

2/18/24 - Acts 13:36-16:10 - "Mission Status: It's Complicated, but Clear"

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[0 : 00] Okay, if we could open up, we're reading from the book of Acts, chapter 15, starting in verse 36. 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 But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.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. Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra.

A disciple was there named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer. But his father was Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.

[1 : 25] Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places. For they all knew that his father was Greek.

As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem.

So the churches were strengthened in the faith and they increased in numbers daily. And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

And when they had come to Miletus, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So passing by Miletus, they went down to Troas.

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, Come over to Macedonia and help us.

[2 : 30] And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. This is the word of the Lord.

Amen. Thanks be to God. Throughout history, mankind has really been advancing well at handling disagreements.

Been doing pretty good at it, right? Well, I've conjured up a few quotes to try to prove you wrong that unveil the progress that we really have made in handling disagreements.

Some say, let's agree to disagree and quietly resent each other. Or, let's agree to disagree, but also that I am right.

Or, I'd agree with you, but then we'd both be wrong. Or similar to that, if it's okay if you disagree with me, I can't force you to be right.

[3 : 36] Or maybe the last one. Rather than us agreeing to disagree, why don't you just be quiet? What evidence of progress that we've made, right?

In handling disagreements. Well, underneath the humor of these quotes, we uncover the difficult truth that we often don't handle disagreements well.

We don't. And when we do disagree, we have to sometimes ask, is it worthy of disagreements? Is it worthy of disagreements?

Well, last week, we saw the council in Jerusalem, and the gospel was at stake at this council, right? They debated the relevancy of circumcision in the New Testament church. We spoke last week that that was indeed a good fight.

[4 : 39] When works-based salvation is integrated into the topic of what Jesus Christ has accomplished through His works, We get dicey, and we marginalize grace by faith in order that we might achieve salvation.

Works-based salvation doesn't save, and that's why the gospel was at stake at that council. And now in the text today, we see the mission continuing to unfold.

Do you get the sense of Acts 1.8? You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria to the end of the earth. You get that sense and that momentum and the spread in the text today as the gospel and the mission is unfolding in these eastern regions of Macedonia.

Well, Antioch to Macedonia and Achaia. And these fights continue to occur. I want to ask you a question.

How does God want us to view disagreements? The main point of the text today is that God will redeem the mission amid division.

[6 : 01] And we will see that unfold in two sections. Let's discover together God's sovereignty over disagreements in a sermon titled Mission Status.

Yes, it's complicated, but clear. And I encourage every one of us, if you have a ticker pumping in your chest, have your physical Bible open in front of you this morning and have your finger on the text that we're at.

Don't believe me that that will change your time together in the words. Trust me, take a chance in that. We have Bibles available and stick in it as we go through.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your words, something true that we uphold and that we know is the ultimate authority and guide in life.

It is absolutely true. And we may disagree with it, but that disagreement does not reduce the weight of its truth.

[7 : 04] Because we are the ones that are disagreeable to your words. So help us, Lord, to agree as we see this mission spreading and decisions being made and opinions being conducted as your gospel is going forth in these regions.

And let us see Jesus Christ this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. You guys awake today? Okay, kind of?

The coffee is hot and it's good. I think we still have some coffee. So the first section that I have for us in the text that I want us to see, it's a longer portion, a similar theme in the text.

See, in section one, man creates disagreements. I know it's not new to you to know that, but it's in the text and we have to pay attention when the text says something important.

Man creates disagreements. And we see that from Acts chapter 15, verse 36, all the way to Acts 16, verse 5. And the narrator and author of the book of Acts, known as Luke, makes known the disagreements between Paul and Barnabas in verse 36.

[8 : 31] He says in verse 36, Well, that seems simple, right?

A simple task. It's been a while since we've been at these churches. Time has passed by. Well, let's check on those elders that we established.

Let's see how things are doing and check in with them. And what a discipleship strategy that we see, just ingrained in Paul's desire to revisit churches and to follow up.

Oh, man. Follow up? That's the Christian F word, right? Follow up. What? What? You want me to go back?

I just evangelize this person and this person and this person. And you want me to go back and see how they're doing? Enter into drama?

[9 : 47] Maybe be let down because they're not following in the faith? Oh. Follow up is often the most vital aspect of discipleship church and the most frequently neglected following up.

It takes time. It takes energy. It takes perseverance, especially when things are not going very well. And after all, it's easier to just do drive-by evangelism, throw a track out the window, and hope they find Jesus in there and hopefully find a good local church, right?

If only verse 36 would be followed by Acts 16, verse 5, which simply reads, So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

We know that that was not the next verse. There was disagreements. See, the mission is simple.

[10 : 57] Follow up. But it's yet so complicated because there's that pesky word of how. How do we do it? What's your opinion?

When you're fishing for opinion, it's usually not a good sign that a conversation is going to, we're all going to sing kumbaya and get along. Well, this happens in verse 37.

Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark, 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. And there it is in verse 39, as Luke narrates, 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.

[12:01] And he went through Syria and Cilicia. Sorry, get tongue-tied in that. And they were strengthening the churches. Verse 39, we see a sharp disagreement, but what is the disagreements?

