

On their first missionary journey, God used Paul and Barnabas to open the way of faith, and salvation, to the Gentiles. Many of these Gentiles had no ties to Judaism. They received forgiveness of their sins, and were sealed with the Holy Spirit, without having the demands of Jewish law, in order for them to continue in their faith.

This was a huge development, and one that would test the hearts of the Jewish Christians. The Jews were God's chosen people. God gave them the law, and obedience to the law was central to their faith. Parents instilled these beliefs in the children from a very early age. The concept of Gentiles becoming God's chosen people, apart from Jewish faith was inconceivable to them.

Yet the testimony of key church leaders, the evidence of the Holy Spirit, miracles, and changed lives, all came into agreement so that the church understood that this was a movement from God and one that they had to accept. Some of the Jewish Christians remained trapped in their dogma. The Jews, who did not receive Jesus as their Messiah, continued to oppose Paul, as well. In spite of this opposition, that continues throughout the remainder of the book of Acts, the gospel message continued to spread, even as it does today.

At the end of the first missionary journey, there was a season of rest, and encouragement for the missionaries, and the church. After some time passed, God put into Paul and Barnabas' heart to strike out again. In tonight's passage we will read of the beginnings of what we now call the second missionary journey. Let's see what lessons we might learn from our passage this evening, as we read together, Acts 15:36-41.

The first thing we notice in this passage is Paul's concern for the people in the newly founded churches. Here we see an evangelist with a Pastor's heart. Paul wants to make sure that the devil does not trip up these Christians who are still relatively immature in their faith. They do not have to submit to the law of Moses, but they must live up to God's moral code, in order to grow in their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and to flourish in their new-found faith. They needed further instruction and discipleship.

Even as many of the Jews were trapped in dogma, because they were taught certain things all of their life, many of the Gentiles were completely pagan before their conversion. They might be true believers, but practice things, unknowingly, that were opposed to the will of God. Today a person who comes to Jesus, but lacks the foundation of a biblical worldview, will be met with many challenges. They may not understand the biblical principles that guide Christians in their walk with the Lord. This is one of the reasons why church membership is so important. Everyone who hopes to grow in his or her relationship, with the Lord, needs the instruction and encouragement that may be found in a biblically solid church family.

Paul's plans are to retrace their steps on the first missionary journey, to go back to all the places where they ministered, and started new churches. As we will see as we work through chapter 16, God had other plans for Paul. It is good when we make plans to advance the kingdom of God, but the events, as they unfold in the book of Acts, remind us that we must be open to the Holy Spirit, and discerning about God's will. We are most blessed when everything we do is centered on God's revealed will. Even when we invest heavily in one area, if God reveals that He desires for us to do something else, we have to be willing to change directions.

The idea of revisiting the churches seemed like a good idea to Barnabas. In fact, the bible suggests that this is exactly what Barnabas did. Paul, on the other hand, decided to go in the opposite direction, because he and Barnabas had a big fight. The Greek word used, which is here

translated as “sharp disagreement,” suggests a heated argument where they provoked one another to anger. Some suggest that this means that they nearly got into a fistfight over their disagreement.

Here we have the two principle subjects, at this point in the book of Acts, two of the most prominent men in the church, who can't get along. They are unable to reconcile, so they split up and go separate ways. I love the fact that the bible is brutally honest. I am encouraged to know that these great men of God struggled in their flesh, whenever I struggle in mine.

Disagreements sometimes arise in the church today. God's word instructs us on how to deal with others, and how to discipline ourselves, when there is a strain in our relationships. I find that, almost always, if we handle disagreements biblically, and we are godly in the way we treat, and talk to, one another, we can enjoy harmony with our brothers and sisters, in spite of any disagreement, or misunderstanding.

On the other hand, if we allow our pride, and emotions, to rule us, we are likely to go off in a huff, and break fellowship with one another. I cannot count the number of people, who over the years, have gotten mad about something, and left the church, rather than trying to get things right. Many of them left, and to this day, I still do not know what upset them. If any of you ever get upset with me, please come and talk to me, and give me a chance to make things right, before you leave the church.

Paul and Barnabas argued about whether or not to take John Mark with them on the journey. John Mark was Barnabas' cousin, who started out with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but he did not finish the work. For whatever reason, he returned home about the same time that the disciples began to face greater opposition. Barnabas saw great potential in John Mark and wanted to take him along, but Paul did not think he was up to the demands of their mission. Barnabas saw him as an asset, and felt the mission would help him to grow. Paul refused to allow him to come with them, suggesting that he thought John Mark lacked spiritual maturity, and would abandon them again when things got tough.

