

# SESSION 5

## PREACHING GUIDE

### OVERVIEW AND GOAL

The goal of this session is to explore more fully the importance of being global disciples in our world today, and to root our discipleship in the examples provided in scripture. You will be reminded of the challenges that face God's people in the world today, and be invited to join with people and partnerships that are bearing fruit for the Kingdom of God.

### KEY BIBLICAL PASSAGES

*Luke 10:25-37; Acts 15:1-35; 21:17-26; 1 Corinthians 9:19-27;  
2 Corinthians 8:8-15*

### BACKGROUND

Ethnic and racial conflict. Economic inequality and crippling poverty. Religious violence and ethical confusion. The world of the New Testament was strikingly similar to ours today, and the challenges facing the early followers of Christ required creativity, generosity and courage, and dependence on the Holy Spirit to be faithful to the Kingdom purposes of God. The scriptures provide early examples of mutual ministry and partnership that can inspire and instruct us today.

### BRIEF THEME SUMMARY

Followers of Christ today find themselves participating in an exciting and dynamic movement of the Spirit worldwide. With the expansion of the Church to every corner of our world, and the opportunity for creative partnerships, there is unprecedented possibility for those of us who are committed to living as God's Kingdom people. The challenge comes on two fronts: first, the forces of evil remain active and evident in the violence, poverty and pain experienced daily around the world; second, it takes intentional and prayerful effort to work cooperatively with others, because it requires patience and love.

In this session we will set the challenges of our day next to scriptural examples that provide examples of partnership in the teaching of Jesus and the example of the early church leaders such as James and Paul. Along with modern examples and opportunities for mutual ministry, these can guide us into new and deeper partnerships in our own lives as individuals, groups, and churches.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

1. In the late 1990's, Altadore Baptist Church in Calgary began to regularly send short-term mission teams to support ministry in El Salvador, partnering with CBM and Emmanuel Baptist Church (IBE) in San Salvador. The teams would bring valued resources and the people of IBE repeatedly stated the importance and encouragement of working together. Altadore blessed IBE with their presence; the Altadore people returned enriched and instructed by the hope and ministry of Christians living on the edge of poverty and places of oppression.

Certainly there were challenges in the partnership – differences in theological viewpoints and cultural styles required patience and generosity of spirit. Over the years, IBE's leaders also visited Altadore, and through this relationship Altadore enhanced and refined their own ministry to the poor and marginalized in Calgary.

The flow of ministry between the two churches has become so integral to the life of both congregations that Gary and Norma Calderwood, two of the leaders of Altadore Baptist, say that today IBE and Altadore consider themselves as "one church." This speaks to a profound identity shift in the way that global church partners express what it means to be God's community in the world.

2. A number of years ago, Emmanuel Baptist Church in Saskatoon had embarked on a building program, with significant money already pledged for the project. However, the church's leaders discerned God calling them to give in a new direction.

Emmanuel's then-Lead Pastor, Cal Malena, writes:

*It was in the middle of the pledge campaign that I, as Senior Pastor began to have doubts about the whole endeavor. There had been a lot of prayer, but there was now a nagging sense that this plan had really not captured our hearts. I had been serving on the CBM Board at the time, which had begun to open my eyes in fresh ways to both our global and local mission. I suggested that we might put the brakes on the building plan, and begin again with a broader question of how we could go out into our city and our world with greater impact. Some on the Board had been feeling the same things, others were afraid the church members would think we were all fools if we tried to change direction at this point.*

*A couple of months later, I sat on a stool before the Sunday morning congregation (a bit of a tradition when there was something we needed to have a heart-to-heart about) and told them that the leadership team was recommending that we shelve the expansion project and go back to the drawing board to ask the question of God and of ourselves, 'How could we really have the greatest impact as a church?' I really didn't know what to expect, but this suggestion received one of the few standing ovations that I remember in my ministry.*

*In 2006, a new strategic planning process was launched and produced quite a different plan. The first was to raise \$300,000 for the poorest of the poor, over and above regular offerings. Half went to a local inner-city ministry with whom the church had partnered, to purchase a new facility. The other \$150,000 funded the first three years of CBM's new Orphans and Vulnerable Children program in Rwanda. Emmanuel has continued this project up to the present, supporting over 300 orphans as part of its ongoing STEP partnership commitment with Canadian Baptist Ministries. They also continue to send teams to learn and serve in Rwanda.*

*This fundraising for the poorest of the poor was only one of the five major initiatives in the first year of the new mission-oriented strategic plan. I will*

*always be thankful for the Spirit's prompting at the brink of a decision that would have tied up our resources for several years, which instead steered the church on a much more exciting and fruitful course of mission and ministry.*

## SERMON SUGGESTION

### A Church Meeting that Changed the World

*Scripture: Acts 15:1-35*

Acts 15 sits structurally in the middle of the book of Acts, which is fitting because it also marks a pivotal moment in the global spread of the good news of Jesus Christ. Acts 15 describes an early church meeting – called the “council of Jerusalem” – that models for us the importance of global and local partnership and conversation in spreading the Gospel in word and action. The manner in which the meeting was conducted, as well as the outcomes, is a powerful example of Christian maturity and wisdom that can continue to inform our work as global disciples today.

## BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

In Acts 15, the “First Church” in Jerusalem was faced with a global-local problem that needed to be debated and decided at a high level of leadership. About 300 miles north of Jerusalem, a new church was being formed in Antioch in Syria. The Christians in Antioch included many Greeks and other non-Jewish people. Back in Jerusalem, however, some of the powerful traditions of Jewish law were being retained by many Jews who were turning to Christ. In their desire to see Jewish traditions preserved, some of these Pharisees (who had accepted Christ) paid a visit to the church in Antioch and instructed them to keep Jewish traditions such as observing food laws and practicing circumcision. This led to a sharp debate between them and the missionaries Paul and Barnabas (15:2), who taught that salvation was by grace alone and that “works” were not necessary. Paul was a former Pharisee, but the Jerusalem Pharisees were also compelling in their plea. The congregation

at Antioch was confused. Should they keep the Jewish traditions? In response, the Antiochians sent Paul and Barnabas to discuss the matter with the leadership of the church in Jerusalem.

On their way to Jerusalem Paul and Barnabas met more people along the way (in Phoenicia and Samaria) who had accepted Christ by faith and were following the way of Jesus. The two missionaries reported this to the Jerusalem church when they arrived, and it produced great joy (Acts 15:3-4). But the Christian Pharisees were also prepared to speak to the situation, and made their strong argument that the laws of Moses could not be disobeyed (15:5). How could Christians now disobey the teachings of the Old Testament? The stage was set for a tense debate.

After an initial discussion among the elders and apostles (v. 6), we observe a typical Jewish decision-making process, where the most senior or authoritative people speak at the end, with the final decision then being made by the chairperson, who is the Apostle James.

We first hear from Peter (v. 7) who explains how he came to realize that God was not requiring Gentiles to obey Jewish laws. Peter is recounting his own powerful experience of God through his meeting with Cornelius (recorded in Acts 10 and included as a reading in Session Three). It was then that Peter realized that salvation no longer required obeying Jewish ceremonial laws. He uses very strong language in arguing that non-Jews should not be required to keep them, saying that to do so would be ‘testing God’ (v. 10). Paul and Barnabas also speak (v. 12), supplementing Peter’s argument with their own experience of how God has saved Gentile people in remarkable and clear ways apart from the keeping certain Old Testament requirements.

This brings us to James’ decision. He realizes that Peter has profound influence in the Jerusalem church, so he refers to Peter’s comments, and then validates them with Scripture (vv. 16-17). In so doing, James wisely connects human experience and biblical truth – both are important, but they must be aligned. James also calls Peter by his pre-Christian name: Simeon (v. 14). This is a

gesture to respect the Jewish Christians who were sincerely trying to live their faith obediently. At this point James could see how the Gospel of Jesus Christ was transforming people. Combined with the powerful voices of Peter, Paul and Barnabas, he could have easily crushed or humiliated the Jewish Christians who were still struggling to keep old and obsolete laws. Considering all this, his decision was both loving and progressive. He firmly states that the Gentiles not be hindered by Jewish laws in their turning to God (v. 19), but he also asks them to “abstain” from certain foods (those offered to idols, those not prepared by Jewish legal standards), and to avoid fornication (v. 20).

Why did James make these three requests? First, the mentioning of fornication is important given that not far from Antioch, at the shrine of Daphne, the religious cult of prostitution was practiced. James realized that some Gentile Christians might still justify indulging, especially if they twist the idea of “salvation by grace” to give themselves permission. Second, the sensitivity to preparation of foods remained crucial for maintaining table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. It was at mealtimes in church that relationships between Christians could become most strained, so he urges Gentiles to be respectful of their Jewish brothers and sisters.

The congregation in Jerusalem is in full agreement with James’ decision. They set apart two people other than Paul and Barnabas (Judas Barsabbas and Silas) to deliver the decision to the Antioch church. When these men arrive and share the decision, the Christians at Antioch are relieved and thrilled (v 31). They have clarity and direction. As a result, the global ministry continued—salvation is by grace alone, but we must honour others in love.

What the church meeting at Jerusalem teaches us about global discipleship today, and local and global relationships:

### 1. The importance of mutual support through dialogue.

The church in Antioch needed the support of the Jerusalem church, and the only way it could take place was through personal communication and healthy, respectful dialogue.

