

Expectations- all combined

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[0 : 0 0] in Acts 15 we read at verse 5 there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed saying that it was needful to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses and we probably read that verse and we go here we go again Pharisees causing trouble as they do you know troubling Jesus and being a hassle and opposition to him and so on and what I want us to think about today is not so much all the troubles and fantasies but now to recognise loyalties and exceptions loyalties and exceptions now we are told of plenty of exceptions in the Bible we go back to Matthew chapter 1 and we read particularly amongst the women in the genealogy in Matthew chapter 1 genealogy of Jesus we read that in verse 5 Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab that is Rahab who is the the harlot of Jericho who was an outsider at Canaanite but who put her trust in the Lord and as a result of putting her trust in the Lord that primary loyalty that centre of the bullseye as we were looking at with the children there then from that of course our family would then be round about her and they would be brought up in the

Lord our new her country to which now she she gave you allegiance she'd be still living in the same country as she was before but it would be as it were under new management with the Israelites as opposed to the pagan Canaanites because she had put her trust in the Lord but Rahab was exceptional only Rahab and her immediate family were saved out of the hold of Jericho and its destruction if we go a little bit further down we find also that likewise Boaz himself begat Obed of Ruth that's the same verse and Ruth of course is a Moabitess a foreigner somebody who would have been brought up as a pagan but who likewise put her trust in the Lord and because she put her trust in the Lord likewise she reduced Obed perhaps other children too likewise her family her new country the circles of our loyalty expanded because the Lord is the centre of our loyalty she is exceptional in that sense just as Rahab is exceptional I want us to recognize here at verse 5 in Acts 15 it's not oh here we go troublesome Pharisees again but see what it says about them there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed these are believing Pharisees these are

Pharisees who have become Christians who by their very fact of joining themselves to the disciples have broken with all those previous ones who were the troublemakers and opponents to the Lord Jesus during the days of his earthly ministry the Pharisees of course as we know often caused trouble for the Lord in John 12 we read for example nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed in him they too were exceptional no doubt but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him lest they should be put out of the synagogue but these in Acts 15 although they're saying well yes we should circumcise any new converts and they should become Jewish before they become Christians this was a perfectly logical way of thinking at the time Jesus was sent as the Messiah of Israel and as long as all the believers in Jesus happened to be Jews there wasn't a difficulty the situation didn't arise it had never occurred to anyone before and it was perfectly logical that when Gentiles non-Jewish people began to become Christians that some people would think well of course they're going to be Christians Christianity is a Jewish phenomenon it's Israelite they have to become

Israelites first how can they possibly plug in to this great grace if they don't belong to us they have to become Jews of course they do it's the logical thing now we have to recognize that up to this point in Acts 15 it was not a fait accompli it was not automatic and recognized that Gentiles would be accepted as Christians on the same basis as Jews this is something that still had to be crashed out so as we see at verse 2 you know when Barnabas and Barnabas and certain other them had great dissension and disputation with them they determined that they should go up to Jerusalem and to the apostles and elders about this question and the apostles and elders spend Acts 15 debating and discussing what they should do it's not automatic it's not obvious like it is to us 2,000 years later but the thing I want us to recognize is that these in verse 5 are not simply troublemaking opponents like the old Pharisees that opposed Jesus even in those days there were those who believed in him we think of the likes of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea and others and so on who were Pharisees who believed in the Lord Jesus and Paul himself describes himself in Acts 23 and verse 6 when Paul perceived that one part was

Sadducees and the other Pharisees he cried out in the council men and brethren I am a Pharisee not I used to be a Pharisee not I once was but I am a Pharisee the son of a Pharisee of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question and when he had so said there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the multitude was divided but the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection neither angel nor spirit but the Pharisees confess both so the Pharisees Paul still describes himself as one of course here in Acts 23 these are they in verse 5 who have come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah but amongst all the Israelite nation they are a minority they are exceptional but we find that it's not just amongst the Pharisees that there are exceptions we just mentioned about the Sadducees and how they didn't accept there was any resurrection if they were going to believe in Jesus if any of them were going to come and acknowledge that Jesus was the

