

Over the past few weeks we have been reading through the book of Acts to catch a glimpse of what the early church was like so that we can learn about how we are to be the church today. One of the characters that we have been introduced to is a man named Saul. In the part of Acts which we will be reading today we will see that the man named Saul will now be called Paul.

In the Scripture we are going to be reading today we are going to see that Paul and a man named Barnabas are going to be assigned to work together. We will hear some about their adventures together in ministry and then we will read about a big conflict that they have with one another.

As I introduce us into this story of Paul and Barnabas, I invite you to think about a relationship in your life that has been important to you but now that relationship is broken. I invite you to think about some relationships in your life where you and this other person have had some important experiences together.

Maybe this person was a best friend. Maybe this person was really there for you during a particular time in your life that you needed them. Maybe you had a lot of fun with this friend. Maybe you were there for this person when they needed you. Think about a relationship with someone that has been really important to you.

But even though you and this person had gone through all of these experiences together something happened and the two of you could no longer get along. Something happened and this really great friend is no longer that really great friend.

Do you have relationships like this? I do. I have had some really tight relationships with some people but then something happened and that relationship was never the same. Maybe you had a working relationship with someone and the two of you really depended on each other but then something happened and it was never the same again.

Maybe you had a friend in school and the two of you were always together but then something happened and the friendship broke apart. Either he did something, she did something, you did something that the other person did not really care for. Maybe you had a difference of opinion with the other person and you could not reconcile your differences.

Have you seen this picture? Show picture of the dress that is two different colors depending on who looks at it.

So what we have are two groups of people looking at the same object but we see something different. We are looking at the same dress. But we see something totally different. There is a scientific explanation for this but I'm not going there. Talk to a scientist for that answer.

I try to be a theologian and how I interpret this big dress debate is to say that faithful people can look at the same problem and come up with two different solutions. It is my understanding that the dress is really blue and black but that the makers of the dress have now come out with one that is gold and white. So now both sides can be correct.

Let's read about these two colleagues in ministry in Acts that worked very closely together but then came to a point where they had a difference of opinion.

Read Acts 13:1-5

So we see here that Paul and Barnabas are worshipping God and fasting and praying in their church in the town of Antioch and then they hear the Holy Spirit say to them, "Get up off your duff and go." It's now time to go on a missionary journey they are told. So then the rest of the church in Antioch affirms their call to missionary service and the congregation then lays hands on Paul and Barnabas and sends them off to do ministry.

We have a map which will help us understand where Paul and Barnabas go on their missionary journey. This is traditionally called the First Missionary Journey of Paul. How original I know.

So Paul and Barnabas set sail together from Antioch. Antioch would be found in modern day Syria. So the two of them head over to the island of Cyprus and arrive in the town of Salamis. There they go to the Jewish synagogue and begin to teach and preach. Paul usually heads first to the synagogue when he enters into a town.

We are told that Paul and Barnabas meet up with the missionary John who had arrived earlier. They then head over to the other side of the island. It is then that we are told that Saul will now be called Paul whenever the Bible talks about him. Saul is his Jewish name but Paul is his Roman name. It is here that Paul's ministry to the non-Jewish people is blessed by Luke, the writer of Acts.

In other words, by now calling him Paul rather than Saul, Paul's ministry is blessed to focus on people that were different than whom the church had been focused on. It is time to reach out to new people in new places. We are also told that the name Barnabas means "one who encourages." So the gifts of Paul and Barnabas complement one another as they venture out to do ministry together.

Paul and Barnabas set sail from the island of Cyprus and catch a boat to Perga and then to a different town named Antioch which would be modern day Turkey. Here Paul once again attends the Jewish synagogue where he preaches a sermon. Some of the Jews really like what he had to say about who Jesus was and how he fulfilled the words of the Old Testament prophets but other Jewish leaders were not pleased with Paul and then Barnabas.

So Paul and Barnabas tell them that it was now time to share this message with the non Jewish people or gentiles. The scripture says that these gentiles were ecstatic that Paul and Barnabas were including them.

Read Acts 13:48-52

So Paul and Barnabas get run out of town. So what do they do? Scripture tells us that they shake the dust off their feet and go to another town. In other words, they keep going forward and did not worry about looking back.

Let's continue to read about what happens next.

Read Acts 14:1-20

Paul and Barnabas then make the return trip back to their original town of Antioch and report about all of their experiences. The church leaders listen to them and decide to bless their ministry to the gentiles.

And then this happens to Paul and Barnabas. Think about all that they had been through together and then this is the way their relationship with one another ends.

Read Acts 15:36-41

After all that they had been through and then their relationship ends because they cannot agree on whether or not the missionary named John should accompany them. The two men then break up and head their separate ways.

Think back to similar types of relationships that you have had. Relationships with people that were very important to you. But then something happened which led to the end of the relationship as you knew it.

It is very hard when important relationships come to an end. Paul and Barnabas had worked together for years and shared ministry together. But then a dispute led them to end their relationship with one another.

But guess what. This story gives witness that the Holy Spirit can overcome every barrier that is put in the way of the gospel. The spreading of the gospel does not end because Paul and Barnabas end their relationship with one another. The Holy Spirit is able to use their breakup to spread the gospel into new places.

It is very hard to end long and cherished relationships. It is hard and painful and may leave you confused. But the Holy Spirit does not leave at the end of relationships. The Holy Spirit does not allow broken relationships to prevent God's work. The Holy Spirit can even use church splits to spread the gospel.

So we are invited to move on from broken relationships. To move forward and not backward. I heard a quote recently that has really stuck with me. Be sure to allow your dreams to be stronger than your memories. Be sure to allow your dreams to be stronger than your memories.

We can cherish our memories but God calls us into the future. The Holy Spirit can transform anything into something good. The Holy Spirit can redeem broken relationships and turn this brokenness into something powerful. Keep looking to the future and trust God to guide. AMEN.