### 2. The importance of listening from every direction and finding a “middle way” of creative ministry.

The local church in Jerusalem listened before they spoke. Verse 12 states that the whole assembly kept silent. They learned about what they did not know. Discernment and wisdom emerges from a respectful listening to the voices of sincere Christians from other parts of the world who need support and whose situation needs to be understood. The Antioch church was also willing to listen to the wisdom of the leadership in Jerusalem, and to accept the challenges being faced there. Both churches – local and global – arrived at a solution that was both a victory of truth and a victory of love. It is a victory that comes by adjusting some of what we don’t need in order for the other person to find greater wholeness.

### 3. Extending grace and deepening relationships was more important than power or control.

James’ (and the Jerusalem church’s) decision to sustain optimal conditions for table fellowship (eating together) was no doubt inspired by his watching and learning from Jesus. Eating together with global and local partners is crucial to respect, trust and mutual ministry.

### 4. Creating a Kingdom people through the gospel was more important than institutional maintenance or “tribal” superiority.

By asking Jewish and Gentile Christians to each adjust their thinking in order to promote ministry, James resisted what we might today call “tribalism.” When people are tribalistic, they see their group as superior to others, often justifying behavior that seeks to dominate, dismiss, and even humiliate the other tribe. In rendering their decision, James and the Jerusalem church rose above that; they were following not only the way of Jesus, but the Old Testament teaching that you must love the alien as yourself, for you were once aliens in the land of Egypt (Leviticus 19:33-34). The Apostle Paul would later reinforce this thinking by telling the Philippians to be like Jesus: “... in humility consider others as better than yourselves. Let

each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others” (Phil 2:4). Paul and James together illustrate what it means to stand for truth without diminishing others who are not of our own “tribe.” What’s more, they teach us that the church today is not simply an alternative “tribe,” but God’s new humanity that is called to transform the world with truth and love.

#### 5. A creative and fruitful missionary relationship between local and global partners requires strong, wise and generous leadership.

The leadership at Antioch was wise to ask the Jerusalem church for advice. Paul and Barnabas were humble enough to journey to dialogue with those they disagreed with in Jerusalem. Peter was bold enough to share personal experience. James brought a deep understanding of scripture and sensitivity to different cultural and religious traditions. As a result, God worked through Peter and Paul to teach the Jewish Christians to reach out to Gentiles, and worked through James to teach the Gentile Christians to reach out to Jews.

### OTHER PREACHING AND TEACHING POINTS

Take some time to mention some of the global issues we face in the world today that requires global and local partners to work together (see *Appendix A: Statistics to Think About*)

- A child dies every 3.5 seconds from hunger or hunger-related causes (and there is enough food in our world for everyone)
- 74 people die every hour from AIDS
- Half the children in our world live in poverty, which means inadequate shelter, unsafe water, or lack of access to education and health care
- Religious-based violence is evident across all major religions in the world, including Christianity
- Almost 1 in 6 people in the world entered this millennium unable to read or write

In Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, the Apostle addresses the need for ethical purity, simplicity in lifestyle and sharing so that those who do not have enough would have what is sufficient, and those that have in abundance would not have too much (see 2 Corinthians 8:15). His encouragement that the Corinthians be generous to those suffering from famine in Jerusalem was a clear example of his “global” concern. This is not just good advice for individuals, but also for churches.

The Good Samaritan example (Luke 10:25-37) illustrates the power of partnership, when the Samaritan teams with the innkeeper to take care of the man in need. Together they offer a better alternative to the spiritual negligence and ineffectiveness of the priest and Levite. This story, told by Jesus Himself, illustrates how old and unhelpful religious approaches (usually overemphasizing purity and neglecting compassion) need to be replaced by creative ventures marked by love. This famous story also exposes some of the perennial threats to love illustrated in the responses of the priest and Levite – religious narrowness, spiritual arrogance or superiority, fear of threat or inconvenience, negligence, and stinginess.

There are always barriers to partnering in bringing God’s love to the wider world – even well-meaning Christians in years past have imposed themselves unhelpfully on others. Organizations like CBM have needed to depart from the older approaches to mission that imposed religious values and Western culture on global partners, and intentionally moved to a present-day emphasis on peer learning and mutuality in partnership.

Local-global partnerships today emphasize:

- Humility and respect between Christians around the world in learning from each other’s experience
- A core belief in the dignity and value of all people – we are all created in the image and likeness of God
- A commitment to patience and humility in working with Christians from other cultures

## APPLICATION TOOLS

As a church leadership, begin to welcome the perspective of global partners in teaching the church in Canada about living faithfully. With this in mind, invite CBM's Global Field Staff or office staff to address your church on the topic of global partnerships – what can Canadian Christians learn from the global church? How has global mission changed? What is the challenge that the church in Canada needs to respond to from the churches in other parts of the world?

Discuss the possibility with a local ministerial association to sponsor a mission-centred gathering that would enhance learning in the wider Christian community, and inspire some creative joint activities.

## SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

Gord King, Gary Nelson & Terry Smith. **Going Global**. Chalice Press, 2011

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