

TURN TO ACTS 13

Over the next few weeks we are going to be looking at the theme of forgiveness and reconciliation.

A couple of reasons for that

1. It's a good subject to consider when leading up to Easter to remind us that Jesus has died to take upon himself our sin that we might be forgiven and reconciled to God. And we are called to forgive as Christ forgave us. Freely we have received freely give. It's a good general theme to keep in mind.
2. The second reason for looking at this subject is a specific one for this Church. Within the last 4 years or so Cabin Lane Church has had to deal with the difficulty of losing 2 pastors. Both situations have been difficult to deal with, both have provoked emotional response, both have led to divided opinion and potential conflict. For some, those two events may have been even harder to deal with because they have been a catalyst for bringing to the surface personal issues that still need resolving in them that are not necessarily anything to do with the Church.

NOT SURPRESS

When we encounter difficult circumstances in regard to relationships with one another - to ignore the problem does not resolve it – it just suppresses it and may in turn make matter worse

But to address difficult circumstances can be uncomfortable and different people will respond in different ways and lots of personal issues may well come into the mix that will make the process of healing difficult

NO PROBLEM

Now there will be many here who don't have any issues to resolve in regard to the Church or in regard to personal matters. If that is the case then can I suggest that first of all you praise God and that you secondly store what God says to you over the next few weeks so that you will be strong when you DO next encounter an environment of conflict with other people.

SOLUTION

If you **are** dealing with issues then this may be your time to get help and support

Whatever you are dealing with your response may be one of anger, guilt, sadness, confusion. You may be very vocal about the way you feel or maybe you are silent and no one else knows the pain you are carrying. God does! And maybe during these next few weeks something that is said or sung or prayed will be His way of helping you deal with the problem that you regularly thinking about and maybe have prayed to God about

Giving God our problems is only part of the process. It is important that we also take time to listen to His response and apply His solutions so that we can move from the place of hurt into a place of healing.

PRAYER SUPPORT

At the end of every meeting if you would like to talk to someone about anything that rises within you as we explore this subject then there is a prayer team in the corner who will listen to you and pray with you in a non threatening or imposing way. If what rises up is specific to the Church then perhaps it would be helpful to also arrange to speak with one of the Elders.

NOT READY

If you don't feel ready to address your issue just yet, then that's fine. If it is all too personal and difficult right at the moment then don't rush it. But also please don't stay away from Church over the next few weeks **because** we are looking at the subject. Try and stick with it and perhaps by the time we have got to the end you will feel stronger and more confident than you did at the start to begin working through the things that concern you.

STORIES

What we are going to do over the Sundays leading up to Easter is to simply look at some real life stories in the Bible where

- people fell out with each other,
- or where someone offended someone,
- where there was some conflict between people
- that eventually led to, or attempted to, lead to reconciliation.

And as we look at these stories we want to draw from them any principles that we might be able to take on board in order to respond to **our** situation.

This morning we are going to think about a story that affects 4 people: 2 Church leaders and two trainees - Paul, Barnabas, John Mark and Timothy and I want us to think about the somewhat strange way in which God worked in Paul's life to enable him to be ready to be reconciled with someone he had fallen out with.

READ Acts 13:1-12

¹In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ²While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. ⁴The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. ⁵When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. ⁶They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos there they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, ⁷who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. ⁸But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. ⁹Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ¹⁰"You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? ¹¹Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun." Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹²When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. ¹³From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. ¹⁴From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch.

And then Paul goes on in chapter 14 & 15 to visit Iconium and Lystra and Derbe

REFERENCE TO MARK

Note the particular reference to John Mark in v 13

¹³From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.

MARK

Mark was the cousin of Barnabas and it was at Mark's house that the early Church was meeting when Peter was set free from prison. So Mark probably got to hear first hand accounts of what God was doing in the early Church and ended up wanting to get involved. And so he was given the opportunity to travel with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey.

MARK'S DESSERTION

Something happened however that led to him to choose to go home and Paul and Barnabas completed the first missionary journey with him.

