



Acts – Can I get a Witness?

Wk. 46 “It’s not me, It’s You

By Pastor Glenn Baker 08/13/2023

Paul and Barnabas Separate

Acts 15:36-41 ESV

³⁶And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” ³⁷Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. ³⁸But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, ⁴⁰but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

[Intro and Review]

Good Morning! My name is Glenn Baker. I’m excited for the opportunity to share God’s word with you as we continue our journey through the book of Acts. Before we jump in let’s review the last few weeks. If you remember, at the beginning of chapter 15, Mike brought us through the church’s first major Doctrinal issue brought to you by the letter D. Paul and Barnabas came home to Antioch from the first mission trip and encountered what Mike described as a spiritual plague that was being taught by some men from Judea. And that plague came through the question of whether or not Gentiles could enter the Kingdom of God without first coming through Judaism. That is, they needed to be circumcised in order to be saved. So in other words, they had to deal with the teaching of a works-based salvation. These Judaizers were the staunch guardians of legalism and they were intent on driving a wedge between Jews and Gentiles of the early Church. There was a Debate and a Decision was made concluding that salvation was by grace alone.

Last week, Onan brought us through how the church responded, brought to you by the letters L, C and U. The apostles and elders, with the whole church



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sent Barsabbas and Silas along with Paul and Barnabas with a letter of encouragement. It was a letter outlining liberty since the law decidedly cannot save you. It was a letter of consideration, participating in the difficulties faced by the church in Antioch. And a letter of unity demonstrated by the endearing words and loving concern for the young church.

But Onan, LC and U were not as fun as being brought to us by the letter D.

As we arrive to our passage this morning please note that it is frequently viewed as a bridge or a passage that transitions us from one major section of thought to another. It’s one where Luke shifts our attention from an internal doctrinal issue to a different kind of issue happening in the church. An issue between two brothers that have labored together for many months in many cities.

When we get into the text, you'll see that we're going to take a break from describing the missionary journey and we're going to get into the real life of being a missionary. And in real life, things happen. Like you need to go to the bathroom or you stop and get something to eat or in this case I'll exaggerate a bit and say that you find yourself In the middle of a very public, long lasting, bromantic breakup. Complete with all the idiocy that Twitter and Facebook ushers in.

Let's stand. As we read God's word together.

Acts 15:36-41

36 And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” 37 Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. 38 But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. 39 And there arose ta sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, having



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been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

[Prayer]

We have a bit to sort through when it comes to this particular passage. One, because we've all heard this before, right? This is usually treated as the infamous passage where Paul and Barnabas split up. And if you've been a church attender or a Christian for any amount of time, you've probably heard a sermon or two regarding the specific passage dealing with this split. I'm not going to deal with it any differently. It is in fact a dark and difficult situation to deal with. The difficulty lies in having two church leaders widely regarded and respected champions of the faith who get into a heated argument.

I want to take our time to gain the best understanding we can about this situation. I'll try to go just a little slow because I'm going to take us in and out of our passage today to read other sections of scripture that help our context.

Let's begin to look at how we get there. Starting in verse 36, it says “after some time Paul said to Barnabas, let's go back and visit the brothers and all the cities where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they're getting on.”

Perfect. I can hear Paul saying with a sense of urgency: We've wrapped up the first trip. We got a victory in the Council. We are regaining our strength, having a wonderful time worshiping in unity as a church. Hey Barnabas, I've got a great idea. Let's go back. Let's go check on our work. Let's go check on our brothers to make sure the churches they all haven't left the faith for a different gospel. I was stoned at Lystra, but now I'm doing awesome. Let's go be an encouragement. Barnabas, you are built for this.

Now before we get to the fireworks, let's look at a little more context. Let's focus on those first three words of verse 36 after some time. Now, what's interesting about this demarcation “after some time” is that we must remember that this first missionary journey included Churches in Galatia. Pisidia, Iconium, Derby, and Lystra. Those are all Galatian cities. Paul had time to write his first epistle to



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the Galatian churches so in order to help us understand what could be the setup for this disagreement, let’s go hear what he has to say:

Let's look at Galatians chapter 2:11-14

Galatians 2:11-14

[11] But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. [12] For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. [13] And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. [14] But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (ESV)

We examine this so we get to know Paul a little bit more. And his attitude. Not a bad attitude. But we see what drives him. We have examples of where he's coming from. What he's trying to do? Why he says the things that he does? And in this situation. It says that, he got in Peter's face. And in this passage. We know that he was calling out Peter for being wishy washy. One minute, He's eating with the Gentiles, hanging out, and then as Mike mentioned two weeks ago when the false brothers of the circumcision party entered, Peter all of a sudden withdrew from fellowship with the Gentiles. And because Peter acted in this manner, the rest of the Jews including Barnabas followed him into what Paul labeled as hypocrisy. Which is “not in step with the truth of the gospel.”

OK, so let's go back to Antioch when Paul has propositioned Barnabas to make a return trip.

