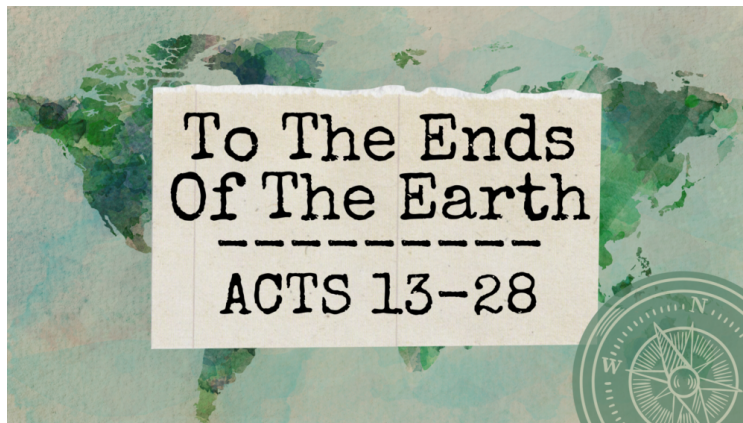


Not The Start They Wanted!



Acts 15:36-41

Bro Ricky Cunningham

Have you ever planned a trip and the trip just didn't start out the way you planned – and what happened at the beginning of the trip almost ruined the rest of the trip? Have you been there? That sometimes happens on mission trips. We are going to see that this morning in this passage, that the mission trip didn't start the way the mission trip was planned.

I'll never forget one of our first mission trips to Brazil. We were going to Barreirinha. We had never been there before, had never been to the Amazon

River, so with the encouragement of a missionary, Richard Walker, we followed all of his advice and took everything he told us to take, packed it the way he told us to pack it, and labeled it accordingly. He said we would have no trouble. We had trouble. We were the last group off the plane in Manaus, and by the time we had gathered all of the stuff we were taking and started through immigration, immigration decided to confiscate what we were bringing. Most of us knew nothing that was going on because we spoke English and they spoke Portuguese. We could not answer questions. Brother Walker began to try to explain what the purpose of our trip was, why we needed all of these things, and what each one was. After about an hour, he said we needed to go on to the boat, so someone took us to the boat and we got on. He stays. This was early in the morning. We sat on that boat for twelve, fourteen hours knowing we needed to pull out because we had about a 30-hour trip to where we were going to Barreirinha, but we thought we needed everything that we had packed. It got to be lunchtime, early afternoon, and Brother Walker had already called us on the satellite phone twice to tell us he just didn't understand why but it looked like we were not going to get to take what we had brought to give to the people of Barreirinha. Then, a little after lunch Ms. B said to me, "Ricky, why don't you just lead us in prayer. Maybe God wants us to have this. Maybe God doesn't want us to have this. But we need to know what God's will is. Why don't we ask God to just show us right now what his will is?" You have to remember that I was really young when we went on this trip. So while I'm now asking God, on behalf of the team, that we want God's will, personally, I really wanted that stuff we had brought. I submit myself to the Lord and I began to pray, and while I was leading our group in prayer, the satellite phone rang again. I heard Ms. B say, "What?" And her husband, the missionary on the other end of the phone at customs, said to Ms. B, "I don't know what just happened, but they just came out and said take this stuff with you and get gone!" He said, "I'll be there in an hour." Wow!

That trip didn't start the way we thought it was going to start, but praise the Lord, it ended the way we wanted it to end. I don't know about you, but I expect personal trips to not always to start out right, but a mission trip? You would think it would all be covered. It would all be anointed under God's Holy Spirit. You would think everything would go perfect. Agreed? Sometimes they don't.

Not a Good Start

We are getting ready to start the second missionary trip this morning, and it starts horribly. We are going to talk about something I wish we didn't have to talk about. If I can be totally honest with you, I wish Luke hadn't recorded this. I say that not as a Christian. I say that as a pastor, because sometimes there are just some things that happen in the church – and the way they happen – when people outside the church hear it, it really puts a bad name with the church. It hurts. Honestly, there are just some things I wish we could keep in-house and no one else ever know. But God had a plan, evidently, for what is going to happen in our story, and the Holy Spirit is going to lead Luke not to leave it out but to write it into the historical narrative of the first church. I believe he did it for our advantage. I believe there are some of us here this morning who need to hear what happened at the beginning of the first missionary trip even though it's going to break my heart to tell you about it...and it's going to break yours.

