

## **Paul's Missionary Journeys**

### **Session Two**

This traveling band of believers will leave Cyprus and sail to a totally new region for any of them. Even though verse 13 ends with a comma, we're going to unpack a couple things from it. Prior to this verse Barnabas has been named before Saul/Paul, but here that shifts. "It was Barnabas who had set out as the leader of this expedition. But now it is Paul and Barnabas. In the very nature of things it is Paul who has assumed the leadership of the expedition. And the lovely thing about Barnabas is that there is from him no word of complaint. He is a man prepared to take the second place, so be it God's work was done."

#### **Acts 13:13**

**Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem,**

The second part of this verse is very simple but is a significant event. Later in Acts 15, we will see where Barnabas wants Mark to be a part of Paul's second missionary journey, but because of this event, Paul refuses and he and Barnabas part company over the matter. There is nothing noted about why Mark decides to leave to return to Jerusalem at this point, but regardless we might benefit from a refresher on who this man Mark was.

"Mark was very young. His mother's house seems to have been the centre of the Church at Jerusalem (Acts 12:12) and Mark must always have been very close to the centre of the faith. Paul and Barnabas took him with them as their helper, for he was the kinsman of Barnabas; and now he turned and went home. We will never know why. Perhaps he resented the deposition of Barnabas from leadership; perhaps he was afraid of the proposed journey up into the plateau where Antioch in Pisidia stood for it was one of the hardest and most dangerous roads in the world; perhaps, because he came from Jerusalem, he had doubts about this preaching to the Gentiles; perhaps at this stage he was one of these lads who was better at beginning things than finishing them; perhaps – as Chrysostom said long ago – the lad wanted his mother. However it was he went."

**Question: What do you think of these possible reasons for Mark's leaving? Have you ever had someone leave you hanging and how hard was that on your relationship with them?**

Barclay points out that Barnabas and Paul split company later over whether Mark should join them on their second journey. He also gives more information on Mark following the debate over him in Acts 15:38. "Then Mark vanishes from history. Tradition and legend say he went to Alexandria and Egypt and founded the Church there. But when he re-emerges almost 20 years later he is the man who has redeemed himself. When Paul wrote to the Colossians when he was in prison in Rome he tells them to receive Mark if he comes to them. So Mark is with Paul again. And at the very end when he wrote to Timothy just before his death he says, 'Take Mark and bring him with you, for he is a useful man when it comes to doing a bit of service' (2 Timothy 4:11). The man who once a deserter has become the man who was useful to Paul. ... By the grace of God the man who was the deserter became the writer of a gospel and the man whom, at the end, Paul wanted with him."

**Question: Being redeemed and reconciled are powerful experiences. What emotions come to mind for you as you think of what Mark may have felt as Paul requested his presence at the end of his life?**

**Question: Is there anyone you know who might need to know that you still love them after they failed you or others?**

### It's uphill from here

#### **Acts 13:14-15**

**but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.<sup>15</sup> After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it."**

With continued insights from Barclay, we read, "One of the amazing things about Acts is the heroism that is passed over in a sentence. Pisidian Antioch stood on a plateau 3,600 feet above sea-level. To get to it Paul and Barnabas would have to cross the Taurus range of mountains by one of the hardest roads in Asia Minor, a road which was also notorious for robbers and brigands. They were setting out on one of the most dangerous of all journeys. But we are bound to ask the question, why did they not preach in Pamphylia? Why did they leave the coast with the word unproclaimed and set out on that difficult and dangerous way? Not so very long afterwards Paul wrote a letter to the Galatians for all these towns were in the Roman province of Galatia. In the letter he says something. 'You know that it was because I was sick in body that I first brought the good news to you' (Galatians 4:13). So when he came to Galatia he was a sick man. Now all men know that Paul had a thorn in the flesh which in spite of much prayer remained with him (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). Many guesses have been made as to what that thorn-or *stake* as it more likely should be translated-was. The oldest tradition is that Paul suffered from prostrating headaches. And the most likely explanation is that he was the victim of a virulent recurring malaria fever which haunted the low coastal strip of Asia Minor. A traveler says that the headaches characteristic of this malaria was like a red-hot bar thrust through the forehead; and another likens it to a dentist's drill boring through a man's temple. It is most likely that this malaria attacked Paul in low-lying Pamphylia and that he had to make for the plateau country to shake it off. Now note, it never struck him to turn back. It was a sick man who faced that grim journey up through the hills. Even when his body was aching Paul never ceased to drive on and to be an adventurer for Christ. And so in these two verses there is a hidden romance of heroism for those who see."

