

Breaking up is Hard to Do - Acts 15:36-41
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

Simon and Garfunkel were not supposed to part ways. We know that Molina and Wainwright are together until the end. Batman and Robin have to stay together. Paul and Barnabas were also a tandem that seemed to be matched forever. Their story together is amazing. We meet Barnabas early in the story of Acts, as he sells a significant piece of property and lays the proceeds at the Apostle's feet for the care of the poor. His name (actually this is his nickname, his given name was Joseph) means the encourager, and this he was. Paul's entrance into the story of Acts has him standing over the first Christian martyr giving approval, and he then becomes the lead persecutor of the church. Yet, he is radically saved and changed when he has a vision of Jesus. But this would be difficult for others to believe, so it is Barnabas who grabs Paul and brings him to the fearful Apostles for an introduction. Later, Paul and Barnabas are together in Antioch, part of the leadership of a growing and diverse church. The church in Antioch sends them out on a crazy missionary journey. They go throughout large sections of modern day Turkey preaching Jesus and planting churches. They have both success and persecution. At one point they are called Greek gods together (there must have been some funny teasing of each other after this), and they are together when Paul gets stoned and left for dead. And then they stand side by side in front of the entire Jerusalem church to defend the essence of the Gospel together against the Judaizers before the Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem. They had been through so much together, no way they break up.

I think if I had been Luke I would have found a way to skip our story from Acts this week, or at least spin it positive. I might have shared how they believed it better to multiply their ministry so they could reach more people. Or that Barnabas felt the call to go to his homeland of Cyprus and Paul felt called to Galatia. But like virtually all inspired writers of Scripture, Luke does not skip the difficult stuff that shows the flaws and warts of the key Biblical characters. Paul and Barnabas get into a fight that ends with them breaking up and going their separate ways. At the center of the conflict is a young leader named John Mark (we will call him Mark). Mark's mother was the hostess of a house church in the city of Jerusalem, so he was acquainted with the Gospel and probably became a believer early in life. He is also Barnabas's cousin (Colossians 4:10). So Mark joins Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. But half-way through, just as things are getting difficult on the mission, Mark leaves the team and goes home. Now it is time for the dynamic duo to leave again.

I get both sides of the conflict here. These are two men who deeply desire to see the Gospel advance to the nations, to see people saved and churches planted everywhere. Mark's abandonment on their first journey had definitely hurt their mission and probably wounded these men. Paul, the big picture, charge the hill at any cost missionary strategist saw the lostness of the nations and the size of the task. There was no room for babysitting a homesick person on this journey. He left them once, and as far as Paul is concerned, that was once to many when the task is so important. On the other hand, Barnabas is the encourager, the people person. I can imagine him looking at Paul and saying, "Dude, everyone deserves a second chance. Of all people, you ought to know that, because your second chance came after you were a murderer of my friends in Christ." He could see the hopeful potential in this young leader and wanted this trip to offer redemptive discipleship for Mark. Who is right? To be honest, the disagreement is not as easy to choose sides as you might think. For these men, it turns into a significantly heated argument resulting in a breakup of the most famous missionary tandem in church history. Barnabas leaves for Cyprus with Mark. Paul grabs Silas and heads to Galatia. In the end, two missionary teams does mean more people reached and a multiplication of the mission. Yet the way they got to this point is heart breaking.

Conflict happens in the church, and often it comes from an angle not expected. When these things happen we should work toward unity around the Gospel and mission and love for each other. The general rule should be that we work things out and move forward as brothers. Yet there are times when parting ways is the best way forward. I am sure these departures came with lots of tears for these two men, and some bewilderment for the church in Antioch. Yet, we know that God used it, and that the stories do not end here. While Barnabas does not show up in the story of Acts, we know that he and Paul were reunited because of Paul's writings (Colossians 4:10, 1 Corinthians 9:6). Paul's mission with Silas is incredibly successful, as we will learn in coming weeks. As for Mark, well his story ends well too. He is reunited with Paul and is so important for him near the end of Paul's life (Philemon 24, 2 Timothy 4:11). He also joins up with the Apostle Peter reaching people in the capital city of Rome. And Mark hears Peter preach the Gospel over and over again. It is from this that the Holy Spirit inspires Mark to record the Gospel witness for us, which we have in the Gospel of Mark. So the final point is this, even when conflict happens, we must trust Jesus with both the mission and relationships. He takes our failures and accomplishes His glorious will, even in our separations.

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

| Sun | Mon | Tues | Weds | Thurs | Fri | Sat |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Jonah 2 | Jonah 3 | Jonah 4 | Micah 1 | Micah 2 | Micah 3 | Micah 4 |

Reading from this past week: Acts 15:36-41

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Acts 15:36-41

Family Worship

Song - *Act Justly, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly*

<https://youtu.be/dk7llf2LkKc>

Gospel Project

Unit: The People Disobey

Story: Jeroboam disobeyed God

Big Picture Question: What is idolatry?

Answer: Idolatry is a sin of the heart in which we love and value something else above God.

Scripture: 1 Kings 12-13

New City Catechism

Question #36: What do we believe about the Holy Spirit?

Answer: That he is God, coeternal with the Father and the Son.

Verse: John 14:16-17

Scripture

Acts 15:36-41

- Which side of the Paul/Barnabas argument over John Mark do you find yourself agreeing?
- Have you ever been involved or seen a conflict in a church that turned into a fight?
- What are some ways we can resolve conflict in a manner that honors Jesus?

Prayer

*Pray that our church would fight for unity and learn how to deal with conflict with grace and peace.

*Give thanks for your jobs and pray that you would honor job with the work that you do.