Scripture

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

The first missionary journey from Antioch is over. The church at Jerusalem has settled the question once and for all that circumcision, nor keeping the Law of Moses is necessary for justification. Because of the gospel, a person who is a sinner is made right with God based on grace through faith. That has been settled. Now, in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas have gone back to teaching. The men who came with them, with the letter, to the church at Antioch have returned. Now, Luke is getting ready to make a major shift. He is going to let us know that that first trip is over and now we are getting ready to start what we call the second missionary trip.

It starts out this way. Paul turned to Barnabas and said, Barnabas, let *us* return. Let us go back to every city where we proclaim the word of the Lord and see how they are. Now you know that there are going to be times, especially in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, where he is going to use an agriculture metaphor. Here, I think that the Apostle Paul realizes that in some regards, he is a spiritual farmer and he and Barnabas have been allowed by God to go into a territory and sow the gospel seeds. On this first missionary journey through Southern Galatia, they saw the seed of God, the Word of God, germinate in a sinner's heart and soul, and a new life begin to emerge – the life of a Christian – a person who is now dead to sin and alive to God, but formerly was alive to sin and dead to God. They faced a lot of persecution. They were driven out of some of the cities, yet when the trip was over, they knew the gospel seed had been sown.

Now, at the beginning of verse 36, the ESV says, "And after some days." Now some people in other places might understand this differently, but I think here in Western Kentucky if we talk about "after some days" and we are measuring time in days, we are thinking not very long. Luke actually uses the word, time...after some time has passed. I don't want you to get the opinion that they have just come back home, and now a few days later they are getting ready to go back again. No. Some time passes. How much time, we don't know. But enough time has passed that Paul is encouraging Barnabas for them to go back because they want to see if those young spiritual believers, those young spiritual plants, are growing. They want to see if they are putting roots deep into God, if they are growing up toward God, and if they are growing out in service to others. They want to see how those churches that they have started are doing. Doesn't this sound awesome?

See, the reason Paul takes the lead is because we saw that shift. We saw in the beginning of the missionary journey, it was Barnabas and Saul. Then Saul is no longer called Saul; he is called Paul. But it is no longer Barnabas and Paul; it is now Paul and Barnabas. Paul is the leader, so he believes it's time to go back, and he said to Barnabas, – *let's go and see for ourselves how the Word of God and the work of God are going*. And when Barnabas said – *I'm ready! Let's go, but let's take John Mark with us*, I don't think he had a clue what was going to happen next. See, Luke tells us that Barnabas wanted to take Mark, but then Luke tells us that Paul thought it not best. Luke doesn't mention the name, Mark, when he represents Paul's view. He calls Mark, "the

one who withdrew himself” from us and did not go to the work. So, the second missionary trip is going to start out with Barnabas wanting to take Mark and Paul thinking it is not best.

A Sharp Disagreement Arose

Now, look at this next phrase. “And there arose a sharp disagreement” over whether or not to take John Mark with them.

Now, I want to tell you what the English translators of the English Standard Version did here. They put two English words together to try to translate one Greek word. We actually have the root of this Greek word as a word in the English language, but I had never heard it before. (Can you imagine there is an English word that I don’t know and have never heard?) I even looked it up in the English dictionary to make sure it was really a word because I didn’t really believe it was a word! The word is ‘paroxysm’ – it’s an English word in our dictionary. That English word comes from a Greek word that’s actually used by Luke to capture what happens between Barnabas and Paul. If you were to look this word up in the dictionary (and I know you will this afternoon just to make sure I’m correct), it means ‘to have a sudden outburst of emotion.’ In other words, you have got it all together, you are doing fine, and then all of a sudden, WHAM, you are out of control! That’s what this word means.

Most of us have not ever heard or seen that word, but we have seen people who have a sudden outburst of emotion to where they are out of control. Now, when someone gets to that stage, if they are a Christian in their unredeemed flesh and they have this sudden outburst of emotion that is uncontrollable, sometimes they will say things they don’t mean. But when they are saying it, it sounds just like they mean it. It’s not until after the outburst is over and they come back down that they realize the damage they have done. Then they start saying things like, “I didn’t mean that.” “Now, you know I didn’t mean that.” Well, it sure felt like it.

