

Sermon Text For September 8, 2019

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Amos 9:11-12, Acts 15:12-21

“Once saved, now what?”

Thank you for the blessing of last week. And let the whole church say: Praise the Lord. I heard from some more of you this past week. Don't stop praying, don't ever stop praying. I hope you will remember last week as the power of what God can do if you will only allow him to do it. I'm convinced we haven't even scratched the surface of realizing the power of a faithful church. That is part of our journey together as we become more mature as a body and as individuals we will realize more and more what God can do.

This week we move on and go back to Acts as we have asked and answered that simple question: what must I do to be saved, with the simple answer: Just believe in Jesus Christ and by the grace of God we are saved. Over these past weeks I have tried to drill into all of us the certainty of our salvation. We are saved by grace through faith. Are you saved? Yes, yes we are saved. We have covered that, and now we can move on. So, we are saved by grace, we have redemption...now what?

What unified us and brings us together as Christians first and foremost is Jesus Christ who is our Savior. But do we have anything else that unifies else, is there anything else that we have in common? Do we have anything else that must draw us together, or once we are saved, well now what?

READ SCRIPTURE

So look around this room and ask yourself what do I have in common with these people? One answer should be Jesus. But what about anything else? Is there anything else besides Jesus that ought to and should be something that we have in common? Do we all have a certain way of looking at things, at any thing? After high school I took a year off, now they call it a gap year, but I took a gap year before people knew what a gap year was. I went to Philadelphia College of the Bible for one year, I deferred from Swarthmore College knowing that the next fall I would start there. But for that one year after high school I wanted to try to figure out what I believed. I had a born-again experience my senior year and I didn't want to start college without some understanding of who really Jesus was to me.

Well, at PCB you could not wear jeans to class, go to the movies, be out after 10 on week days and midnight on weekends. You had to go to church twice on Sunday and your bed had to be made every day or else you would get a demerit. The school tried to make us all the same. In

fact, my roommate asked me to read his paper that he got an A on which was entitled: Why every Christian must be a _____, and a certain political party was mentioned. I'm not going to say which one it is, but it rhymes with Republican. The idea that all Christians living in this country must belong to one political party, that idea was foreign to me. I thought we were free to choose and that God's family was big enough, diverse enough to include all parties, all manner of thinking. It was a defining moment for me when I realized that I didn't think and believe anything like they were telling me I needed to believe and think.

But is there anything that must bind us together besides Jesus? Once saved can you go your merry way completely unleashed from any kind of common beliefs and common core values? There must be some things we share besides Jesus.

So the argument went in Acts. Besides Jesus we have to share circumcision which represented the entirety of the Mosaic law. So we have a movement in the church that was powerful that said yes, loving Jesus is enough, but our Christian identity is still wrapped up in a physical marker, circumcision.

That argument tended to be a bit of a deal breaker for many coming into the church. Peter in chapter 10 reminded us and the people in Jerusalem that God shows no partiality and no distinction between those circumcised and those not circumcised. People who look and act and culturally are very different from us and speak a different language from us, love Jesus. Paul and Barnabas also said people who are very different from us love Jesus and they are coming to church and they are giving and offerings in the offering plate.

James then later in these verses picks it up after Peter whom we saw, and Paul and Barnabas whom we saw, and he says, let's not burden the gentiles, the foreigners, the strangers, from having to be circumcised. I have decided he said. Who is this James anyway? We don't know except back in 12 Peter says make sure you tell James what is going on as these churches are taking off. And James calls Peter Simeon, which was another language for Peter. It would be like me calling John here Giovanni. It isn't wrong, but why use a foreign name to reflect the decision that he was about to make. Loving Jesus is enough.

Well..., almost. While you don't have to be circumcised there are some things that we have in common, no big deal, but this is part of what defines us and part of our culture as Christians. He gives four things that for us today don't really apply in many ways.

So the resolution was no, we do not have to agree on everything once we are saved. Many times in a new member class the questions comes up on social issues, so what do we have to believe about those things if I am going to join this church? We are conducting a bit of a

social experiment in the young adults Sunday School class. We are going to be looking at topics that people disagree over in our society. I'm sure you're aware of the tenor of our country and how caustic and angry people become so quickly once these topics arise. We don't all agree on immigration, abortion, homosexuality, death penalty. Faithful Christians take opposing sides on those issues. If you disagree with me on those issues it doesn't make you any less of a Christian. No! You're wrong, but no, our family is big enough to welcome all those who love Jesus. But is there anything that unifies us besides loving Jesus?

My social experiment in this class is to see if we can, as people of the church, as people who belong to the same family, and who disagree on key issues, if we can talk about them in a way that is a breath of fresh air compared to how the rest of the country talks about these issues.

How did the church talk about issues and decide? Once saved, now what, now what am I supposed to do and believe and how do we live together as a family? The first thing we read in vs.12 is what? They stopped and listened. When was the last time that you just listened in the midst of a disagreement?

But this Scripture does tell us that all are welcome but there has to be something besides Jesus that unifies us, that brings us together, that we can get behind which has an impact on our actions and on our society. Something that means something in this society in which we live.

In Acts 15 the decision, the final decision was made that we have to be able to welcome people into our culture who are different from us without burdening them with deal breakers that we would never ask other members of our family to do. So what ought to unify us today? I am saved, now what? What are our identifiers as a community of God? Yes, you can join us, but there is something you need to know about us besides the fact that we love Jesus, and it is reflected in Acts 15 and it is reflected in Jesus' answer to the question of which is the greatest commandment. If you are going to be a part of us you have to love God and ...what else?

I know I've told you nothing else, but what is going to be a defining feature of who we are as we journey together? We are the people who love God and...love our neighbor. Can we say this?

What holds us together? Salvation? Yes, absolutely, by grace and not our own actions. But what else holds us together? Can we have differing views on abortion and homosexuality. Yes, we can cast the net wider than that. Can we have differing views on loving our neighbor? No, we have to be unified on that one. We cease being the church when we stop loving our neighbor.

So loving Jesus is almost enough. But loving each other and loving our neighbor is mandatory. Who is my neighbor? The Samaritan, the gentile, the uncircumcised, the one who thinks different from you on the hot button issues, the one who speaks a different language from you, the one who votes for a different political party than you.

How many of you love your neighbor? I have a way for you to prove it and to test if you really do. Here is your homework for this week. I want you to go to Wal-Mart this week. You don't have to buy anything if you don't want, but I want you to go there and walk from one end of the store and back. Your test is when you walk in and are walking around and you see the melting pot that it is, and you hear the different languages that are spoken, do you see it as a blessing or does your nose turn up a bit, and something like anger or annoyance wells up inside of you?

If it is the latter you have a lot of work to do in loving your neighbor. You may love Jesus, but that isn't enough in this crowd. Our goal is that once we are saved then we are determined to not only love God, but to love our neighbor as Jesus commands and as Acts 15 expects. Loving Jesus means you're saved, praise God, but that's not all that counts. Take the Wal-Mart test and see how you stack up. Amen.