

## 37—Acts 15.36-41—The Weakness of Men and Power of Christ

- I. Introduction
  - a. My pappa liked to teach me things. I recall he and I out mending a fence together in the pasture. When it came time to move the truck, he let me drive. I don't recall every detail but I do remember nearly running him over. I think I had the truck in drive instead of reverse. He was standing at the front of the truck and when I pushed the gas the truck hit him but it was going slow enough for him to keep backing up until I slammed on the brakes.
  - b. I had failed my pappa and almost hurt him severely...maybe worse. I remember being so afraid but he wouldn't let me stay that way. He made me do it again.
- II. Main Point
  - a. The mission of God will never be thwarted by the failure of men—the Kingdom continues to advance even through conflict by His marvelous grace.
- III. Outline
  - a. A Plan to Strengthen the Disciples *Again*
  - b. But Conflict Happened
  - c. Two Separate Groups are Sent
  - d. What Happened to Mark?
- IV. Exposition
  - a. As we finish chapter 15, Luke tells us about an incident that happened some days after the letter was delivered. Paul and Barnabus had remained in Antioch teaching and preaching the word of the Lord WITH many others. As you might recall, at the end of their first missionary journey they had doubled back to strengthen the disciples that had responded to the gospel. They now want to return and visit the brothers to strengthen them again.
    - i. So that's the plan. Go strengthen the disciples. You might ask, "What is it they plan to do and why?"
      1. These are basic or fundamental things that a new or old community of believers do—see how they are doing.
      2. If you have read that unbelievable list of Paul's sufferings in 2 Cor. 11 of countless beatings and imprisonments and near-death experiences, he ends the list with: (2 Cor. 11:28) there is the daily pressure on me: my concern for all the churches.
        - a. It seems out of place. Yet the word pressure literally means--*stopping, checking*; hence, as what creates hindrance to normal activity.
        - b. Think of it like a road block. How long would it take you to get to work downtown Nashville with 30 stops at 6:30am?
      3. So, Paul has this pressure on him to know how the churches are doing where he and Barnabus had proclaimed the word of the Lord.
        - a. Communication was and still is best accomplished face to face.
        - b. From Paul's perspective, he understood these people as his sons and daughters in the faith.
        - c. Can you imagine, the apostle Paul knocking on your door and wanting to have a conversation about how your walk with Jesus was going?
      4. We briefly talked about what it means to strengthen the disciples. The image is that of placing supports under a building. But what does that look like?
        - a. We hear Paul speaking this way to the church in Rome--(Rom. 1:11-12) <sup>11</sup> For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you--<sup>12</sup> that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.



- a. If we ask if he is qualified for ministry, the qualifications include faithfulness.
      - i. He must be faithful to his wife.
      - ii. Faithful to lead his family
    - b. Who knows if Mark even has a family but abandoning Barnabus and Paul reveals some character flaw.
    - c. If you call a pastor or missionary to the field and they have not been faithful to one's spouse and family then that person isn't qualified.
    - d. The three major duties for a husband and father are: provide, protect, and lead.
      - i. Let's imagine Mark was married with children. If he had abandoned his wife and family like this then something is terribly wrong.
  - iii. Paul seems to conclude that taking Mark was not worth it because he was not faithful to the task.
- ii. So Barnabus wants to take Mark along to strengthen the churches but Paul thinks it best not to take him with them. So, who is right?
  - 1. Luke doesn't say. He doesn't even give us a hint. He states in verse 39, "And a sharp disagreement happened" between Barnabus and Paul.
    - a. This word for sharp disagreement is used of God's wrath. It's also used positively in Hebrews of "stirring one another up to love and good deeds."
    - b. You might be thinking that Paul's argument is clearly the right one.
      - i. My push back would be this: then how is Mark going to learn to be faithful if someone doesn't take him along and help him grow?
    - c. I would like to argue that's exactly who Barnabus is! He's that kind of guy!
      - i. Let's remind ourselves what kind of man Barnabus is. And the kind of man he is didn't happen automatically. The Apostles had been discipled by Jesus and the Apostles disciple men like Barnabus.
        - 1. The first thing we see him doing is selling some of his property and he gives the money to the church to use as it sees fit.
        - 2. In chapter 9, who brings the former persecutor of the church— Paul himself—to the apostles when no one else would come near him?
        - 3. When a great number of people believed in Antioch, who did they send? Barnabus. Why? (Acts 11:24) <sup>24</sup> for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.
        - 4. When Paul was nearly stoned by the Hellenist in Jerusalem, who took him to Tarsus?
        - 5. Who went and got Paul from Tarsus to teach in Antioch for more than a year? Barnabus.
        - 6. Who did the Holy Spirit set apart with Paul to go do the work God had sent them to do?
        - 7. Who tracked with Paul the entire way on the first missionary journey and no doubt bandaged his wounds and cared for him and preached with him? Suffered with him?

