



Harmonychurch.life

Each month we have a special memory verse and Life App. All of our stories revolve around those.

This month's Memory Verse is:

**"God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ.
Your salvation doesn't come from anything you do. It is God's gift."**

Ephesians 2:8

This month's life app is

Faith

"Believing what Jesus did can change me."

Weekly, we have a different bottom line that goes with our story and Life App.

This week's bottom line is;

"The story of Jesus is for everybody."

Our story for this week is about how God's gift is for everyone. (Acts 15:1-35)

**Last week we heard about Jesus last command to His disciples. In Matthew chapter 28 verses 19 & 20, Jesus tells the disciples that *they are to go into all the world telling them about Jesus. They were to baptize them and teach them all the things Jesus had taught the disciples. Then, Jesus reminded them that He would be with them always, even to the end of the earth.*

After Jesus had gone back to heaven, two of His followers, Paul & Barnabas, were traveling all around spreading the story of Jesus, "The Good News", with everyone and encouraging believers everywhere they visited. When returning back to Antioch, the town they started from, Paul and Barnabas were excited to tell them about the many, many people that were believing in Jesus.

In fact, the number of people who believed in Jesus was increasing every day. That's a good thing, right? Well, some people thought it was good. Others weren't so sure.

That may sound crazy to you, but THIS was all brand-new to a lot of people. You see, back in those days the majority of the first people to become Christians were Jewish. Those who were coming to know Jesus who weren't from a Jewish background, these people were called Gentiles. Basically, anyone not raised in a Jewish family was considered a Gentile.

Now the Jews, they followed all of the laws that God had given the Jewish people before Jesus died on the cross. These laws were good laws, but there were a lot of them. And by a lot of them, I mean a LOT of them. Like hundreds. And these laws were about almost everything!

They had laws on what to eat, how to wear their hair, and having feasts and festivals.

But it went further than that. There weren't just rules on what to eat, but HOW to eat it—like, they couldn't have cheese with their meat. There were even rules about how to grow the food, when you could plant your crops and when not to.

They couldn't just throw a festival/party whenever they wanted; there were rules about the dates and times. They even had rules about their clothes. Their coats had to have four tassels one on each corner and each one had to have a blue thread in it.

And that was just the beginning. There were rules for nearly every single aspect of their lives. Now these laws may sound odd to us, but back then they helped God's people be different than the people around them and they helped God's people live better lives. There were just so many of them.

To the Jewish people, part of following Jesus meant obeying the laws. What did that mean for all of the people who weren't Jewish who wanted to follow Jesus? They did not follow these laws. I mean, if you had not grown up being taught the laws, it would be basically impossible to learn and follow them all. So, there were Gentiles following Jesus without first following the laws.

This made some Jewish people very angry.

They felt if anyone was to follow Jesus, they needed to follow the Jewish laws too. But Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them. The Bible actually says they *'argued strongly with them.'* (Acts 15:2). Paul and Barnabas and some of the other believers decided to go straight to the leaders of the church to get the answer.

So, Paul and Barnabas traveled to Jerusalem. The church there welcomed them, and they shared with them all the wonderful things that had been happening all over the known world—Jesus' story was being shared with everyone!

But it wasn't long before they started to talk about what it meant to follow Jesus. Some of the believers were Pharisees. These men believed that the Gentiles should follow the letter of the law—every single law before they could be considered a follower of Jesus.

Well, there was an important question that needed to be answered: Did Gentiles who were putting their faith in Jesus have to become Jewish first? Did they have to follow the Jewish laws before they could follow Jesus?

The church leaders got together and discussed this question amongst themselves for a while.

Finally, a disciple named Peter stood up and spoke.

In Acts 15:8-11 it tells us what he said:

'God knows the human heart. By giving the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles, He showed that He accepted them. He did the same for them as He had done for us. God showed that there is no difference between us and them. That's because he made their hearts pure because of their faith. ... Why are you trying to test God?. ... We believe we are saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus. The Gentiles are saved in the same way.'

Everyone was quiet as Peter spoke. Then James, who was also a leader of the church, stood up and spoke too. He said

'It is my decision that we should not make it hard for the Gentiles who are turning to God.'
(Acts 15:19)

In other words, James was saying the MOST IMPORTANT thing was for the Gentiles to turn to the one true God. The Gentiles didn't have to follow all of the Jewish laws in order to follow Jesus. Because just like Peter had said, it was impossible for even the Jewish believers to follow every rule perfectly, so how could they expect Gentiles to do something they had never been able to do well themselves?

It took some time for the first followers of Jesus to realize that Jesus isn't just for the Jewish people or the important people or the 'smart' people. Jesus is for everybody. Jews, Gentiles, American, Canadian, European, African—the story of Jesus is for everybody. In fact, that idea is so important it's the one thing to remember today.

“The story of Jesus is for everybody”

And if the story of Jesus is for everybody, that means it is for you, too, and for your family and your friends, and for everyone all over the world. We are able to come to Jesus just as we are—no special rules to follow first. In fact, the Bible tells us there's NOTHING we can do that can save us, except for following Jesus. That's our memory verse this month.

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Your salvation doesn't come from anything you do. It is God's gift.”
Ephesians 2:8***

That's the best news there is! Let's tell God how thankful we are!”

PRAY

“Heavenly Father, thank You for making it so easy for us to follow Jesus. You could have made us jump through hoops, follow a bunch of rules, or memorize a bunch of laws. But instead, You sent Jesus and You just want us to receive the free gift of what He did for us. We are thankful that He came and that His story is for EVERYBODY. Help us share that story with everybody around us, so they, too, can become followers of Jesus. We ask these things in Jesus' name, amen.”