**Disagreeing Well – Paul and Barnabas part Company**

by Stephen Miles

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.*

**Introduction: What has happened?**

To think that this was just a small argument or that this wasn’t a big deal we would be wrong. The Greek word used is ‘paroxysmos’ which carries the overtones of severely heightened emotions, red distorted faces, loud voices, things said that were better unsaid. Paul and Barnabas had a huge row, a sorry sight, an explosive argument.

But why? Paul was thinking back to what had happened in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. John Mark, whom this argument had been about, hadn’t even made it over the first hurdle on the Turkish missionary trip. Paul didn’t trust his reliability and thought he was just going to jump ship again and go home. Paul needed people he could rely on. On the other hand, Barnabas also known as the (Son of Encouragement), was living up to that name. He was acknowledging the fact that John-Mark was a youngster on the last trip and simply had panicked. Also, Barnabas and John-mark were cousins, and it could be argued that Barnabas probably had seen that he had matured, grown in his spirituality, maybe through time he spent with him whilst Paul and he were in Jerusalem. Therefore, he just needed another opportunity.

A huge row erupts, and, in the end, they part their ways.

**The Story:**

Have you ever had an argument which sounds like this? Where you’re both right, where neither of you are willing to concede … I know I have. They are arguments that make you feel sick maybe, lost, hurt, damaged or maybe result in you digging your feet in and not willing to budge on any other points. You plant your standard in the ground, and you don’t move. But even when we disagree, there is a way in which we can disagree well, even if it means, as in the case of Paul and Barnabas, that there’s separation, because neither of you can see the other persons point of view, there is still a way to disagree well. So, here are three things to think about:

**Bless Others:**

How we communicate about others after a disagreement, gives the enemy a foot hold into our lives as well as those who we have had an argument with. Puritan writer Mathew Henry once said, *we shall never be all of a mind till we come to heaven, where light and love are perfect.* The picture Luke paints in this passage in Acts is a shameful episode in scripture, one where both Paul and Barnabas must have looked back and hung their heads. But the reality is that sometimes in disagreements we just can’t find common ground. However, one thing we see is that does not stop them commending each other in their future ministry. They don’t try to put a stop to the other persons plans. In 1 Corinthians 9:6, sometime after their separation, we can see Paul refers to Barnabas as a fellow worker who shares in his life and labour of the gospel.

**Space isn’t a bad thing:**

We very rarely want to be seen as weak but instead standing our ground and sticking to what we think is right. When disagreements reach a stale mate we just go around in circles in our argument and at that point, time apart and space is not a bad thing. Afterall, Romans 8:28 tells us that God works all things to his good. And later in his life and ministry, what we see in 2 Timothy 4:11, is that Paul asks for John-Mark to be sent to him *because he is useful*. Was its Pauls rebuke of Mark or Barnabas’s patience with him that helped him? We don’t know, but what we do know is that God bought victory out of contention, and Mark was used for great things.

**God triumphs even through the failures of his people:**

As we saw in the previous point that God works all things for good. But we can also see that even through the failures of his people God still triumphs. After Paul and Barnabas’s argument we could be forgiven for thinking that everything had gone wrong it had all failed, however out of one faltering missionary journey two emerge. This episode in the life and ministry of Paul and Barnabas shows us massively what the message of the gospel demonstrates – that God can bring good from the greatest human folly and sin. Two missionary journeys out of one, Barnabas and Mark going off to Cyprus to consolidate the work that had already been started. With Paul and Silas onto a whole new venture into uncharted territory.

**In conclusion**:

Arguments happen and sometimes arguments mean that we have to go our separate ways when both parties are deeply rooted in their positions. But how we respond to these arguments, to this separation gives testimony to God. Therefore, how can we disagree well? First, bless those who we have fallen out with and don’t speak negatively of them; secondly, take space if it is needed, because God works all things to good; and finally, trust that God ultimately triumphs even when we fail.

**Questions**

1. When you have a disagreement with someone, how do you respond? Have you learned to bless the other and speak well of them even if you do not disagree with them?
2. Is there a current conflict in your life experience where you are persevering with a situation – but it might be better to take some space?
3. How do you see God at work in conflicts and disagreements in your life? Does prayer feature in your approach?
4. Pray for anyone that you have had a disagreement with and ask God to bless them and to do good to them.