



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

MARCH 05 2022

us and them

Scripture Story: Acts 15:1-17.

Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders)*, chapters 19, 20, 21.

Key Text: Acts 15:10, 11.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The story that frames this week's lesson illustrates the central purpose of our mission and describes how we can negotiate through our problems with politics, personal preferences, traditions, and practices. By this time in the life of the church the Gentiles were breaking down the doors to know who Christ was, but some Jews felt strongly that in order to be a follower of Christ you must also be a good Jew. The practices and traditions of the Jews became so convoluted over time that it was hard for them to separate truth from tradition. So the church had a meeting—a "General Conference session" or board meeting to deal with the growing problems.

Paul, Barnabas, and Peter were in attendance while James presided over the meeting. The discussion was vigorous and passionate, because church and faith and eternal life are things that matter and are worth getting excited about. But in this storied moment, gospel minds prevail and embrace the basics of their faith with resolute conviction: the grace of Christ poured out at Calvary and made certain by the resurrection is a gift to *all* mankind, given freely and with no preference to race, gender, age, or social class. Another key feature that made this meeting so successful was the way Paul and Barnabas told stories of the miraculous way God was reaching the Gentiles (Acts 15:12). These stories sealed the meeting with a sense of renewed purpose and commitment to the gospel commission. This lesson can be a key moment to face the hard truth of politics and problems

among believers; but moreover, to rekindle the heart of our mission through storytelling, and reminding ourselves why we are here.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- See how prejudice and preferences shape all people. (*Know*)
- Sense a unity of purpose based on God's grace to all. (*Feel*)
- Choose to be devoted to the gospel commission. (*Respond*)

III. EXPLORE

Growing in Christ, Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs, No. 11

We are also called to follow Christ's example by compassionately ministering to the physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of humanity. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience (1 Chron. 29:11; Ps. 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Matt. 20:25-28; 25:31-46; Luke 10:17-20; John 20:21; Rom. 8:38, 39; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 5:19, 20; 6:12-18; Phil. 3:7-14; Col. 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; 1 Thess. 5:16-18, 23; Heb. 10:25; James 1:27; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 1 John 4:4).

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Invite the students to share their responses to the voting activity in the *What Do You Think?* section of their lesson. The voting activity should incite various opinions based upon their experience and perspective. To avoid students choosing not to commit either to agree or disagree, you can invite those who agree to stand or hold up their hand. Be clear about how you want them to take a stand.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Fritz Kreisler was born in 1875 and died in 1962. Kreisler was a world-famous violinist who earned a massive fortune by playing concerts and writing compositions. But surprisingly, Kreisler generously gave almost all of his fortune away. He was a brilliant musician, but equally renown for being kind.

One day Kreisler discovered an exquisite violin but was unable to buy it because he no longer had such ample resources. He scrambled and saved and after raising enough money to meet the asking price, he found the seller, hoping to buy this amazing instrument. But his heart was crushed when he discovered it had been sold to a collector. So determined to continue and not give up, Kreisler made his way to the new owner's home and offered to buy the violin. The collector quickly refused, saying the violin had become his prized possession and he could not sell it. Disappointed, Kreisler was about to leave when an idea came to him. "Might I play the instrument once more before this precious treasure gets confined to silence?" he asked. The owner mused and nodded, giving his permission. Kreisler then began to fill the room with such heart-moving music that it made an unmistakable effect on the owner. He was so deeply stirred in his heart by the music that he said, "I have no right to keep that to myself. It's yours, Mr. Kreisler." He continued, "Take it into the world, and let people hear it."

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

What lesson or truth do you think this story illus-

trates? What is the meaning of this story from the perspective of Kreisler? What about from the perspective of the man who bought the violin and who was just going to keep it on display? What does this story teach us about how we should function as individual believers? How should we live as a body or a church?

Kreisler came to the same conclusion that many of the New Testament believers came to, and that was: *there is something that is worth everything*. The early church had problems, but their biggest problem was the amazing growth and impact they were having on the region. As a result, problems emerged. Read the story of how this band of believers functioned as a church.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them:

- Read the story and *underline* what you think are key phrases to understanding what this passage is about.
- Draw a *circle* around all the individuals and people groups mentioned in this story.
- Describe what you see as the social and religious dynamics that are going on in the New Testament church at this time.
- Who are these "certain people" who demanded that Gentile believers be circumcised? What do you see as their spiritual focus?
- Why did Paul and Barnabas go to Jerusalem, and why do you think they went through Gentile territory on their way to counsel with the apostles in Jerusalem?
- What is the yoke that Peter referred to in Acts 15:10?
- After Peter spoke to the assembled leaders of the Christian church, Paul and Barnabas added their stories of Gentile believers they had met in their journeys. How do you think these stories impressed the congregation? How are such stories important to the decisions we make?
- What do you think God is trying to say to us today in this story?

Extra Questions for Teachers:

- When people work together for a cause that is worthwhile, there will be differences. How have you seen these differences tear churches apart

or bring them together?

