

35a ACTS

Let's begin our study of the Word of God this evening. This is April the 9th, 2004. And we pick up tonight, beginning a new chapter, Acts chapter 15.

Let's take a moment at the outset to go to the Lord in prayer. Father, thank you for preserving us and providing for us through another week. We thank you for your many expressions of grace and patience and faithfulness.

We thank you that you have a plan and purpose for our lives. And the fact that we are still here and breathing means that it is not complete and you have more for us to learn and more that we can accomplish in your strength, through your word and through your spirit. We pray that our study tonight will equip us for every good work.

We pray that we can rightly divide your word and come to a greater understanding of our savior and of our role through him in your plan, both now and in the age to come. We pray it in Jesus name. Amen.

Last time we saw the apostle Paul and Barnabas in their first, what has come to be known as the first missionary journey, leaving out of Antioch of Syria, heading west and then north up into the very center of Pamphylia and Iconia. And then after the adventures in Lystra and Derbe and so on, hooking back through Antioch of Pisidia and back down now to after having visited or revisited Lystra and Iconium down to Antioch and we saw them appoint elders in every church. The word appoint in verse 23 deserves a little bit of mention there.

There are two different words for appoint in Greek or at least two different words that are used in terms of ordaining or otherwise commissioning leadership in the church. This particular word is composed of the word for hand, which is *cheir*, C-H-E-I-R-O. And then the word *ektino*, which is E-K-T-E-I-N-O.

And so it comes to be *Cheirotonia*, C-H-E-I-R-O-T-O-N-I-A. And *ektino* means to stretch forth the hand. We've talked before when we studied Hebrews chapter six, the first six verses, talking about not laying again the foundation of change of mind away from dead works and faith toward God, baptisms and the laying on of hands is included in there.

Well, laying on of hands is a different word. This is the stretching forth of hands and the stretching forth of hands is more a gesture of blessing, of approval. This leaves room.

The laying on of hands pretty much means you take somebody, you put your hands on them and you say, you are the one, I am taking you out of the group and I am transferring to you some sort of authority. I am delegating to you some sort of mission or commission. Stretching forth the hand is one step removed from that.

It leaves room. And this doesn't mean so much to us because we're not really concerned

with how do people end up in a position of leadership. But in larger churches, this is quite the issue.

And at some future point, if we get scattered to the wind or something happens and we wind up in different groups, or if you look at a church and you say, well, why are they organized the way they are? There is a need to figure out how do we arrive at having pastors, elders, deacons or people who have been given some sort of leadership. There's a difference in a laying on of hands, which means you already have a certitude, you have an apostle, you have the Lord Jesus, you have somebody laying hands on and there's no doubt. I mean, the hands have been laid on.

To stretch forth the hand in a gesture of blessing or approval, this person who is brought forward could be a candidate that was selected or identified by the group. You have a lot of churches who, if they want to fill a vacancy in their roster of deacons or in their roster of elders, will nominate. They'll say, well, here's a faithful member.

Here's a man that has been with us for a long time. And he seems to have the necessary qualifications. I would like to submit his name to be a functionary in our church in whatever capacity, deacon, elder, however they happen to be organized.

And then you would have some sort of ratifying body stretch forth the hand and say, OK, fine, we'll approve this. So it's more of an approval than a just than a autonomous sort of what am I trying to say? Yeah, you know where they say God does it in eternity past. Somebody just predestined, just grabbing you out of the crowd and saying, well, you've been foreordained and selected.

We've just out of just looking at the crowd. We need an elder. You, you and you, you know, count off by sevens.

Every seventh one, you're an elder. Or some such thing, just designating them in some sort of de facto way. This is is a step removed from that.

There could have been some sort of nominating or collective process of putting someone forward. And the apostles say, good idea. We'll we'll bless this one.

Once again, I just covered it because it's here and it is a valid principle. How did they arrive at having elders in Old Testament Israel? We're in Exodus Sunday from this coming. We're going to see the 70 elders plus Nadab and Abihu and Aaron and Moses go up Mount Sinai.

How did they get these 70 elders? What what made them an elder? Well, this process is is somewhat unknown and mysterious to us. And the same thing here. We don't know by what process these elders were derived or selected.

