

Sermon: The Blessing

Text: Acts 15:1-35

Introduction:

Several years ago, our elders and leadership team here at King Street articulated a short and succinct mission statement for our church family moving forward:

Engaging and Blessing our community with the Gospel.

Does this sound familiar? I hope so. We try to refer to it often.

I was part of the discussions that produced this proclamation. Since a mission statement carries such weight and importance—I can assure you that each and every word was examined and debated. We wanted a statement that was as sharp, and clear, and to the point as possible.

Which word do you think came under the most scrutiny—and caused the most debate?

It was the word **blessing**.

I think the primary reason for this is the fact that there is a great deal of uncertainty as to what the word blessing actually means. It's a broad term, and can be used in many different circumstances to mean many different things. When someone sneezes—we bless them. When we sit down for a meal—we "bless the food." It all seems a bit generic and vague.

I have found a good definition of "blessing" on the website gotquestions.org:

"A blessing is a statement of good will and happiness that is said about another, as well as the condition that fulfills those good words. God's original design in creation was for His creatures, including mankind, to experience joy, peace, and fulfillment, but that design was ruined when sin entered the world. Statements of blessing are a wish for God to restore His favor on others or a declaration of His inherent goodness."

This definition focuses on statements of blessing. I would add to this ACTIONS that are also a blessing to others. When we show kindness and grace—we are blessing others. When we speak words of encouragement or affirmation—we are blessing others. When we forgive others—we are blessing others. When we reach out to offer help—we are blessing others.

All of this has a much higher purpose than simply being kind or gracious. The purpose is to help others be restored to the soul-deep peace that can only be experienced when we are in a right and restored relationship with God our creator. We don't just bless others—we bless them with the Gospel!

- How have you been blessed by others? More specifically—WHO has blessed you?
- How is God using YOU to engage and bless others?
- What do you think it means to bless others WITH THE GOSPEL? How do we do this?

Examination:

- Read **Acts 15:1-21**
 - Acts chapter 15 comes on the heels of Paul’s first missionary journey as recorded in chapters 13 & 14. In this first journey, Paul teamed up with Barnabas (as directed by the Holy Spirit) to venture into what is now central Turkey—to take the message of the Gospel to both Jews and gentiles. The Jews by and large rejected the message (at times violently so), while the gentiles often received gladly the good news of grace that is ours in Christ. This conflict brought to a head the tension that was brewing in the church of the first century: Does a Christian have to follow all of the regulations in the Torah (e.g., circumcision) in order to be a follower of Christ? Why do you think this became such a divisive issue? Why do you suppose some first century church leaders would have thought that you had to become “Jewish” as part of becoming “Christian”?
 - The Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) was needed to get to the heart of this Jewish/Gentile controversy. The council begins with Paul reporting all of the amazing things that God had done on his first missionary journey. (v. 4) This led to “the elephant in the room” in verse 5. What was that “elephant”?
 - Verse 7 simply states, “After much discussion.” What do you suppose the discussion was like? Do you think it was heated? Passionate? Is that OK?
 - What point does Peter make in verses 7-11?
 - Barnabas also describes his experiences with Paul on their first missionary journey. (v. 12) What does he point out? Why is this important?
 - What is significant regarding the Scripture (Amos 9:11-12) that James quotes?
 - How can verse 19 be viewed as a turning point in the history of the church?
 - What four things does James suggest be taught to the gentile converts? (v. 20) What is the PURPOSE of keeping these “requirements”? Are these issues of salvation—or a vital means of maintaining unity and fellowship?

- Read **Acts 15:22-35**
 - Summarize the letter that Judas and Silas delivered (vv. 24-29).
 - Why do you think this letter was received with such gladness? (v. 31)
 - What do you think it means that Judas and Silas were “prophets”? What does it mean to be a prophet? What does this gift entail? Are there prophets today?
 - We see in verse 33 that Judas and Silas were sent back to Jerusalem “with the blessing of peace.” There’s that word **blessing**. Looking ahead to Paul’s second missionary journey that begins next, how do you think the Council in Jerusalem served as a tremendous **blessing**—setting the stage for “The Trip that Changed the World” (Paul’s second missionary journey)?

Application:

Be very aware this week of the enormous power of your words and actions—how they can be used by God to bless others. Be very intentional in your efforts to engage and bless others with the Gospel. Speak words of blessing over those whom you are closest to (family and friends). Perhaps write a note of blessing to someone (or several) that God brings to your mind.