- The center of the controversy was about the whether the Gentiles should keep the traditions of the Jews (eating meat that was kosher, keeping the festivals, etc.) as part of their faith in Christ. How much of that is what Christ called them to teach (Matthew 28:19, 20) and how much was about getting them to conform?
- What traditions do you have in your culture that may not transfer to another?
- Is there a biblical principle behind what you do and why you do it?

Use the following as other teachable passages that relate to today's story: Matthew 20; Matthew 21; Acts 7:51, 52; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians; Revelation 14:12; Revelation 12:17.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

It is likely that more than 10 years had passed since Christ ascended into heaven, and the church was growing by leaps and bounds. Peter and James were focused on teaching and reteaching the Jews and those closely connected with the faith of Israel. Paul and Barnabas set out to share the gospel with those who were not Jews, but Gentiles.

By this time there was somewhat of a structure and an agreed-upon process for the problems the young church faced. There had been seasons of famine and shortage of money. There were certain groups

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

From PowerPoint to Story

Storytelling. This theme will return again and again if you are hearing anything master teachers are saying about how people learn. The most pervasive, memorable teaching tool other than personal experience is through story. In fact, entire corporations are moving away from PowerPoint presentations and bullet-listed charts and graphics to telling stories in their boardrooms. Why? Because people don't change because of facts. They are transformed through experience, and storytellers usher you into the realm of thinking and feeling that is beyond becoming convinced something is true; they are convicted to live by it.

Look at this week's lesson and see how Paul and Barnabas turned this heated meeting around with stories from the front lines (Acts 15:12).

that felt neglected (Acts 6). On one hand there was the blossoming church filled with disciples of Jesus and the resident leadership of Pharisees and Sadducees. The adversarial elements that fought against Christ had not gone away and would need to be addressed (especially in light of Peter's sermon in Acts 2 and Stephen's rebuke in Acts 7). So arguments would arise.

One of the basic arguments centered around food.

Teaching From the Lesson

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

• Key Text

Invite students to share the Key Text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

• Flashlight

Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book *The Acts of the Apostles*. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from *Out of the Story*.

• Punch Lines

Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.

• Further Insight

Ask them how the quote in Further Insight conveys the point of the story in this lesson.

It was common for food to be used in religious rituals but then sold in the market afterward. Then there was the manner in which food was prepared. God instructed the Jews to slaughter the animals that they would eat in such a way that the blood was drained from the animal. Disease (and in the minds of Jews—sin) was carried through the blood. But Gentiles who became believers in Jesus had no experience nor did they see the need to practice such things, and thus, controversy ensued.

The controversy in our story this week was held by “Judaizers,” who held that in order for Gentile believers to become “true members of Israel” they had to be circumcised. Maybe the prejudices and tensions between Jews and Gentiles were still so strong that these little arguments were simply tangible ways to vent their prejudice. Either way, controversies are always a part of any group:

“In every society or organized group of people two types are always represented: the conservative, looking to the past, and the progressive, looking toward the future. The ultra Jewish element in the church held that there could be no salvation outside of Israel; hence, that all the Gentile disciples must receive circumcision and observe the Jewish regulations” (Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, *The Story of the Christian Church*, p. 26).

But this story is a testimony to how the church can stay on track and focused on mission in the midst of problems. They overcame this problem by: (1) Peter’s reminder of how God’s grace comes to all people the same way, through faith; (2) Paul and Barnabas’ heart-warming stories of the miracles God was doing on behalf of the Gentile world; (3) James, the leader of the church at that time, taking a bold stand for the heart of the mission instead of letting little problems sidetrack the church. What might this look like today?

III. CLOSING

Activity



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 19-21.

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Give each student a 3" x 5" card or a small piece of paper and something to write with. Then give the following instructions:

“We are a church, and we forget sometimes about what matters most to Christ. But we need to move forward and be able to agree upon what our mission is. So I want you to write out in 30 words or less what you think our mission is as a local church. Begin.”

When they are done, set all the statements where everyone can see them. Then you can debrief with them:

“What were some common elements you saw in all the statements of mission? What were some of the most obvious differences? Now if we were to condense these together and agree upon one statement to work toward, what might be different in this church?”

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

This week’s story is not at first the brightest portrayal of Christians—arguing over whether the outsiders (Gentiles) should be circumcised or not. It seems petty, but it was a real issue then. How they negotiated through it as a body of believers is what is truly inspiring! They found the core of what they were all about. They reminded themselves how they became disciples of Christ. Peter must have remembered how many times he stumbled—now he was a leader. James, the brother of Jesus, had his share of problems. Paul listed his in his letter. All of these people returned to the basic beliefs they knew to be true and worked together. Peter gave his remarks. Paul and Barnabas told stories. James closed the issue and refocused everyone back on the task of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. What part will you play in this church today?

Reminder to Teacher: Global Youth Day is in two weeks! How are your plans for your Sabbath School service project coming along?