Do you understand why the ESV translators translate this word as “sharp disagreement?” It is because this is one of those disagreements, that when it takes place, it sounds like the other person has a knife in their hand. It sounds like they have got a double edged sword in their hand. It sounds like they are slicing me to pieces with every word, and I am bleeding profusely! We want them to stop! But because they are not in control, they don’t

stop...and we are on the other end of that. Yes, I can admit you probably said some things you didn't mean, but I also know there are times when people think things that they don't say, normally. They don't say what they really think until they have one of those moments where they lose it and they are out of control. So, that sword doesn't just have one side where somebody is saying something they don't mean. It's got that other side where you just told me what you would have never told me before, and I had no idea you thought that about me.

Can I remind you who this is talking about? This isn't talking about a husband and wife. This isn't talking about a parent with an unruly child. This is Barnabas and Paul. Luke has been careful to paint the picture – they are apostles of the church! Way, way, way back, it was Barnabas and Saul, and then Barnabas and Paul, and then Paul and Barnabas. These are brothers with a high calling of God to lead the church of God. And they are not debating a theological passage of Scripture; they are talking about whether or not to take John Mark with them on a mission trip. A better translation for us in Dexter and Hardin is that they had it out. They came to blows, not physically but with their words. Does this surprise anybody, that the great Apostle Paul who wrote most of the New Testament had it out, not with the Pharisees, not with the Judaizers, not with Herod, with his brother, Barnabas?

Now we have to stop here as family, and say let's please keep this in the family. I hope you are wise enough to know there are some things you don't need to be talking about at the coffee shop, or at the restaurant, in your place of business, and you *sure* don't need to be talking about it on Facebook and social media. Got it? There are family things that stay within the family.

I personally - now this is my interpretation, you may see this differently - I understand why this happened. Here is what I know...because I knew about this passage of Scripture I've been reading the first part of this book in light of what I knew was going to happen at the beginning of this mission trip. And here's what I think Luke has been doing. Luke has been giving us a pretty good picture of the personality of Barnabas and the personality of Paul, and it was the personality of both of those men, plus their sinful fleshly tendencies, that caused them to have this sharp disagreement with each other. How sharp was this? They separated. For the rest of the book, there is no more Paul and Barnabas. That's terrible. Agreed? Terrible.

- **Barnabas–Encourager**

Here is how I think it happened. We first meet Barnabas in Acts chapter 4. He is a Levite from Cyprus, a Jew from a priest family, and he knows God's law. He was very generous, generous to the point that when he saw the poverty among the saints and the struggle they were having just to eke out a living, he sold a field, brought that money, laid it at the feet of the apostles, and told the apostles do with it as they willed. In that passage, Luke tells us that he was so well-known and so regarded by the apostles that they didn't call him by his real name, they called him Barnabas, meaning son of encouragement. Barnabas isn't even his name. That's just what they called him, son of encouragement. That person who when he sees you, his manner, his words, his actions towards you breathes courage into you. If you are having that moment where you have a doubt, where you just don't know, Barnabas comes along, and after you have been with him you just feel better about yourself. You feel better about your situation and you are encouraged. That's what his name means, encourager. Mr. Encourager. Son of encouragement. He embodied encouragement.

We meet Barnabas again in Acts Chapter 9. When we meet him in Acts Chapter 9 Saul of Tarsus on Straight Street gets saved. After Saul gets saved and talks about all those there, he wants to go to Jerusalem and meet the apostles. He wants the apostles to know that he is now on their side and he's not going to persecute the church anymore, and he actually believes God wants him proclaiming this good news of Jesus. Well, he tries to join them and they won't have anything to do with him. They were scared to death of him. You do know there are people that are scared of us, right, because of our past? Because they knew us before, they just can't really believe we are who we are now saying we are. That was Saul. Then guess who came alongside him, put him under his wing, then went to the apostles, and said – *Hey, this guy's real. I have checked out his testimony. I've checked out what he's doing. He's the real deal. You need to let him in. You don't need to be afraid of him.* – That was Barnabas. Barnabas encouraged the church as he encouraged Saul. So I just have to believe that a special relationship started, and I think Saul kind of looked up to Barnabas and just called him Uncle Barnabas. I think he just felt like they were kin. He was necessary in his life.