Where were their suggestions? Did they put names in a hat? Did the Holy Spirit reveal it

to Paul and Barth? We don't know. But when they stretched forth their hand to designate these ones, it's almost like a pointing or a waving of the hand overhead. You see people when they're using the applause meter, they've got, you know, who's got the who told the best joke or whatever.

The host will stand behind the people and hold his hand over him. This is sort of the idea. And so it doesn't really tell us a whole lot about the process.

It just tells us that there was apostolic approval for these elders. And this is in keeping. The only reason I even bring this up is it is in keeping with everything else we see in the New Testament with regard to the organizational structure of the New Testament church.

It is very poorly documented how they did it. And it's on purpose. God does not give us a ritual.

He doesn't say use a spinner, roll the dice, use the Urim and Thummim. How many pastors, how many elders, how many deacons do you have? Any of one or the other? How are they selected? It is as though God has gone out of his way to avoid giving any sort of rule or restriction or other kind of guidance on that. He basically tells us, you people get together as a group and just figure it out.

I don't care how you identify your pastor. I don't care if you use a search committee or if three elders get together and say, well, I like that guy. It doesn't have to be formal or informal.

There's no set way of doing it as long as it's decently in good order. This is another one of those passages where even when you go to the Greek verb and try to figure out, well, did they go through some sort of ordination? This has been translated ordained elders in some circles. It doesn't mean that.

In fact, the word goes out of its way to avoid any sort of suggestion or hint that it was ordination. So the application of this is whether it's your family life, whether it is the particular arrangement between husband and wife, even within a close circle of believers, there will be differences from household to household in the same way that there are differences in the household of faith. And one church cannot look at another and say, well, you didn't pick your pastor the right way or you don't have enough elders or your deacons don't have the right set of responsibilities.

Whether you're looking at marriage, whether you're looking at child training, whether you're looking at any other area in the New Testament church, when it comes to spiritual responsibility before the Lord, God essentially says husbands love your wives, wives submit to the authority that I have laid on your husband. Children obey your parents in the Lord. And within those very general guidelines, we're supposed to figure it out.

We're supposed to do what we do decently and in good order in a God honoring Christ glorifying way. And we're the rules, the structure that was a part of Old Testament. Israel's life has been removed.

We are under a higher law, the law of love. The law of liberty, the law of supreme sacrifice, which are basically principles and not laws. So this is just an example in the church where God says, I'm not going to tell you how they figured out who these elders are.

You figure it out. And that goes in a lot of different areas. And this gives us freedom in Christ.

We are accountable, not to each other, but to the Lord. We are accountable, not to our pastor, but to the Lord. We are not accountable to a system.

There is not. This is why I personally think our modern denominational structures and organizations miss the mark. I know they mean well.

I know they have a lot of justification. I heard an entire 45, no, yeah. 45 minute sermon on nothing but why a particular denomination needs to exist.

And it's all about, you need a collection of churches in order to support a mission board and to put missionaries all over the world. You need a mission board. And for a mission board, you need a denomination.

You need a collection of churches that can fund all of this and do great things. I understand all of that, but I will tell you that there is no thumbs up or thumbs down in the word of God for any of that. The pattern that we see is individual local churches ministering and seizing opportunities in their local environment.

You say, well, what about foreign missions? How can small local churches possibly support a foreign missionary? Well, they can't. If you want to fund and spend the money for a full-time missionary in a foreign country, a small local church is highly unlikely to be able to do that. So how is that done? Well, I'm not sure it's supposed to be done.

I'm not saying I'm by no means against missions. I'm just saying I'm not sure that the conclusion that we have drawn that, well, we will federate our churches. We will funnel a big pot of money in, and then we will send missionaries forward.

There just is no guidance about that in the word of God. Paul and the apostles worked with their hands. They did not gain benefit other than freewill gifts from believers.

Paul says, I have been at great pains to not levy any sort of tax on the churches to support me as I go forth in doing my apostolic mission. If the apostle Paul was not supported by the churches in some sort of commitment way, everybody signed a pledge

card and pledged to support the apostle, God either gave him opportunities to work and sustain himself, or there were fairy godmothers that came out of the woodwork and did for him the same thing that these great ladies did for the Lord Jesus and his disciples. But it seems to have been something that God, the Holy Spirit orchestrated on an as-needed basis, and it was not formalized, and it was not structured.

