



**Sermon Text:** Acts 15:36-41

*Sermon Date:* May 27, 2018

On Sunday, we witnessed the tragic death of one of the greatest mission partnerships. Paul & Barnabas suddenly separate, unwilling to continue working together. Pastor Justin began the sermon by tracing the deterioration of their ministry partnership.

**COMMITTED PARTNERSHIP:** The passage opens with Paul's suggestion (and Barnabas's implied agreement) to return to visit the churches they planted on their first missionary journey. They are committed to the work of the gospel and committed to each other.

**DIFFERING OPINIONS:** The seed of their separation is their differing opinions on taking with them John Mark, who had abandoned them on their previous journey. Barnabas, Mark's cousin, wanted to give him a second chance. Paul, however, refuses. Since this new mission trip will be just as difficult as the last one, Mark cannot be trusted.

**SHARP DISAGREEMENT:** Soon the difference of opinion escalates into a heated argument. The seasoned missionaries and long-time friends are strongly opposed to one another. Luke's word choice carries the idea of violent action or emotion. Before long, Paul and Barnabas are marching in opposite directions—neither one looking back.

**PAINFUL SEPARATION:** They don't make up. They don't agree. They don't shake hands, give each other a hug, and arrive at a reasoned, strategic decision. No, they separate, going in opposite directions. Kent Hughes says, "The omission of a harmonious conclusion indicates the unstated and undeniable failure of two of the greatest souls the church has ever known."

**CONTINUED MINISTRY:** Even when their failures are in full bloom, God continued to use them—Paul, Barnabas and John—for his glory. As Derek Thomas says, "God uses broken vessels to achieve his purposes, or else he would have to perform his purposes without us."

## APPLICATION

Pastor Justin ended by showing us three ways this text speaks into our lives and our relationships.

1. **Caution.** This text is a word of warning. How delicate are our relationships! We act like they are as durable as iron, but they are as fragile as glass. If this could happen to Paul and Barnabas, who had been through so much together, it can happen to any of us. Unless we take great care, there are cracks in our fellowship that Satan will creep through to disturb and divide us also.
2. **Comfort.** Our spiritual heroes were far from perfect. If God would use them, then he will use us too, even in our imperfections. This must not excuse sin, but it should give us hope in our struggle against it. No matter how bad your fall may be, there is a road paved with grace back to usefulness.
3. **Confidence.** Even though this breakup is a tragedy, God uses it to accomplish his good purposes. Instead of only one mission team, there were now two gospel outreaches. God does right even in our wrongs. He succeeds even in our failures. As we've been singing in our worship gatherings: Our sins they are many, his mercy is more.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. The disagreement between Paul & Barnabas initially began as a difference of perspective. Whose perspective resonates more with you—Barnabas's or Paul's? In conflicts, why is it important to realize that a difference of opinion does not always imply there is a "right" side and a "wrong" side?
3. How can you heed the caution of this passage?
4. How does this passage comfort you and give you confidence?