So the next thing we know, we think that Paul is now going to take the gospel to the Gentiles. He doesn't. Peter does, and the household of

Cornelius gets saved and that becomes a big debate. But when Peter hears that there are some Gentiles being saved in Antioch, the church in Jerusalem sends Barnabas. He is a respected man in the church. They send him to check it out, and when he sees the grace of God and what it is doing in the lives of these Gentiles, he decides he needs somebody to help him there at Antioch, so he goes back to get Saul of Tarsus. Barnabas travels to Tarsus and begs Saul to come back, and they begin a one year teaching ministry there in Antioch. There was such a transformation in the lives of those Gentiles that for the first time, the Bible says, the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.

Now, the church at Antioch hears about a famine that is happening in Judea. Guess who the church at Antioch wants to send? They want to send the same person that the Jerusalem church sent. They sent Barnabas...and Saul. Are you getting this picture of Barnabas? He's a big deal. Along with Peter, he is mentioned numerous, numerous times in the first part of this book. And he takes Saul with him. The church trusts them with this offering of money. They take the offering money to Jerusalem, and then they come back to Antioch, and guess who they have brought with them. They have brought John, also called Mark, with them, and then they get ready to go on the first mission trip. Chapter 13 says, "...the Holy Spirit said to the church at Antioch, 'Separate for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work which I have called them.'" So the church separates them to go on this first mission trip, they sail to Cyprus, and Mark is with them. When they get to Pamphylia – a region of Southern Galatia – John Mark decides to go back home to Jerusalem. Luke never tells us why. But we have this beautiful picture of Barnabas. He is an encourager.

Do you know what encouragers do? Encouragers do not let your past cancel your future. That is Barnabas. He is Saul's encourager. He did not let Saul's past cancel his future with him. He believed in him. He encouraged him. He took him alongside him, and now we have seen Barnabas kind of step back. Through Luke's writing, the Holy Spirit is letting us know that Barnabas isn't even the leader of the mission trip anymore, Paul is and Barnabas hasn't said a word. He gladly went from the leader's perspective, not just to the co-leader but to the associate leader, and he's letting Paul call the shots, so to speak. And he is tickled to do it. That's the picture of Barnabas.

- **Paul–Willful**

Now we have this picture of Paul. He used to be Saul. Are you ready for this? He was hard. He was cold. He was callous. He was a man of principle and he believed in principle, believed in truth. He believed in truth to the point that he believed *his* truth. So as a Pharisee, as a teacher who was going to succeed Gamaliel, when they got ready to stone the first deacon of the church, a man full of the Holy Spirit, a man full of faith, a man with a good reputation that just to know they had the authority from the Jewish perspective to stone Stephen, all of those who picked up stones laid their coats at Saul's feet. He didn't say a word. He gave the okay for them to stone Stephen to death because he was standing for the truth of God. He was so zealous to do what was right that he went to the high priest to see if the high priest would give him permission to go look throughout the land for people who were following Jesus because they were perverting God and they were perverting Judaism. He had no sympathy.

You know what God did. God saved him. God saved him because God knew he needed a man – a man who believed in truth. Yet, God knew from that first day when He called him to salvation and to service on Straight Street that there would be many times He would have to step into his life and sanctify him to get this flesh tendency out of him and for him to become more and more like Christ.

Now some of us haven't believed this, but Paul tried to tell us. He tried to tell us when he wrote to the church at Philippi that this one thing he did – he put everything else in his past – and he was stretching forward to that one thing. He wanted to lay his hands on something. What he was wanting to lay his hands on was that purpose for which God laid His hands on him originally. He called it the resurrection of the dead, and he said he hadn't attained it yet. Now, don't think he was talking about a future resurrection of the body. Paul had no doubt about that. He knew he was going to be resurrected physically. What Paul was concerned about was he knew that there was a spiritual resurrection that had taken place in his life, that God had called him to stand up and to stand out among sinful people, and Paul wanted to put his hands on that. He wanted to be the man God fully wanted him to be so he could do what God wanted him to do.

So, you have Barnabas with his personality and you have Paul with his personality. You have both of them with their sinful tendencies. You have

both of these guys being a work of sanctification. Neither one of them have arrived at full Christian maturity yet. So it went something like this. – Paul said, *Barnabas, let's go*. Barnabas said *I'm ready. I'm going to take John Mark with us*. Paul said *not on my life. There is no way I'm taking him with us*. – And Barnabas blew it. He had a sharp disagreement with Paul, and as he had to have a sharp disagreement with Paul, Paul had a sharp disagreement with him. And then, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke basically tells us that they bloodied each other, not physically but spiritually. They cut each other with their words. They cut each other with their uncontrollable burst of anger.