[6 : 21] Messiah of Israel they would have to believe they'd have to start believing that he had risen from the dead that would change their whole view of the world now we know that the chief priests and many of the priestly class were Sadducees because we're told in Acts 4 verses 1 and 2 they speak unto the people but as they speak unto the people the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them being grieved that they taught the people and preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead that's the big no-no for the Sadducees don't believe in any resurrection don't believe in any afterlife and again chapter 5 verse 17 then the high priest rose up and all they that were with him which is the sect of the Sadducees and were filled with indignation and laid their hands on the apostles and committed them to prison but turn a couple of pages what do you find in chapter 6 verse 7 and the word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith now of course it doesn't follow that all the priests were

Sadducees but it's certainly true that almost all the Sadducees were priests so when we have a significant number of priests believing in the Lord Jesus Christ then they are in a sense breaking with everything that their world has built up into being centered on the temple being centered on the priestly sacrifices of the animals the oxen the sheep the goats if they're believing in Jesus they are recognizing that although they might continue with these things the once and for all sacrifice has made these really just sort of like wallpaper like a decoration you know you can do them if you want but they don't they don't do you any good they're not a they're not a any any worth any power any merit in them as perhaps once they were if they were done in faith so the priests who recognize that Jesus is the Messiah become those who are prepared to face down their whole world as it was before and recognize that the temple has fulfilled its purpose the priesthood has fulfilled its purpose that these things are passing away and that takes a lot of courage and that means that the priests amongst the the believers a great number of the priests were obedient to the faith yes but how many priests were there over all there were thousands they are those who are believers like the Pharisees whether they have been Sadducees or not before these priests are now believing in Christ they are exceptional they have put Christ as their primary loyalty and all the other loyalties all the other conservative circles flow out from that of course in Jesus day there wasn't just the Pharisees and the Sadducees these are the ones of course that we we tend to hear about most often we we know that many of the Jews continued to be very zealous for the law as the Pharisees were remember when Paul came back to Jerusalem just before he ended up being arrested James who was himself a very devout Pharisee but humanly speaking leader of the church in

Jerusalem he spoke to Paul he said and they said to him you know thou seest brother how many thousands of Jews there are which believe this is in Jerusalem and they are all zealous of the law if they're not actually Pharisees they still believe that the law honors God and although Christ has come to fulfill the law doesn't mean just do away with it now we don't have to worry about that we can do what we like but rather they recognized that the law honored God it was else for the law and so not unlike Paul before they were of a Pharisee tendency but they were still believers but they were exceptional just like those in Acts 15 verse 5 the sect of the Pharisees which believed were exceptional those priests those Sadducees who became converted left behind their doubt and disbelief in the resurrection were exceptional there were other groups in Jesus day of course you know more politically motivated groups there was the zealots the zealots who were basically kind of terrorists who would go around assassinating Roman officials or soldiers or whatever it's probable that Barabbas was a zealot it says that he had taken part in an insurrection of course and that he had committed murder in the insurrection he was due to be crucified on the very day that Jesus took his place so the zealots were a kind of quasi terrorist group operating in Palestine at the time and they believed in the overthrow of the Roman authority by political military bloodshed means so you would think well those who think that they're not going to have much time for the Lord Jesus and his my kingdom is not of this world kind of doctrine they're not going to say knock down the other cheek go the second mile and all these other love your enemies were not really surely into all that the way you would think so but nevertheless we are we told about at least one amongst these zealots we're told in in Luke chapter 6 and verse 15 when Jesus begins to call his disciples to him we read of how it said that amongst them there was Luke chapter 6 verse 15 Simon called zealotes that means the zealot he had been one of these murderous gangs of quasi terrorists those who thought it was okay to murder Roman soldiers those who wanted the overflow by bloodshed of the Roman regime what on earth would they want with Jesus and we don't read of many zealots who were converted to follow Jesus but we do read of one Simon the zealot elsewhere he's referred to as Simon the Canaanite and again in Luke's Acts chapter 1 verse 13 is again referred to as Simon zealotes he's the zealot he is however in being converted from this bloodshed assassination type viewpoint this highly politicized if he was exceptional and there are others of a more political bent if we think for example of the Herodians those who were of Herod's court to love their lavish lifestyle total utter worldlings if you could say that the Sadducees were materialists and thought only in terms of this world and perhaps the money that the temple could bring in and so on at least their materialism had a kind of religious hinge to it a religious aspect to it the

