



Acts 15:36-41

36 Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.”

37 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them,

38 but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.

39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus,

40 but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord.

41 He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Special Music - “This is not Goodbye” - Sidewalk Prophets

Judge Jeffery Sutton

(Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit)

Some things are more important than votes...

"It is common knowledge in DC that the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia and the now-late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg were close personal friends. They shared a love of opera, went souvenir shopping together when they traveled, and rode an elephant in India with Scalia up front. Their families spent New Year's Eve together, and when Chief Justice Roberts announced the death of Ginsburg's husband, Marty, Scalia wept on the bench. When Scalia died in 2016, Ginsburg said, "we were best buddies."

They never spoke politics or ideology to one another because as one seasoned observer said, "there would be no point." Scalia himself would say, "if you can't disagree ardently with your colleagues about some issues of law and yet personally still be friends, get another job. for Pete's sake."

On her part, Ginsburg said of Scalia, "as annoyed as you might be about his zinging dissent, he's so utterly charming, so amusing, so sometimes outrageous, you can't help but say, "I'm glad he is my friend." She said she sometimes had to pinch herself to not laugh when he would say something audacious in the courtroom.

In an era when we are being purposefully divided over political and social differences, and friendships and families are being ripped apart in the process, Scalia and Ginsburg were The Odd Couple. They held the deepest respect for each other and kept their disagreements intellectual, not transactional. (Little known fact, it was Scalia that begged Obama to appoint Ellen Kagan to the Court.

He wanted her there so he would have someone to argue with in an intelligent manner.)

When he learned of Ginsburg's passing, Scalia's son, Christopher, shared the following story from Judge Jeffrey Sutton about an encounter late in his father's life.

"During one of my last visit with Justice Scalia, I saw striking evidence of the Scalia-Ginsburg relationship. As I got up to leave his chambers, he pointed to two dozen roses on his table and noted that he needed to take them down to 'Ruth' for her birthday.

"Wow," I said, "I doubt I have given a total of twenty-four roses to my wife in almost thirty years of marriage." "You ought to try it sometime," Scalia retorted.

Unwilling to let him have the last word, I pushed back: "So what good have all those roses done for you? Name one five-four case of any significance when you have got Justice Ginsburg's vote."

Scalia replied, "some things are more important than votes."

This is what we have lost: two earnest and caring people who could place all differences aside for the sake of friendship and an abiding love for each other.

I say to everyone, be a Nino; be a Ruth. Remember what is good in every person you know even when you have to work a little harder to find it or need to let go of anger or hard feelings. God did not put us here in pre-formed harmony, He put us here with differences so we could find it on our own.

Finally, if you are being unduly influenced by anyone who through their speech and actions encourages you to hate or disregard others because they may be or

believe something different from you, tune them out and turn them off. They simply do not have your best interest at heart and are in the business of keeping you riled up for the sake of their own self-interest and profit.

Again, be a Ruth; be a Nino. Be kind to one another. Choose love over votes. It truly is 'bigger than anything in its way,' especially politics."

John Mark leaves Paul and Barnabas in Pamphylia

- 1. The passage of scripture talking about John Mark taking leave of Paul and Barnabas is located in Acts 13:13**

From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.
- 2. For such an innocent passage of scripture, this one event has caused a tremendous amount of speculation and differing opinion among theologians.**
 - a. The scriptures do not tell us why John Mark returned to Jerusalem**
 - b. Differing speculative opinions include**
 - i. John Mark may have received news that his mother was ill**
 - ii. John Mark may have received a note that he was needed in Jerusalem**
 - iii. John Mark may have argued with Paul over differing theologies.**
 - iv. John Mark may have just gotten tired of all the hardships faced when under-taking a journey of this kind. Life on the open road can be extremely tough.**
 - c. This is something that I will not speculate about. There just isn't enough information to have an opinion.**
 - d. Whatever the issue, John Mark left the group and returned to Jerusalem**

Paul and Barnabas Argue

1. We really don't see how unhappy Paul is about John Mark's departure from the 1st missionary journey until Paul and Barnabas are assembling their group for the 2nd Missionary journey

a. Barnabas wants to have John Mark join them.

b. Paul adamantly refuses to allow John Mark to join them. As it says in verse 28 of today's passage:

38 but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.

1. This is the first time we hear of it as a desertion.

2. Whatever the reason is that John Mark left the group, Paul feels that John Mark deserted them, that the reason was not an good excuse for him to return to Jerusalem.

c. There are two very valid views to this argument

i. Paul does not want John Mark to be in a position to jeopardize the success of their journey.