Now, I have got to be honest with you. If I were evaluating these two guys, I would take Barnabas's side, not Paul's. But I don't think this is written for us to take a side. I think it's written for us to understand the potential that lies within each one of us, even as leaders of the church, even as leaders of a small group, even as a leader of a home, that we all have this potential. If you don't think you do, you had better be careful.

Barnabas, this encourager, heard Paul say no to John Mark coming with them. The reason he is said no was on the basis of the first trip where John Mark went home and didn't complete the trip, and Barnabas can't understand how somebody could take that view. And I think, maybe, (I don't know this for truth) Barnabas said something he hadn't said before, that he meant...*How can you, who killed all of those Jewish Christians, who totally failed God – and God reaped His grace upon you, harvested you for Himself, brought you out of that and did not let your past cause you not to have a future with him – how can you now look at John Mark and believe he shouldn't be on this trip with us?* That is just my interpretation. And Paul lost it. He had it out with him, but Barnabas didn't back down and Paul didn't back down. When this was over, they separated. Separated. See, some of us don't understand why someone else is the way they are. Well, there is a reason they are the way they are. The personality they have, where they are in their spiritual walk with the Lord, influences people. You know that, right?

But this is between two brothers, and not over doctrine, over a brother! I can understand Barnabas saying, what does it matter if he leaves again and goes home? Barnabas had that view of the Christian life that mission trips aren't always just about the people we are going to do mission work for, that God may have a purpose for the people on the mission trips. Not with Paul, Paul

was that man of principle. Paul was that man that said we have got a job to do, and if he didn't do it with us in the beginning, he can't be on this trip with us. Matter settled. But Barnabas is pleading – *But this second trip, yes, it's going to be about the mission trip, but look at John Mark! He came back to Jerusalem. He witnessed what we said in Jerusalem. He has come to Antioch, he's here, he's ready! Let's give him another chance* – and Paul said no. Barnabas would not back down, so he took Mark and they sailed to Cyprus. No more Barnabas and Paul. No more Paul and Barnabas. That is the last we are going to hear about Barnabas. He is not mentioned in Acts again.

Commended by the Brothers

Now Luke is going to pick up the story because we know from the beginning, at his salvation, Paul is the chosen one to take the gospel to the Gentiles and be the apostle to the Gentiles, so the rest of this story is going to be about Paul. Here is what Paul does, and this is important. Paul chooses Silas and he departs, and then Luke adds this, "...having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord."

I want to give you some options for that phrase. In our Bibles, it looks like at first reading that these phrases are modifying Paul and Silas. Barnabas and Mark go on their way, and if you remember, it tells us back in Acts chapter 13 that they sailed to Cyprus. Luke is trying to tell us they are starting the second missionary trip. Paul (now catch this context) has just prevented John Mark from going with them, so now Barnabas and John Mark are taking the trip without him. So what does Paul do? He chooses Silas. Now, the English reads this way – Paul and Silas were commended by the brothers, the church, to the grace of God. – It sounds like the church made a choice to put their blessing on Paul and Silas.

But this is a long sentence, and sometimes we don't repeat things in the English. We can talk about Ricky and Celisa and put the modifier after Celisa, but it's actually speaking about both of us. So, it could be that the church didn't step in here and say one was right and one was wrong. It could be saying that Barnabas and Mark go this way and Paul and Silas go another way, and they are both commended by the church to the grace of God.

In my personal opinion, I do not know this is true, we have Barnabas and Mark going one way, Paul and Silas going another way, and they are going to meet somewhere. They are going to meet somewhere, and they have just

had it out! The brothers have seen something in those brothers that they have never seen before. Here is what I think it means...They know with the personality of Paul that this could be trouble, so they commend Paul and Silas. They are out of their control, and they commend them to the grace of God. They commend them to God, knowing only God can do what needs to be done in their lives as missionaries, believing they are probably going to meet. Now, we know when we get into the story that they don't meet because God has other plans, but we don't know that yet.