Of course, that just drives formal, structurized people crazy because they want everything budgeted out and predicted, and I can count on giving you so much a month, but that never works half the time anyway. I say all that to say, this is one of those passages that tells us that we have to think and figure out in our circumstance how to best apply the principles of the word of God. All right, on to chapter 15, because, well, I guess we need to finish 14 before we do that.

They pass, verse 24, they pass through Pisidia, came to Pamphylia. When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Atalia. From there, they sailed back to Antioch.

This is Antioch of Syria, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had accomplished. Now, this word for commended is the same word that we saw up above when Paul and Barnabas set these new converts before God, commended them to God and to the word of his grace. And so they had been set forth by the church to do this mission.

The apostles go out and find these people who are interested and teach them and then set them before God because they're going to leave. And so they are set out there, commended, as it says, to the grace of God. But the idea is that in each case, who are you setting people in front of? The church at Antioch sets Paul and Barnabas in front of God.

And they say, Lord, here are the men we think are best suited for this job. And they leave it to God to sustain and to guide and to enable and to bless the efforts of these people. They don't say, well, we're the first church of Antioch and we've got t-shirts for these apostles to wear with our logo on and we'll be sure everybody knows that they are supported, sustained and ordained and licensed and sent forth by the first church of Antioch.

The church says, we're going to set you before the Lord. We see a need. We think you can do it.

We'll launch you out and we're going to basically put you in the hands of the Lord. So then the apostles go out, they preach, they find these people, they set forth elders in every town and they do the very same thing. They take those people and say, we're going to have to set you in God's hands because we're going to be physically separated from you in the same way.

We've been physically separated from our church. And this is sort of the function that we do for each other in the realm of intercessory prayer. When we can, we like to try to meet each other's needs in a tangible way.

If we can help, if we can support, if we can sustain, if we can encourage, if we can help with a meal or help with a task or watch someone's kids when they're busy, whatever it might be, that's a great thing. But there's many times where we really don't have the power to do anything that is in the concrete world. And so we go to the Lord and we bring someone who is the focus of our attention to the Lord's attention.

And we say, Lord, I have done as much. I can't begin to thank this person or these people for what they have done on my behalf. I want to set them before you and ask you to bless them, ask you to meet their needs, ask you to sustain them.

And that's really the function of intercessory prayer. So the church at Antioch of Syria interceded, in effect, for Paul and Barnabas as they sent them out on what was known to be a dicey and dangerous mission, committed them to the Lord's care. They've gone out and made these converts and committed those converts to the Lord's care.

And now they are about to return. So verse 27, they arrived and gathered the church together. Notice there seems to be a church singular in Antioch, which is a fairly large town.

They began to report all the things that God had done with them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. What an interesting way of putting this. Remember, who are the people in the church in Antioch? They're pretty much all Jewish, right? They are Jewish, they are Greek Jews, they are the Hellenistic Jews.

But they are pretty much all Jews because the whole preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles idea is pretty radical and new and controversial. So they reported that God had done with them and how he had obviously, if there were already a bunch of Gentiles there, the idea of an open door of faith to the Gentiles would be, what are you talking about? We knew that. We've done that here.

They haven't done that in Antioch. It's an all Jewish congregation. The door of faith has been opened as they went up into the regions that they've been traveling in.

But it says he opened a door of faith. What do you think about this phrase, this idea, an open door of faith? Depending on your theological perspective, your Reformed and Calvinist viewpoint says there's really no such thing as an open door of faith unless it's one that God swings open and then kicks you through it. It's more like the Wile E. Coyote door where you just get thrown right through the wall and you have a little shape of yourself as you pass right through because you've been forcibly sent in a particular direction.

So I was kind of asking myself the question, why is it that the church has been open? Why does Luke, why does the Holy Spirit use this particular phrase, a door of opportunity for faith has been opened here? What exactly does this mean? Well, where else does scripture, the New Testament in particular, talk about an open door? You remember that Jesus compared himself in John 10 to a door. He says, I'm the door of the sheep. He is a way for the sheep to go where they need to go.

If they need to go in for protection, he's the door by which they go into the fold for protection. If they need to go out for grazing, for progress, for growth and nutrition and still waters and green pastures, he is the means by which they go out. He is the means by which they come in.