Herodians didn't even have that they were complete total worldlings and all the more strange then that we find on occasion in Mark chapter 3 for example the Pharisees went forth and straightway to counsel with the Herodians against Jesus how they might destroy him now their their purposes if you like their viewpoint would be diametrically opposed the Pharisees and the Herodians would have had nothing to do with each other normally the Pharisees would be highly disciplined religious laymen seeking to keep the law in every detail they would be devoted to the Lord God in Israel the Herodians they might be Jewish but they were just just hanging around the king and his courtiers and for whatever luxury and pay and money and worldliness and indulgence to the flesh they could get out of it the Herodians were complete and total worldlings probably without a religious thought in their heads but the one thing they did have a vested interest in was maintaining the political status quo they wanted Herod to stay as king of his little bit or his little quarter of the kingdom that he still had so the

Pharisees going into league with the Herodians it's it's unimaginable in that context unless they had something that would unite them and we read again in Mark 12 verse 13 they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians to catch him in his words they must have been so united in their opposition to Jesus you know as I think I've used as an illustration in the past if you were to try and imagine the free Presbyterian synod going into some kind of alliance with the Kardashians it just it just isn't imaginable because it's so the one is so worldly and celebrity orientated and to do with this world and his money and fame and celebrity and all the shallow cheap glitz of it and the other devotedly faithful to their religious discipline so these two are like chalk and cheese and yet the Herodians you would think well not much hope of any Herodians following Jesus then and yet what do we find we turn to Luke chapter 8 and we find here that amongst the women who had who followed

[15 : 54] Jesus we'll just read from chapter 1 of verse 8 verse 1 of chapter 8 came to pass afterward that he went throughout every city and village preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God and the 12 of a with him and certain women which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities Mary called mad the one out of whom went seven devils and Joanna the wife of Cusa Herod's steward now that means basically his factor the one who's in charge of all his business his income and his outgoings the steward of Herod is the one his manager responsible for all his finances and his household and so on now if the one who is Herod's steward that is high up in King Herod's court his wife is a Christian then it is impossible for some of that influence not to be infiltrating into the steward's own life into Herod's own court remember that Herod himself had heard of Jesus and all that he did and at one level he was a bit frightened of him because he thought he was John the Baptist come back to life after he had executed John the Baptist and after Pilate sent him to him as we read in Luke's account of the gospel there he wanted to see him do some medical he thought he could entertain him in that way but here we have Herod's steward

Cusa his wife Joanna is following literally following Jesus around the country ministering to him and the disciples of her substance as is many Magdalene and other faithful and devout women Susanna and many others which ministered unto him of their substance you might think okay but that's that's not really a Herodian that's that's a wife of a Herodian you know how could you possibly have somebody who really had been you know steeped in the court of Herod who really was was imbibing all this worminess and luxury and celebrity status they're not going to become a Christian are they well we turn back a page or two from where our reading was to Acts 13 we read in verse 1 there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers as Barnabas and Simeon that was called Niger and Lucius of Cyrene and Manaen which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch and

Saul what this brought up with Herod the Tetrarch means it means that when Herod the Great was still on the throne and he was the king remember when Jesus was born and he ruled a long time so like 40 years he exercised his iron grip over the whole of Judea and Palestine so if his son Herod Antipas Herod the Tetrarch was being brought up he'd be brought up in a kingly court he'd be brought up by tutors and advisors and so on he'd be surrounded by all the the luxury and all the indulgence yes he'd live in fear of his life most of the time because he never knew what Herod the Great was going to do or who he was going to kill so each of his children would be living in fear he didn't think twice about murdering them or his wives or whatever the case may be but to be brought up with Herod the Tetrarch means to be brought up in a kingly court it means that you are a godian through and through it means that you are exposed to and steeped in the experience of the kingly court of the worthiness of the indulgence of the wealth and the celebrity status man Aaron which had been brought up with Herod the