8. I mean, these two have been partners in ministry for years. They've been through the ringer together. They are godly men. They are mature believers. They are faithful. Doctrinally sound.
  - a. AND YET THEY HAVE A SHARP DISAGREEMENT.
  - b. IT HAPPENS. AT THE END OF THE DAY, "THE BEST OF MEN ARE AT BEST MEN." (Derek Thomas)
  - c. THEY ARE WEAK TOO. THEY FAIL TOO.
- c. Such is the case in relationships. Both can be right. How do you resolve this?
  - i. They resolve it by separating. Notice there in verses 39 through 40.
    1. "They separated from each other, Barnabus took Mark with him and sailed away to Cypress, but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord."
    2. I want to restate the main point. God's mission will not be thwarted by weak men. The mission goes on.
      - a. There are now two groups.
      - b. The initial purpose prevails to strengthen the churches.
      - c. They were both commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.
      - d. The mission goes on.
      - e. There have been countless conflicts in the church and there will be countless more conflicts. But the grace of the Lord will prevail. As weak as we are, God will accomplish his purposes.
      - f. (Acts 15:41) <sup>41</sup> And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.
  - ii. I cannot say this enough. The Risen Lord Jesus saves and builds and preserves his church.
    1. We are weak but he is strong. The continuation of the church rests on Christ not us. These two men, Paul and Barnabus, did not build Christ's Church. Jesus did. Paul and Barnabus did not strengthen the churches. Christ did.
      - a. There will be countless conflicts in and around the church but Jesus will save us from them all.
    2. He is the perfect bridegroom for his bride, the church. He provides, protects, and leads her.
    3. He is the Good Shepherd who protects the flock.
    4. Praise the Lord!
- d. I want to end by considering what happened with Mark.
  - i. His story has been a comfort to me for a long time. I would like to put courage in your heart with his story.
    1. I think I know how he felt when he left his cousin Barnabus and Paul on the mission field.
    2. His resources were spent. He had nothing left in the tank. People have different capacities.
    3. Obviously, that capacity changes and that's not easy. In fact, it's often very painful.
    4. John Mark failed. I can imagine that was a long trip home. Then he must answer everyone's questions. There's nowhere to hide because even if we do, we are still there. You can't sleep because the enemy prods you throughout the night reminding you of your failures.
      - a. I can imagine the enemy whispering that he needed to leave and go home. But that same enemy will accuse him for abandoning the team when he gets there.

5. After some time, Mark finds his way back to Antioch. If you recall, he lived in Jerusalem. That tells me that he was ready to try again or Barnabus gotten him there somehow.
6. Barnabus was the kind of disciple that made disciples better. He took risks with people.
  - a. We also know that Barnabus and Paul did not remain at odds. Because we read in 1 Cor. 9:6 (which would have been some time after this event) that they are working together there.
7. But what about Mark? Where does his life go?
  - a. Since Luke followed Paul on this next journey, we don't have any record of how things went with Barnabus and Mark.
  - b. However, Mark is mentioned by Paul in some of his later letters to churches.
    - i. One of those mentions comes in the letter to Philemon.
      1. There Paul says at the end: (Phlm. 1:23-25) <sup>23</sup> Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, <sup>24</sup> and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. <sup>25</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.
        - a. Mark is listed among Paul's fellow workers. It seems something has changed in Mark and Paul.
      2. Another mention comes in (Col. 4:7-11) <sup>7</sup> Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. <sup>8</sup> I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, <sup>9</sup> and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here. <sup>10</sup> Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions-- if he comes to you, welcome him), <sup>11</sup> and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.
      3. And the one that really gets to me shows up in where Paul tells Timothy in (2 Tim. 4:9-11) <sup>9</sup> Do your best to come to me soon. <sup>10</sup> For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. <sup>11</sup> Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.
      4. I can't tell you how often this has comforted me. The enemy will often tell us our story is over. There's nothing else for you. But that's just not true.
      5. As a follower of Christ, the grace of Christ has something to say about that.
      6. Indeed, we do fail and we may be disciplined severely for it. But we are not kicked out of the family.
      7. The very gospel that we believe is for a bunch of failed sinners. Jesus is our story. We get in by grace and we stay in by grace.
    - ii. Mark needed someone to put courage in him and Barnabus, the son of encouragement, seems to have done that.
    - iii. Can you imagine finding yourself unable to continue on the journey with Paul and Barnabus early on in your walk with Jesus but later through

many trials and being strengthened in his faith by countless brothers and sisters in Christ God uses to write one of the Gospels?

- iv. What a story of grace! The weakness of men but the power of Christ in his grace. Weak men helping weak men by the grace of God. Wow.
- v. When we are weak, Christ is strong!

V. Response

a. What is our response?

- i. There are “Marks” among us. They need someone to come alongside them. Put courage in their hearts to trust in Christ.
  - ii. There are “Barnabuses” among us who need to take note of a Mark and help him grow and mature.
  - iii. There are “Pauls” among us who might be right about some of us and want to go on without you.
  - iv. Come on, ya’ll. We need each other. I have been a Mark more times than I can count. Yet so many have come into my life and shown me how to walk with Jesus every day.
- b. No doubt there are some who are not yet in the family of God. And to those I would urge you to come to Jesus. Repent and believe in him for eternal life. We will help you grow and be useful for the King! The Good Shepherd will call his sheep and they will hear his voice.