**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

Thirty-First Week Since the Resurrection

***Covenant Promise - Acts 11***

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November 15th In the Year of Our Lord 2020

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS quoted.)

Last Sunday, we reviewed Peter’s Holy Spirit witness to Gentiles in Caesarea. I wonder how that was viewed by hard-liners in Jerusalem – “those who were circumcised”? From the opening verses in Acts 11, not very well.

What is the historical and theological background we see come to the surface? The covenant sign of circumcision dates back to Abraham who lived between the years 2000 - 1800 B.C. Genesis 17 chronicles the covenant God made with Abraham. Circumcision was the covenant sign showing that God gave the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants. God also instructed Abraham to have his men “bought with money” (slaves) circumcised. Abraham was a patriarch of a large people group. It could have been several hundred or larger. The important belief here is the “covenant sign” of circumcision with God. The land is tied to the covenant. This is why it is important to carry-out the elements of the covenant to a Jew. Even though Jews converted to follow Jesus, they still retained their covenant relationship with God and the Promised Land.

(Also, see Leviticus 8:12, Moses/circumcision)

So, the converts from Judaism could not see how a person could be in covenant with God without circumcision. The Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15 is the pivotal meeting providing direction for the Church. Missionaries who went to the Jewish and Greek world relied upon the outcome of this council.

**Acts 15:1, . . . 5 -11**

1 Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

**. . .**

5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."

6 The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

7 After there had been much debate,

Peter stood up and said to them,

"Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. [Pentecost Acts 2]

8 "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;

9 and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

10 "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

11 "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."

On the surface, Peter’s words appear to address Greek & Gentiles coming to the Lord without being circumcised. As time passed, there still lingered the question of “Jews” coming to faith in Christ and having to undergo circumcision since the covenant was made to the Jews by God. It is noted that Paul had Timothy circumcised, recorded in Acts 16, which is after the Jerusalem Counsel. The situation here is challenging, in that Timothy had a Greek father and a Jewish mother. It is obvious that Paul wanted to remove any obstacle the Jews could bring-up for rejecting Timothy’s witness. In time, the apostles dropped Jewish circumcision as a requirement to be saved.

 **Text of Acts 11:1-3**

1 Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea

 heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.

 2 And when Peter came up to Jerusalem,

those who were circumcised took issue with him,

 3 saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

 The times of the Apostles, preaching the Good News in the 1st century, right after Jesus rose from the tomb in Jerusalem, were transitional for all. Not just the Apostles, but for the Jews and Gentiles. All parties had to question the experience of the life of Jesus. Jesus’ prophecy fulfillment, ministry, teachings, arrest, trial, crucifixion, resurrection, resurrection ministry, ascension, and Holy Spirit ministry in the lives of His followers was ‘up for review’.

 The life of Jesus is/was a historic one-time seismic wave that is still reverberating today - a deep undercurrent to some to a full-scale tidal wave to others. After God made His entry into our physical-temporal- world, people have been contemplating - WHAT HAPPENED?!

 So, we see in Acts 11, that Peter, the Jew first, who had surrendered to God-in-the-flesh, “Jesus,” was still trying to assimilate in his mind and heart - his experience for three-and-one-half years with the Messiah, the Christ. Peter’s Jewish upbringing had him really believing that he was still under the Law of Moses, even though he was saved by the Cross through faith. Prior to Caesarea, he believed he should not visit with Gentiles and that God would not communicate with Gentiles in a spiritual context. After all, Jesus did say in the “Sermon on the Mount” that He did not come to change the Law. These Scriptures need explaining in a Messianic context.

**Matthew 5:17-20**

 17 Do not think that I came to abolish the **Law or the Prophets**; I did **not come to abolish but to fulfill.**

 18 "For truly I say to you, **until heaven and earth pass away**,

not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from **the Law** **until all is accomplished.**

 19 "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called **least** in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called **great** in the kingdom of heaven.

 20 "For I say to you that **unless your righteousness surpasses** that of the **scribes and Pharisees**, you will not **enter** the kingdom of heaven.

 The fulfillment of the Law collimates (straight line to the Cross) in the Cross of Christ. Receiving John 3:16 in this application makes perfect sense.

