

One of the benefits of working through a book of the Bible, the way that we try to do it here, verse by verse, chapter by chapter. Sunday after Sunday, is that in doing so, we are committed to all the text. When we take this approach, we cannot, as some may be, wanting to do, avoid the parts that we don't like or skip the parts that we struggle to understand or miss the parts that make us uncomfortable.

We take the Scripture in order. We take it as it comes. And this morning, we're picking up where we left off three weeks ago. Where I left off three weeks ago. What could be considered an unpleasant, if not unfortunate turn of events is the account of a sharp disagreement in the Christian Leader, which is a magazine for the US Mennonite brethren.

Connie Faber writes, As a conference of churches, US Mennonite brethren have points of disagreement. Whenever I become aware of a disagreement between me and my husband or between people in our U.S. Embassy churches, my stomach twists and I get an icky feeling. How many of you can relate to the icky feeling that disagreement brings? It can have that effect on us, can it?

Most of us naturally want to steer clear of disagreement. If we can. But try as we might, we don't always get to avoid the icky stuff in life, nor should we avoid it when it comes to reading, preaching, or trying to be shaped by the word of God. Our Father. We come before you now asking that you would prepare our hearts to hear and receive the beauty and the wisdom of your precious word.

We come in worship this day to be formed by it, to be formed by you, and to be transformed in the renewing of our minds that we might know you better. Lord, appreciate you more fully follow you all the more faithfully. May the glory in the honor be yours. Amen. So having returned from the Jerusalem Council with a letter in hand confirming that salvation is by Christ alone, and to the great joy of the new Gentile believers when they learned that they would not be required to adhere to the Jewish law.

Paul and Barnabas settled in for a short time of preaching, teaching and rest among the friendly faces of their sending church. In Syrian Antioch, it doesn't appear to have been a long break that they took. We see 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.

Paul and Barnabas had known each other. Now for probably over a decade. Remember, it was Barnabas who, when no one else in the Christian community wanted anything at all to do with Paul, introduced him to the Apostles, and it was Barnabas who, in the work of teaching in Antioch, became great, summoned Paul to come and help him. So humanly speaking, Paul's ministry was possible because of the support and advocacy of his friend Barnabas, who the Bible tells us was a man who was full of the Holy Spirit and faith.

Paul, too, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he was a powerful orator. Paul loved the Lord and he lived to preach Christ and Christ crucified. He lived to share the good news of the salvation that is found only in Jesus. Paul and Barnabas were friends, and when they combined their gifts, Barnabas bent toward inclusion and encouragement and Paul's knowledge and ability to preach.

They were an effective ministry team, so it made good sense that after a successful first journey, they would start out again for a second and they were in agreement as to what should be done. They were going to return to the Christians in every city that they had proclaimed the word of the Lord. They would go back and they would visit with their new brothers and sisters and see that they were maturing in their faith, that they had not been sidetracked by false doctrine or mired in controversy, that the people in the churches, in the towns that they had recently been to were being established and growing.

So Paul and Barnabas agreed to begin their second missionary journey. But as we know, because we've heard the story and I just read it, they stumbled out of the gate for a while. They were of the same mind as to what ought to be done. They are not of the same mind when it comes to how it should be done, or more specifically, who should be involved.

If you are following along in your Bibles and you look at versus 37 and 38, that's where we are now. Barnabas wanted to take with them. John called Mark, but Paul thought it best not to take with them, one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. So here is the point of contention.

Barnabas wants to take his cousin John Mark on this trip. Paul does not. What we learned a little bit about John Mark, who will eventually be known to us simply as Mark back in chapter 13, verse five of chapter 13, says that he was assisting Paul and Barnabas. And verse 13 tells us when he stopped. It's 13:13 now.

Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Persia and Pamphylia and John left them and returned to Jerusalem. The author of X Luke doesn't tell us why John Mark left. All we have to fill in that blank is our imaginations. Maybe a little bit of reasonable speculation. It could have been that the rigors of missionary life, the travel, the opposition, the threats.

Maybe that was too much for John Mark. Others believe he simply may have been homesick. We just don't know. What we do know, what is clear is that early in their first missionary endeavor, John Mark left Paul and Barnabas. And while no explanation is given to us in Chapter 13, we can tell from Chapter 15 how Paul understood.

