

## Him Who Withdrew

"The Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2)

Saul and Barnabas had already established a working relationship before they set out on this work: Saul, having obeyed the Lord some ten years prior, is associated with Barnabas in Acts 9:26-30, when he took Saul "and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way." Following which, Saul was "sent forth to Tarsus." After spending some time there, (Acts 11:22, 25-26) Barnabas, "went forth to Tarsus to seek for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch.

And it came to pass, that even for a whole year they were gathered together with the church, and taught much people." They also journeyed together when the elders "by the hand of Barnabas and Saul" sent relief to the brethren in Jerusalem. It was on the return from this work that they brought with them John Mark (Acts 12:25).

Thus, having been commanded by the Holy Spirit to go forth and fulfill the work committed to their charge (Acts 14:26), they took John Mark and set out on their journey.

We may miss a great deal if we fail to realize the dangers associated with this journey. We live in a society where the danger we face when on a journey is usually associated with weather or road hazards. Such is not the case when traveling by foot. The apostle gives us an indication of the perils associated with his work in Second Corinthians 11:25-28 when he said, "Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from my countrymen, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in labor and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, there is that which presseth upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches."

Saul and Barnabas had to deal with many obstacles. If it was not simply a matter of going forth and preaching the gospel; if that's all there were to it then preaching the gospel, and serving the Lord, wouldn't have a "downside" of any consequence. But we find in First Thessalonians 2:14-16, that opposition follows those who profess belief in God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: "For ye, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judæa in Christ Jesus: for ye also suffered the same things of your own countrymen, even as they did of the Jews; who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove out us, and please not God, and are

contrary to all men; forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved." Thus, in Second Timothy 3:12, "Yea, and all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." With these dangers and opposition in mind we can, at least mentally, understand some apprehension that may accompany such an endeavor. But, nonetheless, Saul, Barnabas and, at the least, John Mark, set out on this perilous journey.

As they journeyed, we find that John Mark "departed from them and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13)." We are not told why he did, nor any reaction Saul may have had to his departure, only that he had so done. At least nothing until preparations were made for the second journey when Paul (Saul) and Barnabas determine to "visit the brethren in every city wherein we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they fare" (15:36-39). It was upon this occasion that "Barnabas was minded to take with them John also, who was called Mark. But Paul thought it not good to take with them him who withdrew from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work." Paul's objection was so severe "there arose a sharp contention, so that they parted asunder one from the other." These men, who had endured hardships and danger, are now "parted asunder one from the other" over the failure of another to "step up to the plate," so to speak, when he would have been beneficial "to the work." Nothing is said as to why Mark did what he did. Whether it be inconvenient, fear, or self-abasement. Whatever it was, Paul had set his face toward a goal, a goal requiring sacrifice and endurance and John Mark had failed to finish what he started.

There is a lot of work to be done in the kingdom of our Lord. As citizens of that kingdom, we are called upon to take our place in the battle (First Timothy 6:12); to "step up to the plate" and do our part. Sure, there are times in which we will find it inconvenient. Times in which we must face fear. Times in which we feel ourselves to be lacking in character and ability. But brethren, if you don't do it, who will?

I have often wondered, would Paul have taken me with him to fulfill the work? ret