

Introduction

1. Our passage today is probably one of the shortest in the book of Acts
2. When I come to such a short passage, my first reaction is to see if there is a way to simply include it with the passage before or after it
3. However, there's enough in these six verses to keep us busy this morning and it really can stand on its own
4. I believe there are some principles we can draw out of the passage that will serve us well

A. Paul and Barnabas began with good intentions (15:36)

1. Paul and Barnabas have been back at their home church in Antioch after their first missionary journey, but after some time Paul proposes another journey:
 - a. On their first journey, Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel in at least 8 different cities and saw both Jews and Gentiles come to faith in Jesus Christ
 - b. Paul now wanted to go back to those cities and see how the new disciples were doing (READ 15:36)
 - c. If you remember, this was similar to what they did on the first journey when instead of following the shortest and fastest path home, they went back through the cities to strengthen and encourage the new disciples and appoint elders to care for them (Acts 14:21-26)
2. Paul's desire to revisit the churches shouldn't surprise us because, as we learned when we studied Acts 14, the Lord's mission to His Church isn't just evangelism, it's discipleship:
 - a. Paul was certainly an evangelist, but he wasn't satisfied with that
 - b. We see his commitment to discipleship here, when he revisited the churches on his first journey, in nearly all of his epistles, and in his relationships with his traveling companions
 - c. Some of the most prominent leaders in the early church were personal disciples of Paul: Timothy, Titus, Silas, Epaphroditus, Epaphras, Euodia, Syntyche, Clement, Aristarchus, Demas, and over 25 other individuals he names in Romans
 - d. Some believe that Luke was mentored and disciples by Paul, which is certainly possible since he traveled with him
3. It's clear that Barnabas was on board with Paul's plan because in the very next verse he's ready to go
4. What could possibly go wrong?
 - a. They shared a desire to encourage the churches
 - b. They were committed to another journey
 - c. They were apparently even united in their courage because they were ready to go back to cities where they faced opposition, were threatened, and in Paul's case almost killed
 - d. What could go possibly go wrong

B. Well, something did go wrong and it led to Paul and Barnabas going separate ways (READ 15:37-38)

1. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark along on this second journey

2. However, Paul **“kept insisting”** against it:
 - a. If you remember, back in Acts 13:13 we learned that John Mark had gone with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but early in the trip he left them and went back to Jerusalem (REREAD 13:13)
 - b. This may not seem like a big deal, and Luke doesn’t suggest that it was in 13:13, but consider this
 - c. The first missionary journey encompassed 1400 miles of travel and would have taken anywhere from 4 to 10 months
 - d. Their first stop was the island of Cyprus where they had preached in the two most important cities, but as soon as they left the island to begin the most difficult part of the journey, John Mark left—they still had 90 percent of the journey ahead of them!
 - e. This may be why Paul refers to him as one **“who had deserted them”** and **“had not gone with them to the work.”**
 - f. In his letters, Paul refers to his traveling companions as **“fellow workers”** and that’s what they were:
 - 1) He wasn’t a tour guide
 - 2) He was an evangelist and teacher and his traveling companions were his co-ministers upon whom he depended
 - 3) John Mark failed in that regard and left Paul and Barnabas to complete the journey on their own, something they hadn’t planned up
3. So, this put Paul and John Mark at odds:
 - a. It appears that Paul’s primary motive was that he didn’t feel they could rely upon John Mark to not abandon them again (where the NASB says, Paul “kept insisting” it’s more literally, **“Paul was considering it [or more likely him] unworthy to take along with them the one who had departed from them...”**)
 - b. On the other hand, Barnabas **“was desirous of taking”** John Mark:
 - 1) This may have been due to the fact that John Mark was Barnabas’ cousin
 - 2) It may have also been that Barnabas was more willing to give him a second chance; after all, he was known as the Son of Encouragement and even gave Paul a chance when none of the other disciples or Apostles would
 - c. The word that Luke uses to describe their disagreement (**“sharp disagreement”**) is a word that refers to the stirring of emotions in both a positive or a negative way:
 - 1) It’s used positively in Hebrews 10:24: **“let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds”**
 - 2) Here, however, it is used in a negative way and suggests the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas was severe and enough to stir up their emotions
 - 3) It was so severe that they decided to part and go their own ways (READ 15:39-41)
4. This is the last time we see Barnabas or John Mark in the book of Acts because the rest of Acts focuses on Paul’s ministry:
 - a. In many respects, Luke leaves us hanging;
 - 1) It’s like that TV series that ends with a jaw-dropping season finale cliffhanger, only to be cancelled before the next season begins!
 - 2) Can you imagine the panic that would have ensued if Dallas would have been cancelled after season 3? We STILL wouldn’t know who killed JR! (it was his sister-in-law, Kristen, by the way)