John Mark leaving. He considered it an act of abandonment, x 15, verse

38. 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 in Chapter 13. The word that is used to describe John Mark's choice to leave means to depart from. But in this description of the event in Chapter 15, we find that he had withdrawn.

That is a stronger word and it has the connotation of desertion. Luke doubles down on that in the 38th verse. John Mark had withdrawn and had not gone with them to the work. Paul doesn't want to go into battle with a fellow soldier who has a record of desertion, but Barnabas, do you remember what Barnabas name was? Do you know what it means?

Sign of encouragement. We learn that next. For he is characteristically hopeful that John Mark has changed. Or maybe if he hasn't changed, that he could help him to change. Barnabas would like to give his cousin a second chance, and the result of this difference of opinion is a sharp disagreement. Did the past just make a trade?

Because if they did, I'd like to know the result of this difference. Back on track, beloved was a sharp disagreement, not the sort of conflict that could be sorted out easily. Not the sort of conflict that the two would have inevitably experienced from time to time in their mission work. The type of disagreements that you and I all experience when we rub shoulders with people, imperfect people in an imperfect world.

We know that some conflict is unavoidable. People married 50 years who love each other deeply still find themselves on occasion having to navigate disagreements. But what we're reading about here and Act 15 is not that kind of run of the mill disagreeing and the Greek word pairing, since most is the word from which we derive our English word for paroxysm, a sudden attack or violent expression of a particular emotion or activity.

So what Luke describes really here is George uses the word that has this idea of of sharp cutting, a heated argument, not a minor dispute, not one that could be resolved in the moment. And we are spared the details. And I mean that sincerely. We are spared the details. Inquiring minds may want to know all that has happened, but we have seen it time and time again in this book of acts.

Luke's tells us what Luke tells us, what we need to know, not always what we want to know. We are given no details of the conversations that took place between Paul and Barnabas around this volatile issue. Just as Luke refrained from any words that would have disparage the character of John Mark for the choice he made in leaving that first missionary journey here to the account, his brief and his matter of fact, 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. The dynamic duo has split, and that seems like a rather sad outcome. That seems like an unfortunate circumstance. It is never, never comfortable to learn of genuine brothers or sisters who cannot overcome their differences of opinion. And that's what's happening here. Recently, we held a Sunday school class on the subject of forgiveness. Some of you attended that. In that class, we took a first day quiz. Some of you will probably never forget that. The seventh question, true or false? Good people get to the bottom of all their disagreements is false.

Sometimes good people and we understand this theologically, there are no good people. So what I mean by saying good people is godly people not perfect people, but godly people, Christ loving people, Jesus serving people. Sometimes they don't get to the bottom of their disagreements. That is a fact of life. And sometimes this failure is is a wicked thing.

Sometimes it is. Biblically speaking, the failure to resolve differences is inexcusable. An example of that would be when one party is being clearly disobedient to Scripture and refuses to repent and refuse is to be reconciled. According to Psalm 133, unity is good and pleasant and we know that the converse of that is true as well. Disunity is bad and unpleasant.

As believers, we should always strive for unity. Ephesians four three tells us this to be eager for it, to make every effort to maintain it, to preserve it. So when a person chooses sin over Scripture, which sometimes happen and that person will not be swayed, that is tragic. That is awful, that is wicked. But that's not what's going on between Bold and Barnabas.

Their disagreement is not over a biblical principle per se. It involves biblical principles, but it is not a chapter and verse issue. Look back in verse 37 and 38, Barnabas wanted to take John Mark. Paul thought it best not to. This is my friends. This is about preference. This is about wisdom. This is about prudence. About what each man believes in.

His sanctified heart is the right course of action. So who's right? Who's wrong? That's what we want to know, isn't it? That's what we want to know when it comes to disagreement. Who's right, Who's wrong? That's what makes disagreements easier on us when there's a clear champion or maybe a clear villain. But I have to ask you, Beloved, is it always so clear?

Is Barnabas wrong to want to give John Mark another chance? Back in Acts four, we saw that he's a son of encouragement. He looks on the

bright side. He's he's generous. He's selfless. He put his arm around Paul when no one else wanted anything to do with him, and he brought Paul into the Christian fold. It's not surprising at all that he would try to revive the ministry career of his cousin.