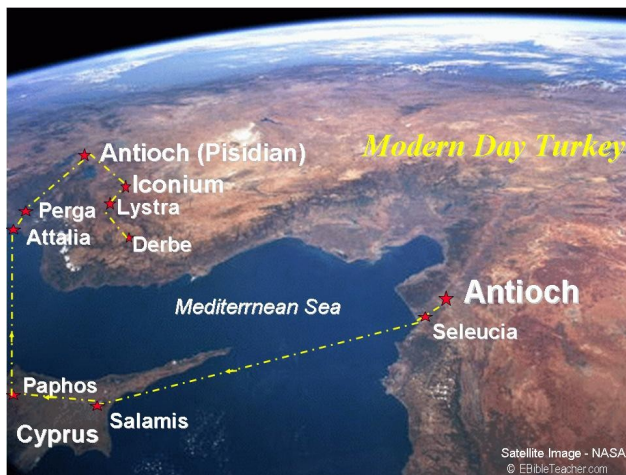
- Maybe he was homesick
- Maybe after encountering what happened in Cyprus he was scared about what he had let himself in for so decided to go home
- Maybe he wasn't physically well
- Maybe he was someone who couldn't commit himself and he just changed his mind
- Maybe he always had in his mind to only stay for a short while
- We don't know

What we do know is that Mark started with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary but didn't complete it with them

SECOND JOURNEY

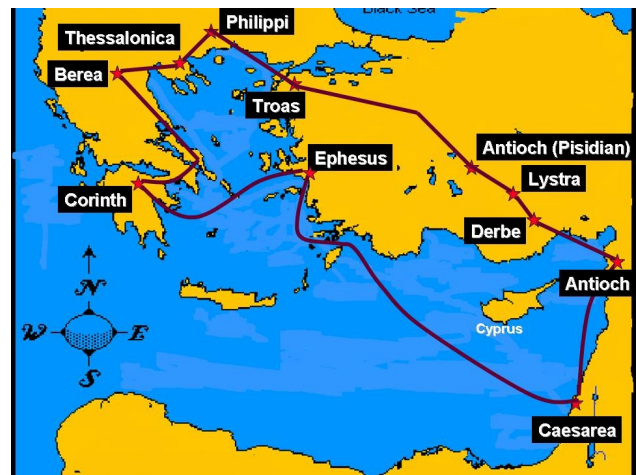
During that first journey Paul covered a lot of ground, met a lot of people and started a number of Churches. A little while later Paul went on a second missionary journey – we read about it in Acts 15-18 and on that occasion Paul covered a much larger amount of territory

If we compare the two missionary journeys we find that



FIRST JOURNEY

Covered about 1225 miles
Records Paul visiting 8 different places
70 verses in Acts dedicated to it
As a result the letter to Galatians was written



SECOND JOURNEY

Covered about 2040 miles
Records Paul visiting 10 different places
102 verses in Acts dedicated to it
As a result the letter to the Philippians, 2 to the Thessalonians, 2 to the Corinthians & 2 to Timothy

GREATER JOURNEY

Paul's first journey was great but his second journey was greater –and we have nearly a third of the New Testament as a result of that second journey. Paul had no idea of the far reaching potential of that second journey when he first conceived the idea – he thought he was just going to visit the Churches he met on the first journey – but as we now know it was to become a highly significant journey

CONFLICT PAUSE

What we also know is that between the first and the second journey something significant happened that could have caused the second journey to have never taken place....a major conflict arose between Paul and Barnabas

READ ACTS 15:35-40

Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord. Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing. Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 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. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.

And so they parted, and Barnabus does not appear again in any further accounts. The Son of Encouragement leaves discouraged- what a horrible scene

PAUL AND BARNABUS

Barnabus took Mark with him to Cyprus and Paul chose Silas and took him on his second journey. And whilst God greatly blessed Paul with a new partner – it seems so sad that a wonderful encouraging spiritual partnership should end so suddenly and awkwardly and we do not read anyway else in Scripture of Paul meeting back up with Barnabus. That doesn't mean he didn't – it just means that the Bible is silent on the issue.

These two people had just been instrumental in bringing peace and unity between the Churches over the issue of law and grace and now they are divided not over an issue of theology but over how they should respond to a young man who apparently messed up – a man who Paul felt had “deserted them”

ENEMY & PERSONALITY

Two forces were at work here – the force of the enemy and the force of personality

Together Barnabus and Paul had won many people for Christ. Because of their first missionary journey many new churches had been established. A lot of the enemy's hold over people had been removed and therefore the enemy was far from happy - when you stir up a hornets nest you should expect the hornets to try and sting you

I don't know if Satan is fully aware of what is up ahead – but if he was able to just get a glimpse of the potential good work that this second missionary journey was going to achieve then he may have done whatever he could to prevent it .