- 3) Aren't you just dying to know what happened to the relationship between Paul and Barnabas?
- b. Luke's cliffhanger here might even leave some of us feeling a bit unnerved:
- 1) Here we have two amazing men of God, Apostles and pillars of the Church:
 - a) One is considered to be the greatest of all the Apostles, responsible for evangelizing much of the known world at the time, and author of nearly half our New Testament
 - b) The other was nick-named Son of Encouragement and known for his compassion
 - 2) They ministered together under the most treacherous and dangerous conditions, facing incredible opposition, persecution, threats against their lives
 - 3) But, in spite of all this, they can't seem to agree and go their separate ways—all over a single, emotional disagreement
 - 4) Some scholars refer to this episode as an embarrassment for the Church with comments like:
 - a) Didn't Paul have something to say about such things when he wrote to the Ephesians: **"Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."** (Ephesians 4:1-3)
 - b) Where was the humility, gentleness, and patience toward one another other here? Where was the attempt at preserving unity? Didn't they practice what they preached?
 - 5) I disagree:
 - a) Certainly, we understand that Paul and Barnabas were human with their own thoughts and opinions on the best way to accomplish the mission God gave them
 - b) There's nothing in this passage that suggests there was any sin on Paul's or Barnabas' behalf—they simply had a strong disagreement and parted ways
 - c) To assume Paul and Barnabas had such a major falling out here that they never spoke again or harbored feelings of resentment toward one another is just that, an assumption
 - d) In fact, Paul's reference to Barnabas in 1 Corinthians 9:6 (which was written some time after this event) would suggest otherwise
- c. The question you might be asking is, Why did Luke include this episode in Acts? I personally think the answer is pretty easy: he included simply to explain why Barnabas wasn't with Paul in the rest of Acts

C. So, is there anything we can learn from this?

1. First, Paul and Barnabas didn't disagree on the MISSION, only the best MEANS to accomplishing that mission...and that's okay:
 - a. Paul believed he needed reliable co-workers and he was right—the work was hard, exhausting, dangerous and he felt John Mark wasn't up to the task
 - b. Barnabas was compassionate and an encourager and believed John Mark deserved another chance and he was right

- c. Being committed to the same purpose or mission doesn't mean we have to agree on the same means or method to accomplish it; it's okay to disagree, and even go separate ways
 - d. In fact, it appears that sometimes that's God's plan and I believe it was here
 - e. We sometimes fall prey to the false notion that as believers we must never have disagreements or our way is the only way to do something
2. Second, God used the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas to further the Gospel in different parts of the world:
- a. Barnabas went back home to Cyprus with John Mark where they continued working together side-by-side for the next decade:
 - 1) Most historians attribute the rise of Christianity on Cyprus directly to Barnabas
 - 2) According to tradition, his tremendous success among both Jews and Gentiles is what led to his death—the Jews having been so enraged at his success that they attacked him in the synagogue, tortured and then killed him in AD 61
 - 3) Tradition also holds that John Mark was still by his side and responsible for burying him
 - 4) With Barnabas' focus on discipleship and not just evangelism (we saw this in Acts 11 at Antioch), it's no surprise that even after his death the church on Cyprus continued its exponential growth, so much so that in just the next two hundred years or so it had essentially reshaped society
 - 5) Even today, almost 80 percent of the population identifies as Christian (mostly Greek Orthodox) and refer to Barnabas as their patron saint
 - b. Paul, along with Silas, went in the opposite direction:
 - 1) They initially traveled through Syria and Cilicia (where Paul's home was in Tarsus)
 - 2) From there they continued west into Galatia where they re-visited the churches from Paul's and Barnabas' first journey in order to encourage and strengthen them
 - 3) They then proceeded into Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia—all new territory unreached by the Gospel
 - 4) We know from the rest of Acts, and Paul's epistles, the tremendous success Paul and his co-workers had in spreading the Gospel and building the Body of Christ
 - c. So, just as we've seen God use the opposition and persecution against the early Church to push the Gospel further out into the world, we see Him use the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas to do the same thing
 - d. Sometimes he does the same things with our disagreements or different approaches to ministry; He uses them to accomplish His purpose and plan for the Gospel (e.g. for instance, Renew Bible Church wouldn't be here had it not been for disagreements some of us had with the leadership at our prior churches)
3. There's a third thing we can learn from this but it's not immediately apparent in this passage, and it has to do with John Mark and Silas:
- a. John Mark was given an opportunity at redemption and prove himself a worthy and reliable co-worker; something he apparently failed miserably at the first time
 - 1) Had Paul gotten his way, and he and Barnabas departed without John Mark, he might never have been given that opportunity
 - 2) Barnabas and his reputation for compassion and encouragement was apparently precisely what John Mark needed

- 3) As we've learned already, he spent the next decade ministering side-by-side with Barnabas on Cyprus and was even there at his death
 - 4) It appears that over that time he grew and matured into a faithful and reliable helper
 - 5) In fact, at some point, he and Paul reunited and he became a valuable and trusted traveling companion and co-worker to Paul, so much so that when he was in prison in Rome shortly before his death, he wrote to Timothy and asked him to bring John Mark to him writing, **"Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is a great help to me in ministry."** (2 Timothy 4:11)
 - 6) John Mark's story is one of growth, maturity, and second chances
- b. Silas was also given a chance to step up and matured under Paul's mentorship:
- 1) He became one of Paul's most trusted co-workers on his second missionary journey
 - 2) He is mentioned by Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:9 and co-authored the letters of 1 and 2 Thessalonians
 - 3) Peter even mentions him as the one whom he entrusted to deliver his first letter to the persecuted Jews living in the diaspora (1 Peter 5:12)
 - 4) Little else is known about Silas from church history and tradition aside from the possibility that he may have become a leading figure at Corinth