"*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*"

 The fulfillment of the Law is to make a person justified to God. The **fulfillment** of the incarnation is the Cross. Jesus is the perfect sacrifice for our sins - the unblemished lamb. John 3:16 points to God’s love and His atoning sacrifice applied to those who believe - will have eternal life. The Cross is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. The Cross sustains all those who surrender (Believe) to its power in this temporal world until the end of the age. At the end of the age is when all is accomplished. Paul declares for God in Romans 3:19-26,

19 Now we know that whatever the Law says,

it speaks to those who are under the Law,

so that every mouth may be closed

and all the world may become accountable to God;

20 because by the works of the Law

no flesh will be justified in His sight;

for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

21 But now apart from the Law

the righteousness of God has been manifested,

being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

 22 even the righteousness of God

through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe;

for there is no distinction;

We read in verses 3:23-26 . . . We all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. But we sinners can be justified as a gift by God’s grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly on the Cross as a propitiation (to appease the payment for sin) in His blood through faith. God demonstrated His righteousness at the Cross. Because in God’s tolerance He passed over our sins previously committed; to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, so that He (God) would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

**Greatest Two Commandments**

 We also see the Law fulfilled in Jesus’ discourse with the lawyer in Matthew 22. Remember, the goal in the fulfillment of the Law is to be justified with God and live eternally with Him. So, what does it take to accomplish this eternal-life status with God? This is what the lawyer wanted to know, who was well-versed in the Law of Moses and the covenant God made with Abraham.

**Matthew 22**

35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him *a question*, testing Him,

 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

 37 And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.'

 38 "This is the great and foremost commandment.

 39 "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'

 40 "On these two commandments

**depend the whole Law and the Prophets."**

(Deuteronomy 6:5, 10:12, 11:1, 30:6; Joshua 22:5)

 **Jesus and the Law and the Prophets**

Last week, we considered the “commands of Jesus” that are to be followed by those who love Him. Here is an online reference to the commands of Jesus.

[**https://www.victoryathleticsspirit.com/coaches-blog/2016/10/3/commands-of-christ**](https://www.victoryathleticsspirit.com/coaches-blog/2016/10/3/commands-of-christ)

 Here is corresponding and overlapping lists of Scriptures concerning the Law and the Prophets directly connected to Jesus the Messiah.

**Matthew 7:12** In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

**Matthew 11:13** "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

**Luke 24:44,45** 45Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

**John 1:45** Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote-- Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

 And then there is the continuation of Paul in Romans 3 to detail how the circumcised and the uncircumcised are justified by and to God through faith. You can also ask . . . how are the Jews that are under the Law and Gentiles who are not under the Law justified by God? And the answer is - “Faith establishes the Law and those not under the Law.”

**Romans 3:27-31**

27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded.

By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.

 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

 29 Or is God *the God* of Jews only?

Is He not *the God* of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,

 30 since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith

and the uncircumcised through faith is one.

 31 Do we then nullify the Law through faith?

May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

 **Acts 11 Continued**

4 But Peter began *speaking*

and *proceeded* to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying,

5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me,

6 and when I had fixed my gaze on it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air.

 7 "I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.'

 8 "But I said, 'By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'

 9 "But a voice from heaven answered a second time, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.'

10 "This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky.

11 "And behold, at that moment three men appeared at the house in which we were *staying*, having been sent to me from Caesarea.

12 "The Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man's house.

13 "And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, 'Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here;

14 and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.'

15 "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as *He did* upon us at the beginning.

16 "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

17 "Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as *He gave* to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

 18 When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads* to life."

 So, what do we take away from Peter’s sermons in Acts 11, 15 and Paul’s Roman letter chapter 3?

 Reflecting upon our time, the same Truth from God is applied to our lives. Faith is the key over any Law or any man-made rules or theological system. Despite rules and regulations in a religious order, Faith is the **key**, the **path**, the **gate** to eternal life.

 AMEN

**Acts 11:19-30**

 19 So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.

 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and *began* speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.

 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them,

 and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.

 22 The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem,

and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch.

 23 Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God,

 he rejoiced and *began* to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain *true* to the Lord;

 24 for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.

 25 And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul;

 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.

And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

 27 Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

 28 One of them named Agabus stood up and *began* to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the *reign* of Claudius.

 29 And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send *a contribution* for the relief of the brethren living in Judea.

 30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.