He is the door of security, protection against invaders or thieves or wolves or whatever might be a threat to the sheep. The door is a door of protection. So we know that he said that about himself.

We know that prison doors have swung open here in Acts that were designed to keep someone in so that something bad could happen to them. Peter has been delivered. We know that in First Corinthians, chapter 16 and verse nine, Paul says, a great and effective door has opened to me.

He's talking about his work in Ephesus. He's writing back to Corinth and he says, I will come to you after I go through Macedonia. I'm going through Macedonia and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go.

For I do not wish to see you now just in passing. For I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits. When I finally get there, I want to have an extended stay.

But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a wide door for effective service has opened to me. And there are many adversaries.

There are many who are opposing, but a great and effective door has opened to me in Ephesus. So the door here really represents opportunity. And we use it this way even in modern parliaments, right? Well, if I could just get a foot in the door at that company, maybe I could get my resume to the right people and get a job.

You know, a foot in the door, if I could just get the door open a little. And that seems to be the sense with which we find it used here. In Second Corinthians, chapter two and verse 12, Paul is rehearsing his travels.

He says, when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, I found an opportunity there. This is what I did. You go to Colossians, chapter four and verse three.

He says, I want you all to be praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I also have been imprisoned. He says, pray that the Lord will open a door for the word. James, slightly different take on the idea of a door.

He says, do not complain, brethren, against one another so that you yourselves may not be judged. Behold, the judge is standing right at the door. If you get your eyes on people, one of the three areas of subjectivity and begin to complain, James reminds us that there is a judgment that comes.

He says, if you avoid complaining about each other, you won't be judged. And remember, the judge is standing at the door. So this is the idea of a imminence, a potential.

There's the potential for the judge to hear through the door. There's the potential for the judge to walk through the door and execute judgment. Of course, our famous passage, we looked at it not too long ago, Revelation chapter three and verse eight, where he's talking to the church in Philadelphia and he says he has the key of David.

He's the one who opens and no one will shut. He is the one who shuts and no one opens. Who determines our opportunities? Who determines our potentials? It is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Operating in the parameters of the plan of the Father, but our potentials and our opportunities come to us through Christ and for Christ's sake. That's why we pray in Jesus name. Everything that we desire, everything that we hope will happen, everything that we should see coming up in our lives as far as a potential or a possibility.

We pray our prayers in the name of Jesus. My father used to pray in his name and for his sake. Because it's all about the Lord Jesus, he's the one that creates our potential.

He's the one that opens our doors. He's Jesus speaking to the church in Philadelphia says, I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut.

Because you have a little strength, you have a little power and I have kept my word or you have kept my word and have not denied my name. You've been faithful, you've been obedient and you have not given up. You haven't fallen back.

Then he goes on to talk about the synagogue of Satan who are persecuting them. He says, you've kept the word of my perseverance and I will keep you from the hour of testing. And this idea of keeping and preserving goes back to that idea of the door of the sheep.

I will keep that stuff outside and you will be inside. I will preserve and protect you. I will

separate you from those.

That's the door that I shut and no one can open. That particular tribulation is not going to come to you. The hour that is about to come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth.

I am coming quickly. Hold fast what you have so that no one will take your crown. He who overcomes I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.

I have put before you an open door that no one can shut. I've given you an opportunity that no one can take away. So when we come back to Acts chapter 14, what's the idea here? He has opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

It is a potential. It's an opportunity. This flies in the face of the idea that we have gone to reap in the predestined Gentiles that God has elected beforehand in his predetermined grace to become a member.

We just went in and collected those four ordained people. He says, you know what? God has opened a door of opportunity. He's made the possibility of salvation and growth in grace through faith available to the Gentiles.

He has opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. It's the potential. It's the possibility.

And they spent a long time with the disciples. That verse 28 is a short verse, but this long time really is a long time. Our best understanding of this is that long time is about five years.

It's about five years. And what's particularly interesting about that period of time is that if this, if the events of this chapter happened in about the preceding chapter happened in about 46 AD or so, the mid forties, and the Jerusalem council is usually dated to around 51 AD. This is how we figured that this long time is about five years.

And what's fascinating about this is that this is five entire years. How much ministry do you think the apostle Paul and these other parties can accomplish in five solid years in Antioch? How many sermons did they preach? How many miracles perhaps were wrought? How many happenings can happen in five years? My daughter's birthday is today, 14th birthday. I think back over the years of her life.

