

One Message Ministry

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[0 : 0 0] like a game of simon says isn't it well this is uh rather strange uh i'm sorry that i can't be with you this morning but please be reassured jen is doing okay she tested positive this morning um on a lateral flow but she's doing okay uh and we're all doing okay but the nature of it is we have to isolate but i'm thankful that we can do this and if you can hear me then then we'll continue on um if you have a bible this morning we're in acts chapter 15 at the end of the chapter from verse 36 and we're going to be going into chapter 16 verse 5 okay let me read that acts chapter 15 from 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they are now barnabas wanted to take with them john called mark but paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work and there arose a sharp disagreement so that they separated from each other barnabas took mark with him and they 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 paul came also to derbe and to lystra a disciple was there named timothy the son of a jewish woman who was a believer but his father was a greek he was well spoken of by the brothers and iconium paul wanted to timothy to accompany him and he took him and circumcised him because of the jews who were in those places for they all knew that his father was a greek as they went on their way through the cities they delivered to them for observing the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in jerusalem so the churches were strengthened in the faith and they increased in numbers daily well this is the word of the lord and we pray that he blesses the reading of it when i was in primary school i was in the cricket team i wasn't particularly fawn of cricket but i wasn't in the football team but i was in the cricket team and i learned a valuable lesson because our school actually got to the final of the school league we were in the final we were the top two and during that final game i learned a valuable lesson when there was a mistake had happened i don't know if it was myself or someone else but something had happened and i was frustrated and annoyed at it and i buried my head in the ground and when my face was in the grass i began to hear my teammates shouting my name and as i looked up and saw that it was my teammates shouting i saw the ball whizz past me and i had missed a crucial play because i was too distracted by the thing that had happened before how easy is it for a mistake or disagreement to distract our focus how easy is it for a separation or division to cloud the things that matter too often our mind is concerned about who is in the right or who is in the wrong or why a thing happened sometimes that matters but sometimes it doesn't in the jerusalem council last week that really did matter who was right was something that mattered

but in the barnabas versus paul debate it really doesn't matter because their disagreement was about the men not the mission their disagreement was about the methods not the message and like me on the cricket team missing a crucial play because i was distracted by a previous mistake there are things in life that can take us out of the game that really shouldn't take us out of the game small things small distractions that have big consequences so looking at this moment when paul and barnabas disagree and separate it's important to see that it didn't take any of them out of the game in fact it ended up adding more players into the game such as the grace of god that he can make lemonade out of lemons and that isn't to say that disagreements and divisions are good they're sad they're frustrating but godly people can and do disagree godly people can part ways amicably but when they stay focused on the message and the mission god can turn that division into multiplication and this is what we see isn't it in verse 40 we might be confused when paul and silas are commended by the brothers to the grace of the lord but we don't see that with barnabas and mark that can confuse us but i think it it has more to do with the fact that this isn't a story about barnabas and mark it isn't a story about the gospel in cyprus it's a story about how the gospel goes to the end of the earth and a big part of that is how jesus uses paul to do that you see luke isn't answering all their questions like who's in the right and who's in the wrong he's telling us what we need to know clearly who was right and who was wrong isn't something we need to know and if he's not answering our question about that perhaps it's more about luke wanting his reader to have confidence in the ministry of paul because now the rest of the book of acts is going to be about paul's ministry you see when luke is writing this he would have known about mark's gospel because luke used mark's gospel as a source for his first book luke knew that mark recorded jesus telling his disciples to deny themselves and take up the cross so whatever the difficulty in the first missionary trip was luke would have known that mark has now learned the cost of ministry so i don't think that when luke says that about paul and silas but he doesn't say it about barnabas and mark i don't think he's throwing them under the bus he's not giving us all the details he's only telling us what we need to know and what we need to know is not who was right or who was wrong but how the gospel got to the ends of the earth and from this point on luke solely focuses on paul's ministry and so perhaps the note about paul being commended is actually to give confidence in the fruit of paul's ministry and the gospel that paul preached because by the time anyone is reading this book it's not barnabas and mark but it is paul who has been thrown under the bus by his fellow jews so i just wanted to highlight three points three points in this passage that help us when thinking about the ministry that we're called to both as a church and as individuals number one this is not a one-man ministry gospel ministry is not a one-man ministry number two it's not a one-method ministry there are more than one way to do this and number three but it is a one-message ministry the gospel is the one message that we all share now it's not a one-man ministry finish the saying for me if you will if you want something done right do it yourself it's a well-known saying because