Tetrarch was one of those regarded as prophets and teachers at Antioch. Remember where the disciples were first followed? Christians not only do you have the wife of Herod's steward being explicitly a follower of Jesus but a few years later here you have somebody brought up with Herod himself who is now a follower of Jesus to the extent he's regarded as a prophet and a teacher amongst those at Antioch but in all fairness they are exceptions there are exceptions amongst the Pharisees exceptions amongst the Sadducees exceptions amongst the Zealots exceptions amongst the Herodians there are even exceptions amongst those who actually put Jesus to death which is the Romans not the Jews as sometimes history attempts to kind of whitewash it and say oh yeah the Jews put Jesus to death no they didn't it was the Romans who put Jesus to death it was Romans who nailed him to the cross it was a Roman form of execution amongst the Romans as Peter says in the passage that we read in Acts 15 he's referencing what happens in chapter 10 when Cornelius the centurion sends for

Peter and asks him to declare the gospel and the Holy Ghost falls on Cornelius and those of the Gentile friends were gathered and God doesn't make a distinction between those who are Jewish and those who are Gentile he gives his Holy Spirit freely to all who will put in their trust and belief in him but amongst all the Roman centurions and all the Roman soldiers and all the Roman officials and governors and all the Roman officials and governors Cornelius is exceptional you might have those who like Festus and others might say you're almost of King Agrippa almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian but almost but not quite and yet we find in due course Paul writing to the Romans and saying chapter 1 verse 7 to all that be in Rome beloved of God called to be saints grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ that doesn't mean everyone in Rome is a Christian but it does mean that he is writing to those who are Christians in all the vastness of Rome now in our city congregations that we have and other denominations are big city congregations elsewhere you might think oh yeah great big congregations used to be a big powerful Anglican church in London but also London place and it would pack in sometimes two to three thousand people perhaps you know basically we filled with people watching a live link on the screen the church would be full you know like an hour before the service started and yes okay can make you a little bit jealous in the sanctified sense but I comforted myself in a former day of my previous charge with a tiny little gatherings of people out of a population of roughly a thousand we might get sort of 20 to 30 on and then I worked out the proportion of the people in the parish area I was ministering to who actually trailed along in my little congregation there and then he said well but you've got two to three thousand people in all so family but you've got eight million people in London so the proportion is tiny what seems like oh good big gathering the proportion is tiny and all that be in Rome that are Christians that Paul is writing to the proportion is tiny they are exceptional and yet there are exceptions writing to the Philippians in chapter 4 verse 22 Paul writes all the saints salute you chiefly they that are of Caesar's household remember he's writing from Rome where he is a prisoner and he says in chapter 1 how that all the palace verse 13 all the palace have heard of his bonds and of his witness and so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace and in all other places and many of the brethren in the Lord waxing confident by my bonds are much more bold to speak the word without fear the palace the praetorium the centre of Roman government that's where Paul is being held and the gospel is filtering out being gossiped out conversationally from him to others and all that are in Caesar's household there are those amongst the slaves or the servants or perhaps amongst the extended family of Caesar himself who have become Christians amongst the very people the Romans who put Jesus to death that are now by that stage believers but they are exceptional and I think well what is exceptional you know who isn't exceptional amongst those who would follow the Lord you might think well in this country surely being a Christian is sort of normal no it's not normal nowadays it's very abnormal and even in the days when we were perhaps more overtly a Christian country with Christian laws and Christian government and so on the number of actual believing Christians

[24 : 54] would still have been exceptional you see the point is that whether we are amongst the Pharisees which believed in verse 5 in Acts 15 here who are exceptional but these are the ones that are on the Lord's side these are the ones that on Jesus' side have believed in Christ have broken with their old condemning brethren or amongst the Sadducees or the Herodians or the Zealots or the Romans or the Scots or the English or the Irish or the Welsh or the French or the Germans or the Americans or whatever nation under heaven it may be amongst all the vastness of any nation any country in all their teeming millions those who will truly love Christ and believe in him as their saviour will be exceptions whether they are like Rahab the harlot from Jericho or whether Ruth the Moabitess who trusted under the shadow of the Lord's wings who put their faith in him and broke with all their old loyalties to build new