But I want you to see what the church did. The church didn't tell one of the group they couldn't go, and they didn't pick between the two. The church trusted this to the grace of God. They trusted God to do what only God could do in the life of those men. That is what grace is. It's God's enabling power. It's God doing for us what we cannot do for ourself so that we can now do what He did, amen! I want you to see, in this first church experience where these two men who totally lose it and have it out with each other, that the church's faith wasn't in them; the church's faith was in the grace of God. And the church didn't lose respect for either one of these men even though they did what I think they totally should not have done in losing it. Is this good news, or is this good news! Because I have blown it...have you blown it? I'm glad the church didn't give up on me but trusted me to the grace of God.

Now can we do a sideroad here just for a moment? Can you imagine being John Mark? This big fight happened between these two apostles because of you, and your failure, and you did wrong. (Have you ever been the cause of somebody else having a fight?) And now, Paul won't go with Barnabas on this trip. Paul had the choice to go with him but he wouldn't go, he dug his heels in. You are Mark, sailing on that ship, and you know your cousin, Barnabas, is heartbroken at what just happened. He is heartbroken! He lost it defending you, believing in you. He was not going to let your past cancel your future because he believed in you. And now we start this journey.

Can I just be on record as saying this? For Mark's sake, praise the Lord for Barnabas. I know we love Paul, and I love studying Paul's writings; don't misunderstand me. I love that man. But praise the Lord for the Barnabases of the church. Praise the Lord for those leaders in the church who have that Barnabas gift to be an encourager, to come alongside us and remind us that our past doesn't have to cancel out our future if we have learned from God and been redeemed by God. They will go to bat for us, even if it costs them

some friendships because of what they see in you, and that is the moving and working of God's grace.

Paul Eventually Accepts John Mark

Now, I want to give you the happy ending. God continues to sanctify Paul. And at some point in his life, Paul comes to understand he was wrong about Mark. How do I know that? Well, Luke doesn't tell us in Acts, but in Colossians 4:10, Paul says, "Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas..." Luke never tells us that Mark was a cousin because Luke doesn't want you thinking that the reason Barnabas did what he did was because he was kin; that is not why Barnabas did it – he would have done it for you. It is Paul who tells us they were related, and then he continued with "...concerning whom you have received instructions..." See, Paul had to write to the church on behalf of John Mark because he knows John Mark has a bad reputation because of him. He wouldn't let him go on the mission trip, and the church wasn't going to receive John Mark because if they did they would be standing against Paul. So Paul has to write instructions, "...if he comes to you, welcome him." When you read this in Colossians, you have to remember Acts Chapter 15, or you won't understand this, because look what he says next in verse 11, "...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." He calls him my fellow worker. He is now bragging on Mark that there are only three Jewish men left who are with him as a fellow worker, and Mark is one of them. Wow! Is this awesome, or is this awesome?

God used Barnabas on a mission trip to shape Mark into the person God wanted him to be, a fellow worker with Paul! And while Paul wrote most of the New Testament, guess who wrote the first gospel about Jesus Christ? It was Mark! He wrote that action packed gospel, the first synoptic gospel, the gospel that Matthew and Luke both expanded by using his copy to write their copies. That is this Mark who abandoned Paul and Barnabas on the first mission trip! By the time this second mission trip is over, he is being sanctified under the encouragement of Barnabas just as Paul was encouraged under the encouragement of Barnabas.

See, John Mark didn't go home and say I'm never going to church again, and Barnabas didn't quit doing mission work because of Paul. You won't either if you are a child of God. There are many, many people who are sitting at

home today because they have had a sharp disagreement with somebody and they got hurt, and they felt like they were bleeding. Because they are bleeding from the wound of somebody who said they was a Christian, probably a pastor or a deacon or a Sunday school teacher, a person of authority, they have decided they are not coming back to church. Do you know what happens when you take that attitude? You reveal who you really are. You are not a child of God. A child of God does not let an uncontrollable outburst by someone else cause them to quit doing what God's called them to do, and that is to be a part of the church of God, doing the work of God, under the Word of God, empowered by the Spirit of God! That's who we are!

Praise God – Barnabas, John Mark, and Paul were real, and they were who they were, and there were things in their life that they were dealing with just like there are things in your life that you are dealing with. Praise God that while someone else may not see, God sees, and brings somebody into your life to let you see that your past, no matter how bad it's been, does not have to cancel your future with God or the church.