Yes, John Mark messed up, but advocating for a second chance that fits Barnabas to a tea. God is a God of second chances, is he not? We know one of the most resounding, resonating messages of Christianity is that past sin does not exclude one from present or future service. Consider the Apostle Peter how he denied Jesus and yet how to resurrected Christ.

Saw him especially and told him ten My sheep feed my lambs. Barnabas is not shaky ground in his advocacy for John Mark. There is scriptural precedent for what he wants to do. So does that make Paul wrong to want to press on without the man who previously deserted him? Did not Jesus say no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back as fit for the Kingdom of God?

Indeed he did. We know that Paul thought it best not to take John Mark. We don't know his thought process, considering the rigors of the mission field and how John Mark dealt with them the last time. Is Paul being harsh and unyielding here or is he being thoughtful and sensitive? You parents, when you're planning a trip or an activity for your family, do you not take into consideration what you believe your child can reasonably handle so as not to set him or her up for failure and all of you for a miserable experience?

Well, might Paul be super clear here in his mind that a mission trip is for the benefit of those being ministered to, not for the experience of the missionaries, which is what so many short term mission trips can easily become. Who is right, Who is wrong? Who is mostly right? Who is mostly wrong? A case could be made for either position here, but pay careful attention as the late Dr. Charles Stanley would have said.

How many of you listen to Charles Stanley? Love Charles Stanley. Listen. Now, listen. He would say, Now, listen. A case could be made for either position here, and yet no case is which I believe tells us something. The text doesn't choose a side as much as we may want to. Neither should we. And this is one application of the passage that author Robert Gonzales Junior notes.

In his assessment of it. He writes this Resist the urge to always take sides. Sometimes we do have to choose sides and form firm opinions, but in many cases we don't. We may have concerns or suspicions, but in many cases it may be the better part of wisdom to leave the matter with the Lord. We often look around and wonder why two great Christian leaders labor in different ministries there in the same city.

They hold the same doctrinal beliefs. Why aren't they working together

more? Brothers and sisters, God doesn't always expect us to take sides. Resist the temptation then, to figure it all out and commit both sides to the Lord. You and I might have that urge to align with Paul or Barnabas in this disagreement. But we would be hard pressed to do that, given the facts that are available in the text.

We certainly could not say definitively from this passage that when it comes to this disagreement, one of these men was right and the other was wrong. And to choose a side would really be more about meeting our need. It doesn't seem to be God's need or God's intent, and including this account in his word. I think his purpose here is not that we should have a ringside seat to any of the verbal blows that are exchanged, but rather that we see and grab some important truths when it comes to the challenges of Christian ministry.

The first is this all ministers and we are all ministers are people, all ministers and we are all ministers are people. You and I may rightly have Christian mentors and examples that we admire. We it's okay to have our heroes of the faith. The Bible has heroes of the faith. Turn to the Hebrews 11 and you'll find that hallway of heroes.

It's okay to have heroes of the faith. And yet we have to keep in mind that every one of those heroes, our heroes, the Bibles, heroes, is human. Paul and Barnabas are no exception to this rule. They are clearly spiritually minded. They are committed. They are God loving men who, like the rest of us, can never see or get everything 100% right all the time.

It is commentary on acts Can't You says this All Christians walk with limps, all Christians walk with wimps or to put it another way, in the moderate our expectations of each other, of our leaders of that perfect church that we're looking for. We all have feet of clay. No one on this side of things ever gets everything always right.

No one in this world has arrived. All people are imperfect and all ministers are people. Second, we know this from the text. Even the most sincere Christians do not always agree. Not long ago I was listening to an interview on the life of theologian Jim Packer, perhaps best known for his book, Knowing God and Jim Packer was strongly influenced by a fellow named Martin Lloyd-Jones, a Welsh Protestant minister, 20 years his senior, and whom he credited as one of his most influential, one of the most influential men and just theological development he loved.

Martin Lloyd-Jones and Martin Lloyd-Jones loved Packer, but the two had a falling out in October of 1966. The issue dividing them was denominational schism and more specifically, how to effectively address the sliding towards theological liberalism that was impacting the church. And the question was posed at the National Assembly of Evangelicals. Should evangelicals concerned with doctrinal orthodoxy

withdraw from denominations which publicly fail to maintain such orthodoxy?