1. Paul may be making a very logical decision with regards to the potential success of the upcoming journey and the safety of the participants.

2. It is also possible that he just didn't want to have to deal with the possibility of John Mark leaving the group again.

ii. On the other hand, Barnabas seems to be showing the greater amount of grace by wanting John Mark along on the trip.

1. Remember that Barnabas means “Encourager.” And just as Barnabas stood in the gap for Paul when everyone was so afraid of him, he now stands in the gap for Mark and chooses to continue to mentor him.

2. We see in Colossians 4:10 that Mark is related to Barnabas, which could also have been a factor.

10 My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)

(Do know that some translations use “relative” rather than “cousin.”)

iii. Whatever the reasoning, neither Paul nor Barnabas were willing to meet in the middle on this issue. So, they split up:

**39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus,
40 but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord.
41 He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.**

- d. I want to point back to our verse from Colossians and see that Paul and Mark do eventually reconcile

Colossians 4:10

10 My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)

- i. I do want to point out here that when Mark returned to Jerusalem, he found a mentor in Peter.
 - ii. Mark becomes known as Mark the Evangelist
 - iii. He is also considered to be the author of the Gospel of Mark by most theologians, which was the first gospel written. Much of the information for the this gospel could have been gleaned from his relationship with Peter.
- e. And while the scriptures never actually talk about Paul and Barnabas reconciling, we do see a certain respect and appreciation that Paul has for Barnabas in even after the separation:

1 Corinthians

1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?

2 Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

3 This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me.

4 Don't we have the right to food and drink?

5 Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?

6 Or is it only I and Barnabas who lack the right to not work for a living?

We can see that Paul views Barnabas as a comrade in service as they both continue to strive to advance the early church, even if they do not do it as a team.

What are our takeaways from this event?

- 1. Relationships change**
 - a. Sometimes due to disagreements**
 - b. Sometimes due to distance**
 - c. Sometimes from lack of tolerance as we all change and grow.**
- 2. The best friendships, like that of Ginsberg and Scalia, are based on mutual understandings, finding common ground, celebrating each other's victories and allowing our fears, differences and opinions to not come between us and the people that enrich us.**
- 3. This is the hard one – Sometimes a relationship just isn't salvageable in its original form, like that of Paul and Barnabas. But God can work with**

- that. He can use those two individuals to take the shared knowledge that they have gained and mentor others.
4. I need to state here that God doesn't cause these kinds of events. It is our attitudes regarding our differences that bring about these kinds of separations. However, God can use these kind of events in a mighty way to further His kingdom. The separation of Paul and Barnabas created an environment where God was able to:
 - a. Allow Barnabas to mentor Mark
 - b. Allow Paul to work with Silas
 - c. Allow the created churches to be lifted and the word to spread in multiple directions.
 5. It is also important to note that when relationships change and parties separate, we should never lose our compassion and respect for the other person. Just as Paul continued to lift Barnabas up to the Apostles (even when he felt they were at odds) we should choose to continue to lift those in our life whom we perceive have wronged us or disagreed with us.
 6. And lastly, do not expect to change the other party to suit your needs. There is a reason that we are individuals with differences and sometimes opposing opinions. God can use different people with different ideals to reach people that would otherwise be unreachable. Instead, lift each other in prayer.

- a. **We should each pray for grace and compassion when we engage with those who do not agree with us.**
- b. **We should listen, even if their beliefs are not our own. We never learn anything new when we are talking. But when we listen, there is always the opportunity to learn something new.**
- c. **Every soul is unique in the eyes of God. God has not set us aside to sit in judgement, but rather to lift others from where they are, friends and enemies alike. We gain nothing by using words and actions that tear people down. We gain the heart and mind of Jesus when we choose to lift people up.**

We are the hands and feet of Jesus in this world, not the hands and feet of malice, deceit, and destruction. Jesus wants us to see people as he sees them, to engage with them in the way that He would engage with them, to reach them with the gospel even when they seem unreachable. He gives us the tools. He gives us the spirit. He inspires us with purpose and grace. Do not let anger prevail. Do not lose sight of the message of Christ in the heat of a moment of disagreement. Always come into a discussion with an ear willing to listen and learn, a voice of compassion, an open mind and heart, and a spirit guided by the love of Christ so that any discussion will be seen and heard as a desire to advance the Kingdom of God.

I want to conclude today by reading a passage from Paul's letter to "God's believers in Rome"

Romans 12:9-16

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.

18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

AMEN