Who is to say who was right, or who was wrong? The bible does not tell us. What we do know is that they went their separate ways, and God used both of them to advance His kingdom. To my way of thinking, this event gives us insight to the personality of these two men. Barnabas, who is called the son of encouragement, comes across as forgiving and compassionate. Paul comes across as stern and uncompromising. Barnabas takes John Mark, and they go on the planned journey to minister to, and encourage the churches, as Paul originally suggested. Paul, on the other hand, takes Silas, heads in the opposite direction, and struggles. He can't seem to get things going. Everywhere he goes, the Holy Spirit keeps him from effectively sharing the gospel. He appears aimless in his ministry, until God gives him a vision to evangelize what is modern day Europe.

I think that it is important for us to recognize that in time Paul and Barnabas reconciled their differences. Paul speaks favorably of Barnabas in 1 Corinthians and in Colossians. In 1 Peter, Peter speaks of John Mark as his son, in the faith. Mark goes on to write the gospel of Mark, probably based on what he learned, first hand from Peter, about the life and ministry of Jesus. Also in 1 Peter, Silas, called there Silvanus, is Peter's amanuenses, that is his secretary that wrote down the words dictated by Peter. Silas becomes Paul's primary partner in ministry, along with Timothy, who is introduced in the passage next time.

While Barnabas, the son of encouragement, goes back to Cyprus, and probably back up into Galatia with John Mark, to encourage the churches, Paul and Silas go through Syria and Cilicia, to the region East of Galatia, to encourage the churches in those areas. Notice that Paul

begins his second missionary journey encouraging churches not started by him. Sometimes when we read through the New Testament, and especially the book of Acts, it is easy to think that Paul single handedly evangelized the whole world. While I do not want to diminish the importance of Paul's ministry, God worked through many people to spread the gospel. The churches visited by Paul in these new regions probably already existed before the first missionary journey.

Think back to the account of the stoning of Stephen in chapter 7. After that time a great persecution broke out that scattered the believers, and everywhere they went, they shared the good news of the gospel with the people with whom they came into contact. There was already a large and thriving church in Antioch when Barnabas first went to Tarsus to get Paul. We focus on Paul and his ministry because he is the focus of so much of the New Testament Scriptures. But, God used all of the people mentioned in His word, and many, many, others that are not mentioned, to spread the gospel.

God works the same way today. He uses people who are always in the spotlight, but he also uses people who seem to be always in the background. God blessed Billy Graham's ministry to reach more people for Christ than any other person in my lifetime, but he uses pastors, churches, and the personal witness of all Christians, to share the gospel with countless others. An evangelist may preach a revival, which produces many decisions, but the local church takes the responsibility for nurturing, and disciplining, those new believers.

So what are we to take from all of this? God has a plan and a purpose for all of our lives, and the best that any of us can do is to embrace God's specific will, as He reveals it to us. We should also understand that there will sometimes be disagreements among brothers and sisters in Christ. Within a church body, there will be some personality conflicts. Sometimes people get mad and they go and do their own thing. The ideal is that we live in peace, and work together to the glory of God, but even when we miss the mark, God still has a plan and a purpose for our lives, and in time we should be able to come back together in the love of Christ.

This is the last time we will read of Barnabas in the book of Acts. From here on out the focus is on Paul and his ministry. Silas takes Barnabas' place in partnering with Paul. In chapter 16, we will be introduced to Timothy, who also becomes a key figure in Paul's ministry. In verse 11 we will find a subtle clue that Luke, the author of Acts, also joins the missionary team, and from that point on gives us his first hand eyewitness account of all of the things that happened. After struggling for some time, God gives them a vision to evangelize on the European continent. Every place they go, they share the gospel message. This is the same gospel message we share today.

In fulfillment of the Scriptures, at just the right time, God sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. Jesus was God in the flesh. He lived as a man, and experienced life as we do. He knew happiness and joy, but He also knew the depths of sorrow in His soul. He was omnipotent, and omniscient, He commanded the wind and the waves and they obeyed. Jesus knew other people's thoughts, and their life history. He healed the sick and raised the dead. Jesus came for the purpose of sacrificing Himself for our sins.

By His own authority and will, He laid down His life by submitting to a Roman Cross, but arose again on the third day. He showed Himself alive to hundreds if not thousands of people, over a period of many weeks. He ascended into heaven where He makes intercession for all who believe. He is coming again to take all who belong to Him, to be with Him forever.

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. If there are any here who have not yet trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord, this can be the night of your salvation. Confess your sins to God and receive

Jesus into your heart. For those of us who already belong to Him, let us live for Him and in Him. Let us stay busy doing the work He has called us to do while we still have time.