Orthodoxy, or should they try to reform them from within? Jones advocated for pulling out. John start for staying in. Packer sided with START and his relationship with Martin Lloyd Jones would never be the same. Here again, we're not talking about chapter and verse issues. The rift between Jones and Packer was not over a specific biblical principle, but over the proper application of various biblical principle.

I find chapter and verse issues are usually easier to work out where the Bible prescribes a course of action or expectation that is plain because it's plain in Scripture. But issues of prudence and issues of wisdom and issues of opinion all are open for all sorts of possibilities, for differences and for genuine believers not to see eye to eye.

We strive to be of one mind, and we should. The Scripture tells us that we should. We are commanded to do so. And yet, as the Puritan Matthew Henry so aptly put it, we shall never be all of a mine till we come to heaven. We're light in love are perfect light and love not perfect here. There are going to be times when we won't be of the same mind.

Even the most sincere Christians will not always agree. A third principle we can apply from the parting of Paul and Barnabas is just how important, how necessary, how significant it is for us to trust in God's sovereignty. Sovereignty is a word that means supreme power or authority. When we say that God is sovereign, what we're saying is that God is in control.

He He is over all things. Nothing is happening that is outside of his control. God is sovereign. That is not to say that God is pleased with everything that's happening, but He is in control of it. In our counseling cohort recently, we touched briefly on two aspects of God's will, His moral will, and His sovereign will. God's moral will is what He has commanded, what he has revealed, what you and I read in the Scripture, the moral will of God is shown to us in the Bible.

It includes the teaching, the instruction, the commands that he gives us to obey. It's what he wants. He's revealed it to us. This is how we please him. God's sovereign will is expressed in his providentially working all things according to his purposes, in his sovereign will God sometimes allows God often uses things that violate His moral will. And an example of this is seen in Joseph's brothers.

You remember that story back in Genesis. Joseph's brothers, who were very jealous of him and mistreated him in a brutal way, and eventually sold him into slavery, all in violation of God's moral will. You

shouldn't treat people that way, but whose actions ultimately led to the salvation of those very brothers, that whole family. At a later time of famine, which was God's sovereign will in Genesis 50, verse 20, Joseph tells his brothers, As for you, you meant evil against me.

But God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today. This verse alone should give us pause and a rush to judgment over situations and circumstances, should it not? It reminds us again that in all of life, with its twists and with its turns and with its setbacks and its disappointments, we can trust God because God is good and God is sovereign.

Everything is in his control. Whatever transpires in this world reflects his sovereign will. Even if that includes the sinful acts of others toward us or our own shortcomings and failures when it comes to dealing with others, he can use it all. God can use it all. And the fact that God is sovereign and that God is in control is something.

As believers, we must keep in mind. We do well to keep this in mind, especially when circumstances and conflicts appear to have gotten out of control. When a disagreement is so sharp as we see with Paul and Barnabas, then an immediate resolution is not in the cards. It doesn't mean that God can't use it. It doesn't mean that God won't use it.

He really does make all things work together for the good of those who love him, who are called according to his purposes. You know that, right? He really does that even in those stomach churning seasons of relational conflict. When Barnabas took his cousin and headed to Cyprus, there's a good chance neither he nor Paul were very happy. Their parting would not have been seen, nor would it have been felt as anything positive.

And yet the net result of their failure to resolve their differences in the moment is that twice as many people are dispatched to fruitful ministry to different territories are canvased for the Gospel. Remember that the goal that they had agreed upon before they disagreed they were going to go visit the churches and the brothers and sisters in the towns where they had been ministering.

Well, where did all that work start? We know because we've been there in our journey through acts. It started on Cyprus. Where does Barnabas go? Barnabas goes back to Cyprus, back to his home land. And Paul took off to Syria with Silas and he revisits Darby and Lystra. And beyond the original plan to visit those churches, Paul would expand his evangelistic efforts into Macedonia and Greece.

So as a result of this breakdown, this parting of the ways double the manpower is deployed in missions and new churches are planted in regions that before their split had never been considered. Which brings us back to this repeating theme in the Book of Acts Praise God, the title of this whole series, Unstoppable, Unstoppable. What is more



potentially threatening to this spread of the witness of the Gospel than relational breakdown in the church's leadership?