THE WAY THE ARGUMENT BEGAN

The enemy knew that Paul and Barnabus were strong in the area of faith – so there little point in trying to stir up a doctrinal disagreement between them

The enemy knew that Paul and Barnabus were physically strong – so that there was little point trying to subject them to some kind of physical limitation that would hinder their work.

PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES

Where the enemy was able to tempt them however was in the area of the individual characters of Paul and Barnabus which were very different

**PAUL WAS MISSION CENTRED BARNABUS WAS MISSIONARY CENTRED
PAUL FOCUSED ON THE WORK BARNABUS FOCUSED ON THE WORKER**

Both views were valid but they caused a conflict when applied to Mark

Paul was not happy by Mark's desertion from the first trip and therefore the idea of Mark joining them on the second trip was a non-starter.

PAUL

Paul was mission minded. He could see the need to get the message out. Because it was such an important message he felt the need to only use those who he considered to be reliable and strong in the faith to establish the work. Mark did not fit the criteria in Paul's eyes but instead Paul thought Mark's presence on their second journey would be a hindrance to God's Work. So he said NO!

BARNABAS

Barnabas however saw it in a totally different way.

Barnabas was a people person - willing to take a risk with those who others may not trust. He knew how to operate as a Spiritual FATHER figure. He had done that with Paul, stepping forward to speak on his behalf when people did not believe he had become a Christian, and then later working with him at Antioch and then stepping back to let Paul develop his missionary program during the first journey

Barnabas was now encouraging Paul to take a risk with John Mark. Barnabas had seen the potential in Paul and nurtured him – Barnabas could now see so much potential in John Mark and he wanted to nurture and direct him in the right way.

Barnabas believed that being given another opportunity to go on the mission field could be of great benefit to Mark to help refine his character and train him up for full time Christian work.

WHEN BARNABUS THOUGHT OF THE 2nd MISSIONARY JOURNEY HE COULD SEE HOW MUCH GOD'S WORK COULD HELP MARK

SUMMARY

And so here were to two points of view

- Paul felt the Mission would not benefit from Mark,
- But Barnabus thought that Mark would benefit from the Mission

I like what Warren Wiersbe says about this argument he says

**"Paul looked at people and asked 'What can they do for God's work?'
while Barnabus looked at people and asked "What can God's work do for them"**

CONSEQUENCE

As they discussed the issue together neither of them would compromise their positions and they began to become more distant from each other

The outcome was that Paul said that he was not going to take Mark on the mission and he didn't – he took Silas instead

Barnabas said Mark should be on the mission team **and he was** but it wasn't the team with Paul instead Barnabas took Mark on another mission back to Cyprus which was Barnabas' home – whilst Paul took Silas on his second missionary journey

Such a sad story. Two of the greatest evangelists who had done some much for the Kingdom of God together – now divided, now parted, now separated,.

CABIN LANE SECOND JOURNEY

Before we look at what happened I want to suggest that as Cabin lane Church your second phase of ministry in the whole life centre is going to be far more reaching than your first phase of ministry in the school and now here in the community centre.

Can I suggest that it is no coincidence therefore that this Church finds itself having to deal with a terrible situation caused by human weakness just as it is on the verge of launching into a new phase of ministry.

It is not unlike what we read in Acts. Satan is not very original. If something has been successful in the past – Satan may well use the same strategy in the present. And maybe that is what has happened here. In an attempt to disrupt the Church from moving forward into a mission that will win many to Christ in Oswestry Satan has used one of his oldest tricks – temptation – to rob the Church of its minister, to rob the minister of a ministry, to rob families of faithful loving relationships – and it hurts.

- Through all this there are lessons to learn from the past
- Loving support to offer in the present
- Safeguards for the future to put into place

OUR SECOND JOURNEY

What this Church has gone through affects everyone in one way or another but there are other situations added to this one that are deeply personal – that only affect you – but maybe they are an attempt to rob you of something wonderful that is up ahead. Maybe God wants to lead YOU into a second journey that will be far more fruitful than the first one you have engaged in.

- Such a thing is possible if we address any conflicts that exist in the present so it will bring healing to the past in order for us to have clear access to plans God has for our lives in the future.
- Unforgiveness, bitterness, judgementalism, hard heartiness in the present will keep the issues of the past alive and act as a barrier for accessing God's goodness in the future.

