

Sermon: Dealing With Disagreement

Text: Acts 15:36-41

Introduction:

I began this series on Paul's second missionary journey out of Acts 15-18 several weeks ago—and the very first point I made in that first message of the series was: **These are REAL stories of things that REALLY happened that make REAL sense involving REAL people.** In other words, what we're reading out of the Book of Acts isn't "doctored up" quasi-historical accounts of things that might have happened...or might NOT have happened (which, sadly, is what most people think is the case with respect to the Bible).

So how do we know that these things really happened exactly the way that they are recorded?

I could go on and on with proofs that defend that authenticity of Scripture. But one of the most obvious proofs is that fact that Dr. Luke (the man who wrote the Book of Acts) makes no effort whatsoever to "clean up" or put into good light the events as they occurred. In other words—he tells us exactly what happened, warts and all. Luke doesn't leave out the "bad parts." He doesn't try to make Paul—or Barnabas—or Mark—appear better than they really were. These were flesh-and-blood men who had egos and struggles and fears just like you and me. They were called and led by God, but this doesn't mean that they were perfect.

I can't think of a passage in Scripture where this is more obvious than in our text for this morning. I told you part of the story last Sunday. Paul and Barnabas were commissioned by the church in Antioch to launch out on their first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). They took with them Barnabas' younger cousin, a (likely) teenager named John Mark (the "John" was eventually dropped—and Mark went on to write the Gospel that bears his name). We're not sure why, but Mark basically quit the team early on in the trip and went back home to Jerusalem.

That's all well and good, except the fact that Paul and Barnabas are now planning to head out on a second missionary journey—and Barnabas insists on giving his younger cousin Mark a second chance (which isn't surprising since the name "Barnabas" literally means "Son of encouragement"). Paul doesn't think this is a good idea, and flat-out refuses to do this.

We'll explore this further in our discussion questions—but the point of this introduction is to call our attention to the fact that Luke records things exactly as they happened. Simply put...things got ugly. They got really heated. This was a serious disagreement, that led to these two very godly men parting ways and going two different directions.

Like I said, Luke makes no effort to hide this. He just tells us the way it was. Which, in a roundabout-sort-of-way is rather encouraging. I have to believe that later on in their lives, Paul and Barnabas regretted the way things happened. They weren't proud of their actions. Which brings to mind several questions:

- When you think about your life, are there things in your past that you deeply regret?
- How does it make you feel knowing that Paul let the situation get the better of him?
- Why do you think the Bible includes these "not so flattering" stories of conflict?

Examination:

- Read **Acts 15:22-35**
 - This passage comes right on the heels of the major debate that took place at what is now called “The Jerusalem Council” regarding whether a person must become “Jewish” (adhere to all of the laws of Moses in the Old Testament) before they can become a Christian. The issue was settled (the answer was “no”), and a letter was written for Paul and Barnabas to take with them as they continued their mission to take the Gospel to gentiles. Who are the two men chosen to accompany Paul and Barnabas with the letter (v. 22)? What do we learn about these men?
 - Summarize the letter that was written. (vv. 24-29)
 - Why do you think that these four “requirements” were added?
 - What more do we learn about Silas in verse 32?

- Read **Acts 15:36-41**
 - What was the initial idea behind setting out on a second missionary journey? (v. 36) Whose idea was it? What does this tell us about Paul’s heart for the churches that had been planted?
 - According to Colossians 4:10, John Mark and Barnabas are cousins. And according to Acts 4:36-37, “Barnabas” was actually a nickname given to a Jewish man named Joseph who was from the island of Cyprus. Further, we’re told that “Barnabas” means “Son of Encouragement.” Putting these things together, why do you think Barnabas WANTED to take John Mark with them on this trip? What do you suppose he was thinking?
 - What was Paul’s reaction to this idea? (v. 37) What was his reason?
 - Drill down on this a bit more. Why do you think that Paul viewed desertion as a “strike one and you’re out” offense? How difficult did things get on the first missionary journey (see Acts 14:19-20)? What was the level of “spiritual opposition that was faced on the first missionary journey (see Acts 13:6-11)? What did Jesus tell Paul that he would face in his ministry (see Acts 9:15-16)? Why did Paul have such a “hard stance” on not quitting?
 - There is a lot going on in verse 39. The Greek word for “sharp disagreement” (NIV) that Luke uses is the word “*paroxysmos*.” From this Greek word we get our English word “*paroxysm*,” which means: “A sudden attack or violent expression of a particular emotion or activity.” The Message Translation (MSG) of the Bible translates this verse with the words “tempers flared.” I think it’s fair to say that things got a little ugly. According to the latter part of verse 39—how ugly did they get? What came of this “flare up”?
 - What happened as a result of this parting of ways? What are your thoughts on this? Do you think that God “had a hand” in this?

Application:

The bottom line is that God uses broken, imperfect, emotional people to accomplish His perfect plans. The Bible doesn’t say that Paul was right—nor does it say that Barnabas was right. What it IS saying is that both were HUMAN. Believe that God can use you, warts and all.