

Moving on from disagreement – Acts 15:36-41 – Richard Green – 12/03/17

Questions

1. Read again Acts 15 especially v36-41. Have you ever fallen out with another Christian? How did that happen and how was it resolved?
2. How does Acts 15 show that Jesus is building his church through us and sometimes in spite of us? What difference does that make to the way you think about being part of the Church?
3. How does sin and disunity cause pain and hurt? Share some examples.
4. How are we to work at restoring broken relationships? Are there people you need to be restored with? Are there people you need to help to get restored to others? Help one another.
5. John Mark is an amazing example of how God is the God of the second chance. Are there people we have given up on that need a second chance? If we have failed in some way before the Lord, how can we get back into the battle? Pray for one another.

Here are the notes of this message:

Read Acts 15:36-41. Sadly Christians are not immune from separating from one another because of disagreement. The shock for us in this passage is that it happens to two mighty men of God – Paul and Barnabas. **What causes the dramatic parting of these close Christian friends and brothers?** A young man called John Mark.

Some background and the story:

John Mark is Barnabas's cousin (Colossians 4:10). He was the son of Mary in whose house the church had prayed for Peter's release from jail in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). Some even think he was the young lad who fled naked from the scene of Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:51-52).

He went as a helper on Paul and Barnabas's first missionary journey (Acts 13:5), but after they had finished their mission on Cyprus, Mark left them (Acts 13:13) and returned to Jerusalem. Luke makes no comment on the reason Mark left, but in this heated exchange between Paul and Barnabas, records that Mark had deserted them. However, when Paul wanted to return to all the churches they had planted and see how they were getting on (v36), Barnabas wanted to take Mark again and give him a second chance. Paul felt that unwise because they were going back into tricky territory and they needed a strong team. He felt Mark was not yet ready.

Luke makes no comment as to who was right and wrong here. What he does record is that this did not just stay a point of contention. It erupted into such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. The result was that Barnabas takes Mark and goes west to Cyprus (his home island) and serves God there for this next season. We don't hear of Barnabas or Mark again in Acts. Paul sends for Silas (either from Jerusalem where he has returned, or from Antioch where he has stayed). This new team of Paul and Silas are commended by the church to the grace of God and they begin a second missionary journey heading north into Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches.

What are we to learn from all of this?

1. Jesus will build His church (through us and in spite of us).

Acts 15 is tremendous testimony to that truth. Jesus overruled the circumstances of both division and disagreement to further the growth of His church to the ends of the earth. He raised up godly people, including the likes of Paul and Barnabas to preserve the unity of the Church. He overruled even the falling out of Paul and Barnabas to grow the Mission (2 missionary teams were formed doubling the church planting effort). **BUT**

2. Sin and disunity cause pain and hurt.

Because Jesus is building His church, it does not let us off the hook in the part we play. Sinful behaviour causes pain to us, to others and brings disunity among God's people. It can also be a barrier to the gospel. The fallout of Paul and Barnabas was painful not just for them but for all those who loved them and honoured their ministry. It would have sent shock waves through the church in Antioch and beyond. We are called to play our part in seeking after God and his ways, and being ruthless with anything that would damage the unity of God's church, and the extension of God's mission.

What about disagreement? Are we allowed to have differences of opinion? The answer to that is "Yes!" God has made us different and that brings perspectives that will also be different. Praise God that we don't always see things the same way. But how we handle that is really important. Paul and Barnabas crossed the line on how to handle disagreement – not so much the fact they separated because they probably needed to do that for this next season – but because of how they separated. There is no mention of parting on good terms or even agreeing to disagree. It appears there was a lot of anger and harsh words.

In our disagreeing, we are not at liberty to sin and be destructive. We know we have crossed a line when we start personally attacking an individual rather than focusing on the issue at hand. **We can disagree without being disagreeable.** Keeping a sense of humility even if we passionately believe something is vital.

3. Forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration should always be our goal.

Luke who records this account for us doesn't actually tell us the long term outcome. It ends here with apparent anger, hurt, frustration and separation. Praise God that in other parts of the New Testament we get strong hints that the grace of God brought healing and forgiveness to these estranged brothers.

Perhaps 5-6 years later, Paul is writing to the Corinthians, among whom he would establish a church as part of this second missionary journey, and mentions Barnabas as a fellow apostle who like him has to work to make a living (1 Corinthians 9:6). Paul associates himself again with this dear brother. They may not have been a missionary team any longer but their friendship was restored and I'm sure that the apostle who preached about forgiveness and reconciliation in his letters more than anybody allowed Jesus to heal the wounds.

We all need to work on restoration with anyone we have become estranged from. Let God guide you, grace you with forgiveness, and go with you as you work on reconciliation.

4. Let Jesus and his mission be your focus even as you wait and work for restoration.

It took time for healing between these two brothers. But in the mean time they both faithfully got on serving Jesus and his mission. They didn't get so offended they dropped out of serving the Lord. They faithfully proclaimed Jesus and lived for him passionately. God blessed that.

5. Never give up on anyone

We talked about reconciliation between Paul and Barnabas. Likewise with John Mark, we see an amazing reconciliation. In Colossians 4:10 we see how tenderly Paul speaks of him and how in 2 Timothy 4:11 Paul sends for him to be with him in prison just before he faces martyrdom for the sake of Jesus.

He has matured and grown. The quitter has now become a rock of reliability and usefulness. Barnabas in his heart for John Mark was spot on. He invested in this apparent failure of a man. God blessed it. Even Paul comes to see how God has turned this man around.

This quitter also became the man who joined with Peter and from his account of time with Jesus wrote the Gospel that bears his name - The Gospel of Mark! Praise God that he doesn't give up on any of us! He's here for you today to get back in the race.