there let's build, let's plant, let's send out, let's go to the ends of the earth, but we go to the ends of the earth with the gospel. We plant churches with the gospel. We roll off campuses to autonomous churches with the

gospel. If there's any other motivation, we're building on uneven ground. The foundation will not hold, and it will end badly. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for our time together today. I pray where we are weary from adding to, where we are weary from trying to earn what you've freely given, you'd help us rest. God, that you would open up our hands, relieve some pressure from our hearts, and we might just melt into your acceptance of us now because of Christ. I pray that you would remind us that when you rescued us in the beginning we knew nothing of what we were to do or not to do. We just knew your grace had been lavished upon us, and that led to repentance and a pursuit of holy things.

I pray now that we'd pursue holy things. We'd now pursue those outside of the shadow and the power that comes in knowing that we're accepted by you. So correct where we've overcorrected and where we have with zeal tried to control and manipulate rather than rest and be transformed. I pray you would forgive us and lead us in the right way. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.