I think back to five years ago when she was nine instead of 14. How many things have happened in that last five years? I've changed jobs. I've changed cars.

We've changed the house around. She's grown to twice her size and four times her age and all these different things have happened. A lot of things happen in five years.

This five years in Antioch is all covered in verse 28 there. Not a mention. Do you ever feel like your efforts and your labors and the battles that you win are sort of under

appreciated and under noticed and not really given their due? I think about the apostle Paul laboring away, struggling, probably going through all kinds of debates and staving off the legalistic Judaizers that were saying, you know, those Gentiles, they really need to be circumcised.

They had an interesting special. I say they, Peter Jennings had an interesting special this past week. It was another one of those things and with apologies to Dr. Ryrie, but you know, you have the Ryrie study Bible and Ryrie is in like two inch letters and Bible is in like half inch letters.

Well, it was kind of the same thing in this special if you saw it this past week, because what is he on? ABC, Peter Jennings, ABC had this thing. And so it's Peter Jennings reports, Jesus and Paul. Now, I would like to have a two hour special on TV where the title page has my name first and the Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul.

It's Peter, Jesus and Paul, Peter Jennings, Jesus and Paul. Do we really need to know that it's Peter Jennings? But he's up there. Peter Jennings, it's just my personal peeve.

It just kind of annoyed me that it's like top billing goes to Peter Jennings and then you get Jesus and then you get Paul. But in this program, they were giving from a historical, secular, weirdo Bible scholar perspective, their understanding of the how did this strange phenomenon called Christianity come into being? And they can't really explain it. It just bamfoozles and dumbfounds them completely.

And what they really can't explain, they said, you know, there were all of these Messiah movements that sprung up, which is, of course, true. And they all died out with the death of the supposed Messiah. The whole thing kind of fizzles because Romans are still here and our Messiah guy is not.

And after you have 15 or 20 or 25 or 30 of these failed attempts, people kind of it's like, you know, the next the next bachelor or something. I mean, after a while, who cares who's surviving on the island with its old hat? And so they can't figure out because this particular one, this particular Jesus Messiah guy really caught on. And the thing that made it catch on is he was the first one that was said to have been raised from the dead.

The others died and they stayed dead. They killed him and buried him and they didn't show back up. But the Jesus Messiah that showed up in this particular 30 odd A.D., his followers were convinced that he had been raised from the dead and they could not be dissuaded.

And, of course, this just drives them all nuts, because why would they think that he was raised from the dead and the others didn't? And they were not just it wasn't just kind of a novel idea. They didn't steal the body and pretend like he was raised. These men died for the statement that the Lord Jesus rose from the dead.

The Apostle Paul, you can't hardly turn a page in his epistles without hitting something about resurrection from the dead. And it just completely they just can't figure it out. They say, well, this is certainly what made it take off.

But we don't know why they said this. I mean, you know, resurrected, raised from the dead. I mean, come on.

But they certainly believed it. And because they believed it, it set it apart from all other Messiah movements. And they said, but, you know, you can and I've heard this more than once.

You could have had Christianity without Jesus, but you could not have had Christianity without Paul, because he's the guy that really wound it up and made it go. He's the guy that, you know, Jesus folded the airplane, but Paul picked it up and flew it, you know, type of it. Well, they didn't say that, but that was the idea.

And and so then, you know, the whole last thing is on the Apostle Paul. And here's the central what I sifted out of this stuff that they that they put on the screen was that, well, Judaism was kind of not catching on as the Roman Empire grew. And all the Gentiles were kind of they got tired of their old pantheons of God because everybody was going global.

It's kind of like the modern day. I mean, this really does have an application to now. We used to have separate little countries.

You could live in your country and not know about the world. But with radio, with television, now with the Internet, with satellites and everybody says the world has gotten smaller. And, you know, you have this.

It takes a village. You get the global global consciousness now. And so.

Everything is that's why you had the EU, the European Union, because we're getting too big for our little parochial country type of stuff. Well, they believe the same thing was happening in the Roman Empire. And it used to be it was OK to live in some little dump town somewhere and have your your pantheon of seven local gods, one for crops and one for fertility and this and the other.