Christ-centered God-centered loyalties around which all the other circles of loyalty came to be built they are exceptional if we are in Christ friends you and I are exceptional you might think oh yeah but come on in a comparatively church-going Christian island I mean scalp be here okay how many people between here and the continuum on the hill how many people do you think are in church today how many people are believing Christians out of all the population of this island and that's before you start on Harris Lewis mainland Scotland how many are the Lord's people throughout our nation or islands or country they are each one exceptional we are by our very nature if we are in Christ whatever our background whatever our culture whatever our history there are plenty who can pay lip service to the cultural

Christianity of the church in the midst of government and guiding our laws and so on and yes putting our hand in the Bible when we take our oath in court or whatever it may be plenty who will swear to the goodness and positivity of that but how many will know and believe and trust in Christ as their personal saviour amongst all the king millions there will be few there will be exceptions the point is friends that whatever our condition in life and whatever we may be coming from whatever our background or our situation there's not the one of us that can say oh well that's that's not really for me you know it's all very well for people maybe who are brought up with it or people who are from an island background or even people who are native Scottish or Gaelic or whatever it might be you know that's their culture that's their background and so on are you really saying that everybody from that background will automatically be a Christian have you never heard the violent anti-Christian bigotry of some of the secular

Gaelic media and culture of some native Scottish people whose hatred for the gospel knows no balance have you never come across those who speak with spitting hatred of how they were made to go to church and how they were made to do the books at the fireside every evening and thank goodness they put that behind them are you serious as a gentleman that everyone from such a background has become a believing born again Christian no of course not each one who does is an act of God's free grace each one who does is not a confirmation of the godliness of their culture or historical background or native land they are each one exceptional you cannot say oh that's not for me because I'm not this kind of person I'm not that kind of person I'm not from that background I'm not from this background I didn't have this benefit or this upbringing so of course that's not for me

I'm from this place I'm who I am I'm a wanderer I don't fit anywhere I'm completely an outsider the bible is filled with outsiders who were exceptional and were brought into the fold of the lord's people as exceptions one after another after another what does exceptional mean simply means that we are each one unique unique in the eyes of god created individually with a unique soul a unique calling a unique opportunity a unique place prepared of the lord and to which we are invited which we may not end up picking up but if we don't somebody else we'll take it because this bus is leaving and you can either get on it and travel the journey or you just say oh no I can't really be bothered but it will go heaven will be fulfilled the day will dawn when the lord pronounces the end of time when the books are opened and time is at an end it will be fulfilled we'll either be there or we won't be but if we are it is because the lord has made an exception in our case whatever our background whatever our situation we cannot say oh well of course that doesn't apply to me because I'm english or because I'm jewish or because well

[30 : 41] I'm from a latin american background or because I'm irish or because I've got a different color of skin or because I speak a different language or whatever it might be the lord makes exceptions time and time and time again the very reason why the disciples are discussing things in acts 15 is because he has made exceptions and bringing in gentiles into the inheritance of this is you might think oh yeah but most christians are gentiles nowadays but yes but look at how diverse they are in their gentile condition there's not a single one saying I'm exactly like you I belong with this group because I'm exactly the same no you're not exactly the same there'll be so many things in which you differ so many things in which you have different opinions so many things in which you have a different viewpoint a different where you're coming from a different outlook a different being because we are each one exceptions Pharisees who believe Sadducees who are converted

Paulinians Zealots Romans Gentiles Jews whatsoever it may be each one exceptions you and I exceptions whatever your situation may be today the Lord is calling to an exceptional deliverance an exceptional life in Christ because all our loyalties and all our background and all that we have been exposed to and all that we are and all that we have allowed ourselves to become will be centred rightly when we hit the bullseye of the target and our life and our loyalties are centred in God himself and all the other circles filter out from that but they still have the same centre point because when we have Christ as the centre and soul of our loyalties all the other exceptional aspects of our life and every other believer who is called to follow the Lord fits into place because although each one is completely different and unique from every other each one has a place purpose and calling into which they fit perfectly this is the

God of exceptions this is the God who calls those who do not appear to fit anywhere in this world and if we think there's no place for me in this world there's no fitting in this world there's no place where I belong in this world it might just be because this world was never meant to be your home because you are an exception just like me bless you God of God of good pé