Acts 15:37-39

[37] Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. [38] But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. [39] And there arose a sharp



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disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, (ESV)

So there it is. Barnabas wanted to take his cousin Mark. The same guy that left them high and dry in Pamphylia Ch 13:13. And Paul says uh, not going to do it. And things escalated quickly.

Now let’s pause right here and understand a little about Mark and Peter. It would be helpful to know that John Mark is Peter’s scribe. It’s Peter who mentors Mark and thinks of him as a son (1 Pt 5:13). The same Mark who wrote the gospel. The same guy that’s Barnabas’ cousin. The same guy that in chapter in Acts 13. Just up and left Paul and Barnabas. The same Peter that Paul rebuked in his letter.

So let's pick back up. Verse 39.

[39] And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, (ESV)

We can hone in on what exactly a sharp disagreement really means. The Greek word PAROXYMOS (sharp disagreement) used here carries the idea of violent action or emotion. Think of a boxing match where the fight really began at the weigh-in when the other guy looked at him wrong. This was not an argument over charades. This sharp disagreement is why we describe this passage as infamous. It's an unfortunate reality that we deal with in Scripture for all to see. For the last 2000 years and counting, It's on the Internet forever. It is one more window of visibility into a church full of sinners. Sinning against God and sinning against each other. Yes, the Church is a mess.

How bad is it??

We see this group word used just one other time in the New Testament.

Hebrews 10:24–25



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[24] And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (ESV)

Here we can see it's maybe a mild expression to encourage a noble task? Of course not. It's anything but mild. Perhaps the writers intention is to say that we should be passionately moving each other and not simply stirring some Creamer in the coffee.

Other uses for this word are violent anger and passion. We see in the Old Testament translations

Deuteronomy 29:28

[28] and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and fury and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as they are this day.’ (ESV)

and

Jeremiah 32:37

[37] Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. (ESV)

As you can see from these examples, this sharp disagreement is no small matter.

So where do we go from here? What do we do? Why did Luke tell us this story in five short verses as if it's an afternoon thunderstorm in Florida?

I have 3 challenge points for you today all brought to you by the letter B

1) Be Ready



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Make sure to transition to this passage by saying something like, “As Paul had learned this lesson, even from his first missionary journey, we see Paul express the dire need to be ready to defend the Gospel in all situations.”

2 Timothy 4:1-4

[1] I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: [2] preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. [3] For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, [4] and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. (ESV)

First of all, it's because it **is** an afternoon thunderstorm in Florida. Things are going to happen. Luke is giving us this example to show us that we need to be ready for anything. Including a fight with a brother (mentor, friend, coworker).

We are sinners and our actions and attitudes are going to get the best of us. Scripture is telling us that we should expect a little sideways movement. Not everything is going to be persecution. The spiritual battles aren't always going to be obvious. They very well could be doctrinal in nature just like in chapter 15 or sometimes we're going to go to work, like Paul get stoned, and when we get home our sinful nature will come out against our family when our guard is down.

When I used to run restaurant, I would prep my employees for the lunch rush. A lot of hangry people want a meal ready within 5 minutes of ordering. Be ready and waiting and expectant.

2) Be Decisive

Luke 14:26



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[26] “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. (ESV)

Do you see it in our passage today? Paul had to make a tough decision. He had to ‘hate’ (love less) Barnabas > Mark > Peter for the sake of the Gospel. If we’re going to infer motive, let’s do it here. Barnabas was obstinate about taking Mark, but Paul was staunch about not taking Mark. Why? Because he deserted them once already. Paul had to rebuke his mentor, Peter, for vacillating on a doctrinal issue concerning salvation. Paul knew from then on the mission required precision. So he decides on Silas.

3) Be Hopeful

HCC I want you to know and take comfort in our Redeemer that is Christ Jesus. He is the head of this messy church. That’s not just something we say, we see the mess in today’s passage right here! Be like Luke and note it as a passing moment because you expected it, knowing it will pass. But let’s be clear, scripture is not giving us permission to be malicious to each other. Remember it is Paul who writes in Romans 12

Romans 12:9-16

[9] Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. [10] Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. [11] Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. [12] Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. [13] Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. [14] Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. [15] Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. [16] Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

Finally, let’s close our story with the hope of knowing what comes next,

There is hope in knowing that the work continues. Our text today concludes



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Acts 15:40-41

[40] but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. [41] And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. (ESV)

The most obvious working of good is that two missionary journeys were launched rather than just one.

Luke’s short account isn’t coy. Luke doesn’t detail the nature of the disagreement because doing so would probably have lead to gossip. This “bridge” passage is an affirmation of gospel (cohesiveness) unity.

[PRAYER]

[COMMUNION]

[BENEDICTION]

Go in the name of the Father, that calls us to be ready to defend the message of the Gospel and the name of His Son.

Go in the name of the Son, that modeled perfect loyalty to God’s message of Grace, that when others would not follow Him, He still walked the road of Calvary.

Go in the name of the name of the HS, that even in our disputes focuses our eyes on the prize, renews our strength, and prepares our path for the continued work.