But as the Roman Empire spread and culture spread in the Greek language spread, people said, boy, you know, our little tin pot God here doesn't isn't really as nice as the one over the ridge. And so as as people got tired of having a pantheon of gods. And so the Jews conveniently had this one God.

And as you get one empire and one language and everything gets unified and globalized, wouldn't it be great to just have one God that's kind of a one God does all. Why have a whole shelf full of cleaners when you can have this one cleaner that does it all? And and

this was the idea. And so Judaism was poised to be the great monolithic religion of the age, but it couldn't catch on because of this circumcision deal.

And in the days of infection and growing people coming into a religion and saying, wait a minute, you're going to do what? I don't think so. You know, I could die from that. I could get an infection.

You know, we try hard to not slice our bodies in any way and especially not there. And so they didn't want to be circumcised. And so this was like a big stumbling block to Judaism.

And so the genius, according to these people, of the Apostle Paul is he said, hey, with the Jesus movement, quote unquote, we'll give you all the benefits of Judaism, but we'll lay off at the circumcision. This is the point that we're at in Acts right now is the conflict between those who want to impose the Mosaic law and the right of circumcision on the new converts and the Apostle Paul, who says we have freedom in Christ. It's a new covenant, new and better promises.

But this is the secular view. The secular view is this was a great marketing idea by the Apostle Paul. We'll take the circumcision part out and everybody will jump on the bandwagon.

And of course, with this modification, the new Judaism, the Jesus movement just caught on like wildfire. And hence you have Christianity as we know it today. The unanswered question is, why did the Apostle Paul in getting this new sort of Amway religion off the ground here endure imprisonment and beatings and shipwreck and stonings? Why was he just trying to start a new religion? What was his motivation? And of course, they're clueless.

They cannot answer the question. They can't even ask the question, much less answer it. They never even address why did the Apostle Paul, why did the other apostles, why did the first generation in the church endure persecution, get thrown to the lions and suffer and die for their faith? It isn't that they could see down the great corridors of history and say, you know, if we can get this Christianity thing launched, it's just going to catch on.

It's going to take over the world. It goes back to the first question they could not answer. It is all about resurrection.

It is all about new life in Christ, not only for pie in the sky by and by, but we begin to enjoy our new life now. We avail ourselves of regeneration now. You know, there is a view in Christianity championed by Herbert W. Armstrong and Garner Ted Armstrong.

Of course, Garner Ted died last year, so he now knows exactly how it all works. But their idea, one of the things in Armstrongism is that you're not really saved yet because salvation is when you get your eternal life. We don't have our eternal life yet.

You don't get your eternal life until you die. So really, there's a sense in which you're not saved yet. I mean, how are you different? You're an unbeliever.

You express faith in Christ, and people say all these mystical, invisible things happen, but in practical terms, you don't really get your salvation until you die. Then you get a resurrection body. Then you get a cleansed soul.

Then you shed the old nature. Then you go into the eternal realms. Then you can fly.

Then you can walk the streets of gold, all the other things. And so really, our salvation is future, and we're looking forward to our salvation. And if that doesn't miss the point, I don't know what does.

Because the whole truth of our baptism in the Holy Spirit is that spiritual baptism has taken place. We have died with Christ. We have been raised with Christ.

We have our eternal life now. This is the miracle of God's work is that in our fallen body, in our fallen world, wrestling against the principalities and powers, we have life. We have hope.

We have divine power now, and that's why the Apostle Paul talks about resurrection all the time, because it's resurrection now. It's not resurrection later. I mean, that's a wonderful thing to look forward to, and it's a part of our hope.

But our hope is not all future. It's daily. It's now.

And this is the gospel that Paul was preaching, and this is what met the needs of people's souls. This is what sustained the apostles and the missionaries and the pastors in prison and in the lion's dens and in the sufferings and the persecutions that they endured. It's what you get now as well as what you get later.

That's what Jesus Christ has taught. They never, of course, mentioned Revelation 2 and 3 and what the letters to the seven churches say about life now, your faith now, your obedience now, and what it is winning for you in the future. Well, a door of faith has been opened.

We are Gentiles. That door of faith continues to stand open before us now. Let's pause and take our break.

When we come back, we'll dive into chapter 15 and see what the reaction was when Paul began to tell of what great things God was doing amongst the Gentiles.