

Introduction:

You have heard me say it before, and you will hear me say it again, the most successful local church of any time is undoubtedly the Jerusalem church in **Acts**. Because of its success, I have personally made the Jerusalem church my vision for our future. I hope that same vision is in your hearts as well. Yet, at the same time I recognize some possible dangers. That is, as we discuss the Jerusalem model, we can easily gain the wrong impression about that church. Such being the case, I want to take another look at Jerusalem and make sure we understand what the Jerusalem vision really is.

Discussion:

- I. The Jerusalem vision is not of a mother church, but an exemplary church.
 - A. Many people read **Acts 15:2** and see the Jerusalem church as a mother church, thinking Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to find out what to teach. But, Paul learned the gospel of Christ by revelation and was not taught by the Jerusalem church (**Galatians 1:11ff**). He and Barnabas went to Jerusalem because false teachers had come from there (**Acts 15:24**), and they needed to find out whether the Jerusalem church was teaching the truth or not.
 - B. But the Jerusalem church was an example for worship and work. Our vision for the Livingston church must never be to become a mother church. We are not to oversee the work of other churches. But, we can be an example. We can blaze the trail for other churches to follow our example. But our example will only be worthy of following if we follow the Bible example.
- II. The Jerusalem vision is not having 10,000 members, but having constant and unlimited growth.
 - A. Many people are satisfied with small churches. I like to point out how large the Jerusalem church was. There were 3000 in **Acts 2:41**. There were 5000 men in **Acts 4:4**. The wives, widows, and children could bring the count above 10,000. The problem is, some people walk away believing the Jerusalem vision is having 10,000 members. That is not the case.
 - B. The Jerusalem vision is about constant and unlimited growth. The Jerusalem church grew in times of peace and in times of persecution. The Jerusalem vision is not allowing barriers to stop our growth. We do not allow our building, work habits, leadership styles, relationships, or anything else to close the doors of Christ's church. Additionally, the Jerusalem vision is working in such a way as to close the cracks so we do not lose members. The Jerusalem vision is one of constantly converting, grounding, and keeping people.
- III. The Jerusalem vision is not getting enough hired hands to work, but having all hands working.
 - A. I am vocal that congregations need more full-time workers. Jerusalem had 12 in the apostles and Antioch had 5 (**Acts 13:1**). Having said this, some may get the wrong impression about the Jerusalem vision, thinking that it is about hiring the church's work out to professionals.
 - B. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Jerusalem vision is not about getting hired hands to do the work, but about having all hands working. The Jerusalem vision is realizing that as the church grows larger, there is more work needed. The Jerusalem vision is about getting everyone teaching (**Acts 8:4**) and ministering to one another (**Acts 2:44-47**). The Jerusalem vision is realizing that no one does everything, but everyone does something, and thus everything gets done.
- IV. The Jerusalem vision is not having 12 evangelists, but getting the workers that are needed.
 - A. When we see the work needed to make a church successful, we begin to realize that, while all hands are working, we need more full-time workers to be equippers and trainers in the gospel. This fits with the example set in **Ephesians 4:11-12**. We see examples of their work when the apostles described their duties in **Acts 6:4**. We see it when the five men in Antioch are called teachers in **Acts 13:1**. We also see it when Paul says he taught publicly and from house to house in Ephesus recorded in **Acts 20:20**. Hearing this, some people may think the Jerusalem vision is to have 12 evangelists.

- B. But that is not the vision. The vision is about getting the workers we need to accomplish the work we ought to be doing. Folks, let's face it. Our society has changed over the past fifty years. The work that can be accomplished by an evangelist, a handful of elders, and few volunteers has diminished. More women are working. Men are working more hours. Families are involved in more extra-curriculars. There is simply less volunteer time. Yes, every one of us must work in the church. But, as the pace of our society has increased, so has our need for full-time workers to train and equip workers and organize and implement the work. We need to be like Barnabas in **Acts 11:23-26**. He had the Jerusalem vision as he worked in Antioch. He saw that a worker was needed and he went and got the right man for the job. We need to do the same.
- V. The Jerusalem vision is not becoming a huge corporation, but becoming a closer-knit family.
 - A. We have learned that no one person or small group can do everything. There has to be a delegation and distribution of labor throughout the congregation (**Acts 6:1-6**). However, in pointing that out, some miss the Jerusalem vision. They hear this and envision people becoming more separated as they focus on individual assignments in a cold corporate behemoth.
 - B. That is not the Jerusalem vision. Read **Acts 2:41-47** and **4:32-37**—does that sound like a cold corporation to you? The Jerusalem vision is about drawing closer to the brethren to whom we can. The vision is about finding “family” in circles smaller than the entire congregation. The vision is about allowing relationships to be flexible so we do not develop cliques. When each of us follows this vision, pouring our strength, encouragement, and comfort into our circles of contact, everyone will be cared for. We may not be best friends with everybody, but everybody will have best friends. In this vision, fewer people fall through the cracks.
 - VI. The Jerusalem vision is not Communism, but sacrificing to make the church successful.
 - A. Many people read **Acts 4:34-37** and completely misunderstand the Jerusalem vision. They read this passage and think they see Communism. But that is not the vision at all. In the early church, people owned their own property and were in control of their own finances (**Acts 5:4**).
 - B. The Jerusalem vision is every member sacrificing to make the church successful. The Jerusalem vision is not only about giving money, however, but also giving time and talent. You can do many things with your time, but you need to make sure you allot time for the Lord's work. You can use your talents in many areas, but you must prioritize, using your abilities to serve your brethren and glorify God (**I Peter 4:10-11**). This church's victory depends on the willingness of each member to give freely and sacrificially of their time, treasure, and talent. What sacrifices have you made? What sacrifices do you need to make?
 - VII. The Jerusalem vision is not being problem free, but being committed to overcoming problems.
 - A. Because we talk so much about the Jerusalem church's success, some see the Jerusalem vision as being problem free. But the Jerusalem church had problems. In **Acts 3**, there was the persecution problem. In **Acts 5**, there was the hypocritical members problem. In **Acts 6**, there was the partiality problem. In **Acts 15**, there was the circumcision problem.
 - B. The Jerusalem vision is one of a church whose members are committed to overcoming problems. In each case mentioned above, the church overcame and grew stronger for it. Of course, they had no other place to go. We have numerous congregations in our area. Today, Christians get their feelings hurt or see something they don't like and their first response is often, “I will just change churches.” If a problem is unresolvable, there may be a time when a Christian has to make the painful decision to leave a congregation. But it should be a painful decision, not a vengeful or manipulative one. Additionally, the commitment to overcoming problems is more than staying at one congregation. The commitment is to be a part of the solution. Sometimes that means letting your way slide. Sometimes that means compromise. Sometimes that means having to talk to a brother or sister, even when you don't want to. Whatever it entails for any particular circumstance, the Jerusalem vision is one of a church whose members are devoted to overcoming problems.

Conclusion:

This is where I see us going and we will be an example of what it means to follow the biblical pattern. Our vision may be based on the Jerusalem church, but our vision is not about the past. Our vision is of the future. And God, working through us, will accomplish more than we ask or think (**Ephesians 3:20-21**).