And yet, as unsettling as this had to have been for everyone who was involved beyond the disagreeing parties. Not not good for Paul and Barnabas, but spread that out a little bit, if you will. Put yourself there and think about what the disciples in the churches must have been thinking and feeling and hearing. Think about the people in that circle of friends who were friends with both Paul and Barnabas.

Think about what that must have been like. There's hardly anything more threatening to the existing existence of a church than something like that. And yet we've read it plain in day. It's plain as day it's here. It did not hinder the advancement of the gospel. When Paul and Barnabas left each other, they didn't leave the faith and they did not leave the work of ministry.

The disagreement was not the kind that would disqualify either man from continued service to the king. And serving the king is what they both did. Only they went in different directions. If you have your Bible open, you can look ahead to chapter 16, verse five, Act 16, verse five. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and they increased in numbers.

Daily, because God is sovereign, because human circumstances, even human failures do not hinder his will. Beloved, we can. We must trust in God sovereignty. He has both the power and the determination to make good come of seemingly bad situations. Even a relationship is significant as the friendship between Paul and Barnabas, when it broke down, did not deter the spread of the gospel.

So how does this story end? Whatever becomes of Paul and Barnabas is their reconciliation. You won't believe this, but when I was a sophomore in high school, we had to take some sort of assessment how we would end the story and I chose the ending that I thought was best. And I liked. Come to find out, it was romantic.

Everyone lives happily ever after in my story. Your sister also chose romantic, by the way. I think we were the only two, and I was mortified, you know? And then sophomore. You don't want people thinking you're a romantic. It's Oh, my heavenly day. And you. You come to a story like this, and you. You want to see some resolution?

Don't you want to see it tied up? You want to see it brought together? Does everyone live happily ever after? Well, everyone who knows Jesus lives happily ever after. Okay, so it may take a while, but eventually the answer is yes. So there. If that's romantic, then so be it. It's true. Everyone who loves Jesus lives happily ever after.

But in terms of this situation, we just don't have a lot of details.

When Barnabas took John Mark and sailed to Cyprus, he pretty much sailed out of the pages of Scripture. We don't find him in the Book of Acts anymore. We don't see Barnabas anymore in the Book of Acts, but we should not conclude from that that he'd made a poor choice.

Some people have. I don't think that's fair. The Bible doesn't say that tradition has Barnabas continuing in the Ministry of Teaching and preaching, and one account is said to have been so faithful as to have been martyred for his faith. Paul, we know, continued to preach, continue to teach, completed a second journey, a third missionary journey in the Book of Acts will describe these.

He becomes, as we know, the most prolific author of the New Testament. John Mark Well, we have no proof of anything that might have transpired between Paul and Barnabas to indicate restoration, but we do have some intel on John Mark. Guess what? He changed. He did change. He did mature into a faithful disciple being not only a companion of Barnabas, but also a companion of Peter.

And he eventually became the author of the first gospel that we know as Mark. But beyond that, we know that whatever differences he and Paul had early on, they were resolved in later years. At the end of the book of Colossians, Paul names Mark as one of the men who were a help and a comfort to him. And should he come to the people at Colossi, Paul says, please receive him.

And in second Timothy 4:11, Paul asks for Mark to be brought to him, the one he wouldn't go with. He eventually turns around and says, Bring him to me. He summons his mark for help and he says of him, He is very useful to me in ministry. Now that is restoration. I hope you agree. I hope you would be willing, like Paul, to harbor no grudges.

We should count it a possibility at least to jettison our ill feelings for those who have hurt us, to be open, to revise and adjust our opinions of those with whom or over whom we may have even sharp disagreements. Again, the Puritan Matthew Henry gives us some wisdom in this area of relational conflict. A final application for us from the story of disagreement that we find in the pages of Acts, he writes.

Even those whom we justly condemn, even those whom we justly condemn, we should take a just a pause here. There shouldn't be that many, even those whom we justly condemn, even those who have wronged us. We truly know it, he says. We should condemn moderately and with a great deal of temper because we know not. But afterwards, we may see cause to think better of them.

And that brings us to the end of the 15th chapter of the Book of Acts. Not a very uplifting chapter, but, well, one that openly bears witness. And nowhere seeks to hide or minimize these realities. From

the Jerusalem Council to this disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. Churches will have challenges. Sincere Christians will experience conflict, and we must entrust it all to the Lord to bring out of it what he will.