WORDS OF JESUS

Jesus said

“Pray for those who despise you – bless and do no curse”

And we will be looking specifically on Jesus teaching later in this month.

RECAP

So Paul went on his journey without MARK – but also without Barnabas
Barnabas went to Cyprus with MARK but without Paul

HOW DID THEY SPLIT?

Exactly how they felt about each other is unknown- it is possible that they split amicably - agreeing to disagree agreeably and rather than going on one missionary journey they created two. We don't know. I wonder how Mark felt having been the cause of the split?

HAPPY ENDING?

What we do know is that this conflict does have a something of a happy ending!
We are not told anywhere in the Bible that Paul and Barnabas ever reconciled their differences. That doesn't mean that they didn't – it just means that the Bible is silent on the matter. What we do know however is that Paul and Mark were reconciled. We know that from something Paul writes in one of his letters some 20 years later. In 2 Timothy, which is believed to be the last letter Paul wrote, he says to Timothy

POWERPOINT - 2 TIMOTHY 4:9-11

"Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world and has departed for Thesalonica, Crescans for Galatia Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you for he is useful to me for ministry"

By the time Paul was drawing his ministry to a close John Mark was a valuable member of Paul's support staff and in fact may well have been closely working with the Apostle Peter as well.

WHAT HAPPENED TO CHANGE PAUL?

At what point Paul and Mark got together we don't know and how they exactly forgave each other and were reconciled we also don't know. What we do know is that they did work out things together and I want to suggest one of the reasons why it happened was because Paul prepared his heart for reconciliation and he did it in an unusual way.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Having split up with Mark and Barnabas Paul took Silas with him and headed back to the Churches that he had helped establish during his first missionary journey.

His first place of call was Derbe and Lystra and I suggest that what he encountered there prepared the foundation for the process of forgiveness and reconciliation with Mark even though Mark wasn't actually involved.

PAUL QUESTIONS HIS HANDLING

As Paul left Barnabas and Mark I think he began to question whether or not his handling of the disagreement was right! Had it really been worth arguing about? Was it really such an important issue that it warranted a breakup with his close friend. Had he been too harsh – could Barnabas have been right? Should Paul have considered the worker as well as the work? Should Paul have been a spiritual father figure to John Mark?

- Paul knew that he could not turn back the clock and undo what went wrong –so there was no point wishing for that to happen. And the same applies to us. Just pondering "what if", or "if only" doesn't change anything.
- Paul also knew that he could not make right the current situation because Barnabas and Mark had gone one way and he had gone another. It may be something he could resolve in the future but at that given moment he was unable to do anything specific to be reconciled with Barnabas and Mark

NO COINCIDENCE

Into this situation I don't think it is a coincidence that not long after Paul and Barnabas had split over Mark that Paul was introduced to another young man

READ ACTS 16:1-3

¹He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. ²The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. ³Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek

Notice v3 **"Paul wanted to take him along on the journey"**

PAUL'S CHOICE

No one was forcing Paul – Paul wanted this to happen. It was his choice to make good this opportunity in the light of the events that had previously occurred.

Paul knew that his attitude towards John Mark had caused a division so here only a short time later – right at the start of his second missionary journey Paul encounters another young man, another young inexperienced believer.

- Just like John Mark he had a believing mother,
- Just like John Mark he was recommended by others –
- Just like John Mark he was expressing an interest in partnering with Paul
- and this time Paul said YES

Paul could have said “oh no not another one” – he could have said “once bitten twice shy”. He could have walked away and kept his principled heels dug in – but instead he did what Barnabas had done with Mark – Paul took Timothy under his wing and began to nurture him and in doing so it was helping Paul to lay to rest some of his guilt for rejecting Mark!

NOT CLAM UP

Part of the process of the healing of the past can involve doing something again in the present but this time doing it differently

Often our failures or the failures of others that have affected our lives can cause us to clam up and withdraw ourselves from getting involved in similar things again.

- We might say I will never get involved in that ministry again because I will just mess up
- Or I will never get involved with those people again because I could never trust them again

When our self esteem is low because we got something wrong or when we are hurt by the actions of others - don't be surprised if God presents us with the opportunity to do something similar as before but this time to approach it a little differently in the light of previous events.

That is what God did for Paul in leading him to Timothy

By nurturing Timothy Paul developed a new attitude to working with young people who had potential, that helped Paul feel that he got it **right** this time – this time it brought unity instead of division and unbeknown to Paul working with Timothy was actually helping him to become ready to welcome Mark back into his life at a later stage. And Mark was to become a great help to Paul and also a great help to the Kingdom through the writing of his Gospel. Doing the right thing in the present eventually affected the wrong things done in the past.

