

## Life Group Notes

Sunday 02 June 2019

**Speaker:** Josh & Sonia Betts

**Title:** What's on the Menu?

**Passage:** Acts 15:1-2, 4-14, 19-20

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As we have traced through the book of Acts we have seen how God was revealing himself to non-Jews – Gentiles – pouring out his Holy Spirit upon them. Philip sees multitudes joyfully believe in Samaria, Peter has his dramatic experience with Cornelius. A diverse church is formed in Antioch, and from that church Paul & Barnabas have taken their first missionary journey, seeing God move powerfully amongst the Gentiles in many cities. But there's a problem - "what does it mean to be a follower of Christ"? Jewish believers come to Antioch and begin to teach that for the Gentiles to become followers of Jesus, they must first become like Jews – be circumcised, follow the law of Moses. That made sense to them, because every Christian had been a Jew up to that point. How do you build a church where everyone is invited to take part and have a place? We have heard throughout this Invited series that this is God's plan for his church. The church in Antioch had a strong debate on this issue and agreed to bring the question to the apostles & elders in Jerusalem.

It was there that Peter speaks up on behalf of the Gentiles, that they should not have to bear the burden of the Law of Moses, as all are saved by grace – and God had already shown that the Gentiles were welcome by giving them his Holy Spirit, making no distinction between them and the Jewish believers. James makes a judgement on behalf of the church that the believers will need to compromise to make space at the table for each other – the Gentiles do not need to be circumcised like the Jews, but some of their cultural liberties are curbed in order to become part of their one faith in Jesus. From this historic decision in history of the church, we can learn three things about what should be 'on the menu' for us at Reading Family Church as we welcome everyone to the table:

### **1. Generosity, not Resentment**

When we are hurt, mistreated, overlooked, or have suffered historic marginalisation because of differences, we can begin to resent others that either were involved or represent to us those involved. This resentment can hold us back from welcoming others to the table wholeheartedly. However, we are saved by grace and therefore should extend this to others – having generous, open hearts to other's contributions.

### **2. Sharing, not Rejection**

When we do not courageously contribute to church life using our God-given gifts or passions, when we hold back from engaging with others, we are unintentionally reject them. We all 'lose out' if we do not include those who are different from us. Sharing requires compromise, leaving behind some of our preferences and embracing others - like a bring-and-share meal together.

### **3. Common Identity, not Differences**

It is easy to focus on differences, and even make value-judgements of people based upon differences. However, it is our common identity in Christ that truly brings us together. While celebrating and welcoming others that are different to us, we must also know that culture is not king. Our common identity in Christ is what matters. We need to be willing to give up deeply held cultural beliefs that contradict the gospel, or get in the way of the gospel. "Where cross and culture meet, culture must die".

### **Suggested Questions:**

1. Were there any of Sonia's experiences of arriving in a new culture you could identify with?

2. How can we overcome resentment in our hearts, instead being generous and gracious to those different to us?
3. Do you find it easy or hard to share in food, music, conversation styles (etc) that are different? What experiences have helped or hindered you?
4. What truths of our common identity in Christ particularly encourage or embolden you to engage joyfully with those different to you?