These two men who were working together that were in agreement in mission divided based on a disagreement of what to do with John Mark.

Seems silly. We don't know much about this disagreement. We can read into the text and add all of our wonderful, colorful interpretations of what we think that has to do with and what the Greek word is for sharp and the Greek word for disagreements and go into this word trail of trying to figure it out. But Luke simply does not give us the detail. And this is going to be significant as we see the text unfolds. If we dig a little deeper into these disagreements, we know this.

They were wondering if John Mark was the right person for the task. This could be asked in a couple different realms.

[13:19] Was it that he lacked capacity to the mission? Or maybe he wasn't the right guy for the mission? Or maybe Paul was actually looking out for John Mark because he knew that it might cause damage in John Mark's life or something along that nature or had different plans for John Mark.

You understand how we can kind of embellish the story that Luke never really gives us attention and detail for. And so what we have to do is not focus on what is unclear, but focus on what is clear. The mission status is that it's complicated, but clear. What's clear? The mission. The mission is clear. What's unclear?

The best approach. Opinions. And so Barnabas takes John Mark to Cyprus. They sail off. Island boys. And Paul takes Silas through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

And the mission continues. May we see that. And let's continue. Because Paul, upon his journey, he meets his son in the faith, dear Timothy.

[14:37] This is where the two paths cross in Lystra. And, or Lystra, sorry. And Paul appears to be a man of tactful planning.

He's a decision maker, it seems, in the text. Luke seems to be making that clear. And as we see with this debacle with Barnabas, he certainly is a decision maker.

And he says, it says in verse 16, in verse 1, Paul came also to Durb and to Lystra. A disciple was there named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was Greek, was a Greek.

He was well spoken of, Timothy was, and of all, of, of, of, of, of, he was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.

And then verse 3, Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

[15:44] Well, that's an interesting decision. Not only was there a decision made on John Mark continuing in this mission, but now, Paul, have you lost your marbles?

Do you, have you forgotten what was just decided upon in this council in Jerusalem in Acts 15?

Why would you circumcise? You disregarded John Mark for the journey?

You're circumcising after we just talked about all of this? We worked it all out. We might find it odd for Paul to make such a big thing, a huge thing over circumcision in Jerusalem and then in Lystra kind of have a talk out of both sides of his mouth as the saying goes.

He thinks it will help Timothy's effectiveness with the Jews if he was circumcised for that mission. I mean, to get circumcised, I mean, as an adult, I mean, I mean, there's some details here that just broadcast the severity of what is at stake in these Jewish regions.

Many today might say to Paul, well, Paul, I don't agree with that. Why would you choose to circumcise Timothy? You of little faith, Paul.

[17:16] Do you not believe in the power of God unto salvation? That act of circumcision is kind of using man-made tactics in order to proclaim the gospel.

I think many would probably argue that with Paul today. But Paul was a tactful missionary being wise and knowledgeable in debates.

We see that all throughout Acts. You would imagine that this decision would have caused his Twitter feed to absolutely blow up by the fundamentalist followers tweeting or is it tweet anymore? X-ing? I don't know. So, tweeting, what are you doing, Paul? Alright, guys, let's pray for Paul. He's falling away from the faith from the Jerusalem council verdict.

Let's cancel his radio program now. He's falling away. What we should see here is that sometimes the mission requires a tactful approach.

[18:26] Paul was a man who, as 1 Corinthians chapter 9 verse 20 says, to the Jews I became like a Jew to win the Jews.

To those under the law I became like one under the law so as to win those under the law in verse 21. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law so as to win those not having the law.

Verse 22, to the weak I became weak to win the weak I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.

what we should see here amid the disagreements that man creates is that evangelism is simply not a one size fits all.

It is not. it is not the only approach there is not only just one strategy and so with Paul's strategy executed with Timothy and having recruited a team now it is three of them the three amigos they continue in verse 4 as they went on their way through the cities they delivered to them for observance the decisions that have been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem and look we reach finally verse 5 finally verse 5 so the churches were strengthened in the faith and they increased in numbers daily.

[20:20] You see church decisions were made disagreements were fought risks were taken but the mission was clearly underway.

Maybe it's better to spend our time not in figuring out what the sharp disagreement was all about but simply to see Luke communicating to us that nothing could stop the spread of the gospel.

Nothing. No disagreements no little act of circumcision to build credibility to a Jewish audience nothing can stop the gospel and our opinions cannot stop the gospel as well.

Amen. And the second section we see sort of all of this culminate into verse 6 through 10 where God redeems disagreement.

We see all this mess and people going this way the island boys are that way we got the three amigos this way and we're saying what is happening and of course being a protestant I look at divisions and things like that being good but it's important to see that God does redeem disagreements he does what we see here unfold is so profound and it will challenge those who view disagreements as counterintuitive to the mission of God like we're wasting our time why?

