

## Message of a Visitor from Jerusalem

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*This took place in Lystra in the province of Galatia in the year A.D. 48. In Lystra there was a new church of followers of “the Way” of Jesus, nearly all Gentiles. This church had been founded only a few months earlier by Paul of Tarsus, with his companion Barnabas. These new believers came together every Sunday evening in a church member’s house. One Sunday they met three visitors from the Mother church in Jerusalem. After seeing their letters of recommendation, the elders of the Lystran church invited them to speak. The following is, in essence, what one of them said.*

My dear friends, I so appreciate this opportunity to bring you a message from the center of our faith, Jerusalem. I congratulate you at having left your idols to serve the true and living God. You have pledged yourselves, in baptism, to follow the path Jesus has marked out. Jesus truly is God’s Messiah, God’s Son. Those who follow Him will surely attain that holiness without which no one can please God.

It is only right to applaud men like Paul and Barnabas for boldly bringing you the good news about Jesus. We have been told how they suffered here—indeed, Paul was once stoned and left for dead! Whatever defects Paul might have, he certainly is zealous and sincere. And so are you.

Of course, sincerity is never enough in itself. None of us would be saved without Jesus. Not Jesus as we imagine Him, but as He really is. Since we cannot see Him, we rely fully on the witnesses He gave us. No doubt you know that after Jesus went back to the Father, the apostles chose someone to take Judas’s place. It had to be “one of the men,” they said, “who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us.” It could not have been me, nor you, nor Paul, nor Barnabas. No, the church is not built upon us but upon those original apostles and prophets. Everything we preach about Jesus comes from those witnesses the Lord left in Jerusalem. That is why Jerusalem is so important to all believers.

Let me quote some of Jesus’ words that those apostles passed on to us. “Do not think,” He said, “that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Then Jesus proceeded to give examples from the law, showing their deeper meanings. The prohibition of murder, He said, is also a warning against anger. The prohibition of adultery is also a warning against lust. He summed up all of God’s commandments in that of love. Why, do you suppose, did Jesus repeat and deepen all those laws? To show that they are irrelevant or unimportant? that one is saved by what he believes but not by what he does? Of course not. In fact, the one who will “enter the kingdom of heaven,” Jesus said, is

“only he who **does** the will of my Father who is in heaven.” He commended “everyone who hears these words of mine and **puts them into practice.**” He contrasted such a person to “everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice.” That person, He said, “is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.” When the storm comes, that man’s house will crash.

In other words, it is not enough to hear; we must obey. That is exactly what the Lord God had often told Israel: “Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly” (Deut. 6:3). In fact, obedience is the proof of genuine faith. Faith without works is dead. Jesus said, “Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?”

Why, do you suppose, does God require obedience? Because He wants us to be holy, like Himself. Obeying His law will make us holy. Lawlessness is sin. The law we must obey is God’s law, originally given to Israel and often repeated and honored in God’s Word. It was not given by me, or your church leaders, or even the apostles, but by God Himself. And no man has the right to cancel God’s law.

[At this point one of the elders objected that Paul of Tarsus did not require believers at Lystra to keep the law.]

We heard this about Paul but did not want to believe it. If true, it would be a great defect—and quite contrary to apostolic practice in Jerusalem. To neglect God’s law would be to neglect holiness. Of course, we can understand why some do not preach the law—because rules can upset people. No one likes to be told, for example, to quit eating pork or working on certain days—or to bring his tithes.

Another symbolic act God requires is to circumcise all your males. This is more than just a Jewish practice. It was given to Abraham long before the law, and Abraham was the father of all believers. “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Were you told what God said about circumcision? “My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant.”

We are so grateful that you have made the first steps toward the living God. We will be pleased to help you conform your lives to His holy law and become wholly acceptable to Him.

*[Despite its good points, such teaching is heretical and dangerous. The apostle Paul soon responded with his scorching letter to the Galatians.]*