BEING PREPARED

Now Paul's situation was unique but the idea of having our heart prepared ready for reconciliation I think is important for us all.

The process of reconciliation may take a long time or may take a short time but in the meantime I believe we need to prepare our heart to be reconciled with others.

- When a new born child comes into the world the parents prepare the home to receive it
- When a meal is to be cooked you prepare for the event by buying all the ingredients
- When you go on holiday abroad you prepare for the event by ensuring you have a passport, insurance, suitcase, appropriate clothing
- Before you preach a sermon you prepare the content
- Before you plant a crop you prepare the group to receive it by removing obstacles to growth

MAIN POINT

If we are to engage in genuine forgiveness and reconciliation we need to prepare the ground of our hearts so that we will receive back into our lives the ones who have hurt us.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY

If we don't do that then no matter what the person who offended us says or does they cannot be reconciled with us because we won't let them because the degree of our hurt is greater than our ability to pursue healing and so we are not ready to be reconciled.

If we just wait for others to do the right thing and seek reconciliation with us but we ourselves are not doing anything about addressing our own hurt then we delay the process and extend our pain.

If we could however address our pain then we will as a result be preparing ourselves to be ready for process of reconciliation.

PAUL ADDRESSES HIS HURT

Paul began to address his pain concerning the split with Barnabas over Mark by responding to another person – Timothy - in the way he should have responded to Mark.

Paul had done the wrong thing with Mark and he couldn't do anything about it but by doing the right thing with Timothy he got himself into the right frame of heart and mind that made him ready for the time when God brought Mark and Paul back together. All that Paul had learnt and invested in Timothy helped Paul to be ready for that moment when they at some point came together, forgave each other, were reconciled with each other and supported each other in the ministry of the Kingdom.

What will it take for you and me to have a heart that is ready for reconciliation

PAUL'S REFLECTION

Two questions in closing

1. Who is your Mark? What circumstance do you look back on with regrets? What interaction with others went wrong and you have felt bad about it ever since?

WHAT HAS LEFT IT'S MARK ON YOU?

2. Who or what is your Timothy?

What opportunities might God be presenting you with today that can help you to prepare your heart to be reconciled with someone else tomorrow?

What practical things are you doing that will pave the way for your healing from past hurts and unkind people?

What barriers exist that are standing in your way of forgiving someone and seeking reconciliation with them and what positive things can you do to tackle those barriers so that you can be ready for reconciliation?

For Paul he found an unusual way by investing time in a person who was just like the one who he had fallen out with but this time he responded to this young man in a different and better way than he had towards Mark

For us the method may be different - or it could be the same. Maybe God would want us to invest time in the life of others as part of the process of being reconciled with someone who we used to invest our lives in but then things went wrong.

SECOND CHANCE

If you look back and say – if I had my time all over again I would do some things differently then take hold of that idea and DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY NOW within the opportunities God is giving you NOW.

If God gives us a second chance then let's make sure we get things right by learning the lessons from what went wrong the first time and changing what we do in the light of it. A second journey can so often achieve so much more than the first one

Whatever is our Mark (our place of regret, our place of pain) let us ask God to lead us to our Timothy (God's provision for us to get our hearts right so that in time we are able to forgive and be reconciled with those who have hurt us)

OUR TIMOTHY

Our Timothy

- could be a person who will offer us counsel
- could be a book that offers teaching
- could be some music or some other expression of the arts that helps us to reflect
- Could be sermons a minister has preached
- Could be an set of circumstances that we encounter

All of them are examples of Timothy - a means through which God will help us to prepare the ground – our heart – to forgive and be reconciled with those we have offended or with those who have offended us.

GO NO FURTHER

When Paul met his Timothy He did not want to go any further in his life and journey without Timothy being part of it.

Can I suggest that we need to respond to our Timothy in the same way

To not let our lives continue any longer without having within it a desire to be an agent of forgiveness and reconciliation and to work hard to bring closure to any areas of conflict that still need to be addressed.

GLORY TO GOD

That we may bring glory to God – who is not only the great healer of the physical body and the Spiritual dimension of a person but is also the healer of division, desiring to see broken relationships restored, so that He may be glorified and that we may find peace with Him and one another.