[21:56] Because Luke makes it clear in this text God was still guiding the mission and if God is guiding the mission guess what also he is guiding he is guiding disagreements as well in verse 6 and they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak a word in Asia don't believe me church the Holy Spirit didn't forbid Paul and Barnabas to divide the Holy Spirit didn't forbid Paul from using a specific strategy for a Jewish audience for Timothy but the Holy Spirit did forbid the speaking of the gospel in Asia or Bithynia in verse 7 God is guiding this is profound church because that which the Holy Spirit did not forbid the Holy Spirit allowed and guided and not only that but as the mission continue

Paul received a vision of where to speak in verse 9 in verse 9 and a vision appeared to Paul in the night a man of Macedonia was standing there urging him and saying come over to Macedonia and help us and when Paul had seen the vision immediately he sought to go on into Macedonia concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them and church as we stand back and survey the disagreements of old why is it so difficult for us to see the hand of God like something's wrong because disagreements happen sharp disagreements because people have opinions why do we stand back and survey these and find it difficult to see the hand of God well if you've been at Steel Valley Church for the past 10 years Steel Valley Church is here today where it is today on behalf of a disagreements and division and God's evident hand testifies to his redeeming power

over disagreements amen this is true today and you see it was through disagreement that the mission of God multiplied maybe God uses our frailty in life and our differing opinions in order to multiply the mission in two different directions it was through disagreement that Timothy was brought under Paul's wing there may not have been room for Timothy if had John Mark been with them may not found Timothy right it was God's hand clearly evidence in working through disagreement to spread the gospel and something important here that I want anyone who might not be a

Christian today is I want you to see something here is that God will certainly pursue you do you see that God is so devoted and dedicated to his mission his love is relentless in pursuit and persistency to intrude upon your life and say not that way come to me those who labor and I will give you rest God pursues us and he calls us by name gives us a new nature a new status once being alienated alienated from God and brought in through adoption all on account of faith maybe you are running from him today kind of recoiling away from Jesus the thought of having one way to the father just seems too limited for an infinite

God well if Jesus said he is the way the truth and the life I certainly am going to bet my life upon that truth and I pray that you will as well today stop running from him today have faith and agreement that Jesus Christ died for you to give you new life his mission is a pursuing mission even amid disagreements even amid the things that we might call a bump in the road and so I want to close with a little quote from A.W.

[26 : 54] Tozer he instructed that in a fallen world like ours unity is no treasure to be purchased at the price of compromise loyalty to God faithfulness and truth and the preservation of a good conscience are jewels more precious than gold vofear or diamonds from the mine power lies in the union of things similar in the division of things dissimilar maybe what we need in religious circles today is not more union but some wise and courageous division everyone desires peace but it could not but it could be that revival will follow the sword did you hear that everyone desires peace but it could be that revival will follow the sword amen church we cannot avoid disagreement but we certainly can avoid being disagreeable right there's a difference especially in matters of the conscience right in opinions over things it takes maturity spiritual maturity to understand nuances of many personal convictions mind being different than maybe less or even my own wife but we have to have spiritual maturity to understand the nuances of many different varying personal convictions which often involve subjective evaluation of facts and various factors being involved in that and when varying personal convictions go head to head when less goes to brent and they meet head to head the result will reveal a differing opinion paving the way for often what we may perceive as relational setbacks but are they setbacks church or is it a refinement process of discerning

God's will in our lives and parts of sanctification what we see as a setback is in the mission of Paul and Barnabas is that God used those means to advance the gospel in different geographical locations and now I am not saying to just go around and be a bully and disagree with everyone strive for unity absolutely don't hear something I'm not saying right don't be too heavy of a protestant but if possible always strive for unity while not violating your own conscience you see disagreements can be difficult but disagreements do not have to be devastating church yes disagreements are painful and no one likes separation no one likes conflict or confrontation but the text today serves as a reminder that God's sovereign plan can still be at work it can still be at work in your life while a family member is falling away from the Lord or maybe a family member is coming out as homosexual or transgender it can still be at work when you disagree with other family members on in their lifestyle and you are not abandoning them you don't need to feel the weight of that as a setback but maybe a refinement process

God works through human disputes he certainly does in the text doesn't he might Luke actually include this to show us that nothing can stop the gospel this brings hope in all of our relationships in all of your marriages if you're single it can bring hope in your relationships with friends co-workers even your neighbor or even your parents can bring hope for all those things because the gospel is not done so why do we so easily lose heart if only we can have an ounce of tenacity that God has for us and pursuing us that we might be able to pursue and unify our relationships with one another and work out disagreements in families and friends in fact the only thing hindering the mission is our reluctant hearts of being able to get past the complicated drama on the clear mission of the gospel it's us that needs to change this makes me think of

Joshua's situation or Joseph one of those J names Joseph's situation in Genesis 50 where God's plan for Joseph seemed devastating he was sold rejected by brothers right but might we also see the truth of his conclusion at the end of it all he says in Genesis 50 verse 20 you intended to harm me but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done the saving of many lives see when we experience difficulty and perceivable setbacks we can rest in the plan of a sovereign God who works together all things for good and we can trust him in this life even in the midst of disagreements knowing that God will redeem the mission amid division let's pray