**Question: Have you known anyone who pushed through serious difficulties in order to complete a task for which they were committed?**

**Has there been a time when you have done so, even if not as extraordinary as the example of Paul here?**

**How did God use that time for the sake of His Kingdom?**

The next section of Acts 13 contains the only full-length sermon of Paul recorded in scripture. If we were to compare it to the sermon Peter gave at Pentecost, we would find the same elements. Barclay continues

on this point, "This sermon of Paul has five main points. (i) Paul insists that the coming of Jesus is the consummation of history. He outlines the national history of the Jews to show that it culminates in Christ. History is no purposeless process. The Stoics believed that history went in cycles, that every cycle the world was destroyed in a vast conflagration and that thereafter the same process started all over again. History to them simply kept on repeating itself. A modern cynical verdict is that history is the record of sins, the mistakes and the follies of men. But the Christian view of history is characteristically optimistic. It is certain that always history is going somewhere according to the purpose of God."

**Question: Before we read any further commentary or even Paul's sermon, do you believe that most Christians today share the viewpoint that Barclay suggests Christianity provides on history?**

**Considering current events, in what ways can we be optimistic about both the past and the future? What makes that difficult for us?**

We continue with Barclay's second point from Paul's sermon. "(ii) Paul states the fact that men did not recognize God's consummation when it came in Jesus Christ. (the next quote is confusing) Browning said, 'We needs must love the highest when we see it.' But a man, by taking his own way and refusing God's way, can in the end afflict himself with a blindness which is unable to see. The misuse of freewill ends not in liberty but ruin."

**Question: In today's world of independent thinking and freedom of choice as virtues that are highly sought after, how does Christian liberty, i.e. our freedom we have in Christ, both align with and contradict this view?**

"(iii) Although men, in their blind folly, rejected and crucified Jesus, God could not be defeated and the Resurrection is the proof of the undefeatable purpose and power of God. It is told that once on a stormy night when a gale was blowing, a child said in awe to his father, 'God must have lost grip of His wind tonight.' The Resurrection is the proof that God never loses grip, that in the end His purpose and His will reign supreme."

**Question: Is there a place in your life right now where you're feeling like God may have lost grip of something? How can the Resurrection restore your confidence in His grip in your life?**

"(iv) Paul goes on to use a purely Jewish argument. The Resurrection is the fulfillment of prophecy because promises were made to David which were obviously not fulfilled in him but which are fulfilled in Christ. Now once again, however little we are prepared to make of the argument from prophesy nowadays, the fact remains that history is a forward-looking process. It is neither circular nor aimless; it looks to that which in the purpose of God must come."

**Question: Christ's life, death and resurrection were all foretold in the many prophecies of the Old Testament and obviously have been fulfilled some 2000 years ago, but there are still unfulfilled prophecies that remain in the future. What do you believe is the future event or activity of God that we can and should be looking forward to?**

“(v) The coming and the message of Christ is to one kind of people good news. Hitherto they had lived life according to the Law. No man could ever fulfill the law completely and therefore any thinking man was always conscious of failure, inadequacy and inevitable guilt. But in Jesus Christ and in His life and death men find that liberating and that forgiving power which sets them free from the condemnation which should have been theirs, and which therefore restores real friendship and fellowship between God and man.”

At this point Barclay seems to have lost count and continues to a sixth point from Paul’s sermon, but actually it is a continuation on the thought of what is good news for some but not to others. “(vi) But that which is meant for good news and which was designed as good news is in fact bad news for another kind of people. It simply makes worse the condemnation of those who in their blindness have seen it and who have neglected it and disobeyed its summons to belief in and acceptance of Jesus Christ. There is excuse for man who has never had a chance; but there is no excuse for the man who has seen the splendour of the offer of God and who has rejected it. That which is a gift of love to those who take it is a condemnation to those who refuse it.”

**Question: Have you ever thought of the gift of your salvation as offered to you in Christ as being potentially “a condemnation for those who refuse it”? Does that idea create a sense of urgency or a feeling of despair for you?**

So, let’s read this sermon of Paul’s now.

**Acts 13:16-41**

**So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said:**

**“Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. <sup>17</sup> The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. <sup>18</sup> And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. <sup>19</sup> And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. <sup>20</sup> All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. <sup>21</sup> Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. <sup>22</sup> And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’ <sup>23</sup> Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. <sup>24</sup> Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. <sup>25</sup> And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’**

<sup>26</sup> **“Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. <sup>27</sup> For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. <sup>28</sup> And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. <sup>29</sup> And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. <sup>30</sup> But God raised him from the**

dead, <sup>31</sup> and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. <sup>32</sup> And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, <sup>33</sup> this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm,  
“You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’

<sup>34</sup> And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, “I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’

<sup>35</sup> Therefore he says also in another psalm, “You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’

<sup>36</sup> For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, <sup>37</sup> but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. <sup>38</sup> Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, <sup>39</sup> and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. <sup>40</sup> Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about:  
<sup>41</sup> “Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.”

Question: Which part of this sermon do you like the best and is there any of it you don't like?

We'll wait to see how the people react to this sermon, but what might you expect is going to happen?

How well do you think this technique of sharing the message of Christ can work today? Which parts do you think would work and why or why not others?