not because it's true but because it's a well-experienced reality if you don't want to be asked to do a chore do it once and do it badly and you'll never be asked again but if that's how people think with many things in daily life then church is no different ministry is no different in our section today we see that you can't say if you want it done right do it yourself because at first paul says that he wants to visit every city yet when they part ways paul's happy to leave cyprus to barnabas and mark if we always think that you need it done if you need it done right do it yourself then it isn't going to multiply the gospel paul goes to barnabas in the first place and they want to take others with them paul isn't doing it himself barnabas isn't doing it himself it's not a one-man ministry they don't have the attitude of doing it on themselves and not only because it's unsustainable and unrealistic and limiting but also because they want to entrust the gospel to the next generation they want to multiply the gospel remember jesus says that the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few the issue isn't the harvest or the seed it's getting people to sow the seed and bring the harvest in and so we must be willing to help others do the work to train others to do the work to give others opportunity to get involved even if they do it differently from us even if it isn't as polished as though we've ever arrived but the flip side of that is we mustn't also sit on the bench and i don't mean we can't draw away for a rest for a while but we mustn't sit on the sidelines and watch others do the work because it's not a one-man ministry we mustn't think that we needn't do anything because someone else will do it it'll be done by the one man paul might have struggled at the idea of bringing mark in again if he was unreliable but mark has to learn to get back in the game thankfully barnabas gives him that opportunity and then on paul's side we see a young man named timothy timothy's been raised well by his gran and his mum he's well spoken of by the church but he will most likely have seen what happened to paul in lystra the first time when paul was stoned and left for dead he will remember paul's scars and where they came from so he likely knows the cost of ministry before agreeing to join paul but even then he agrees to join paul and paul turns around and wants to circumcise him even although he's holding a letter not requiring people to circumcise timothy likely had no idea paul was going to ask him to do that but ministry is costly if anyone will come after christ they must deny themselves take up the cross and follow him it's not a one man ministry so don't try to be the one man and trust other people but also don't leave it to the one man help others but more encouragingly see that it's not just about passing it on faith is not supposed to be individualistic neither is evangelism you don't need to deny yourself alone you don't need to take up your cross alone and you don't need to share the gospel alone ministry is not for you to do alone you have brothers and sisters a family of faith our efforts in the great commission should not be alone for instance if i were to ask you who wrote colossians you might say paul but it was paul and timothy or thessalonians it was paul timothy and silas their name was on the ticket in our passage we see the desire of barnabas to take mark we see the desire of paul to take timothy seldom will you find the disciples doing it on their own you don't need to do this on your own christian life is not supposed to be lived out on your own not only will do it doing it with someone else help show that person how to do it but it will also give you the confidence

and support and boldness especially when faced with trials when you're faced with trials you need that support and partnership and confidence for instance paul was in prison a good few times but i'm pretty sure the only time that he was singing in prison was when he was with silas see the the joy of doing it with others this is not a one method ministry point number two you see it's good to wrestle with doctrinal issues differences in theology can be very significant but if you can stand together in the gospel that matters more than where you fall on secondary practices you see luke already told theophilus in his first book luke 9 49 of the time when the disciples tried to stop someone casting out demons in jesus name because he wasn't part of their group and jesus rebuked them for that kind of thinking by saying the one who's not against you is for you if other churches or people or organizations are for jesus truly for them and not against them then we shouldn't hinder them we shouldn't try to stop them or or encroach in their work as if they they're not doing it or we could do it any better if people are going to preach christ let them preach christ paul wants to visit every city but he's content to leave the holy cyprus even if it's done by people he disagrees with does the church need to do it does every church need to do it the way we do it do individuals need to do ministry the way that i do ministry or the way that i preach or the way that you pray or the way that she sings or the way that he plays so on even the methodist church even methodism isn't the only method preaching christ is better than not winning souls is better than pushing them away you have a problem when there's a different gospel or a different jesus or no jesus at all but a different way is not the issue again this is the same with timothy isn't it he's circumcised and titus is not we'll find later both cases it was about helping the mission not hindering it does the church down the road help the mission or hinder it does the fact that there is a church down the road there is a different denomination and they do things differently does that hinder the mission in many cases no it helps whether or not they're particularly effective or not doesn't negate the fact there's a very good thing that we are not the only light in this time we're not the only ones preaching christ we're not the only ones proclaiming the good news in this town and that's a good thing we ought to celebrate that we ought to pray for our fellow churches and christians not that they would get all their ducks in a row but that they would be effective and fruitful when they preach the gospel even if they're different what we mustn't do is let distract us from the mission finally this is a one message ministry point number three this is a one message ministry the fact that this incident here in acts comes on the heels of the jerusalem council an event which clarified the gospel i think that helps us see that despite the disagreements of paul and barnabas we can be confident that when they parted ways they were nevertheless in agreement of the message they might not have agreed about the men they might not have agreed about the method but they definitely did agree about the message that was the big point last week wasn't it in the jerusalem council the one message that unites us and the only message that can save us is the gospel we explore the question is the gospel is the church a gospel church that's the determining factor not whether a person

is wearing dog collar or not not whether every person has a theological degree not whether they do it in the right method as though there is one but as a gospel church of one message we mustn't think that paul's ministry was right and barnabas's was wrong they were both preaching the same gospel that isn't to say we must accept every effort or variation we don't need to answer for that but rather it is to say that our responsibility as a church and as individuals is that we should get less hung up on the who and the how and more concerned about the what you see the person themselves they aren't the x factor the method is not the x factor it's the gospel having the right person to pastor the church isn't the big x factor nor is having the right method of ministry it's having the right message the power of god for salvation to all who believe is in the gospel not in the method not in the men powerful message in the lips of ordinary people you see people will come and go methods will change from time to time but the message will remain the same and it must remain the same for there is one gospel that saves it's the one true message that points to the one true messiah the lord jesus christ on the surface in this part it looks like a discouraging and divisive moment in the church but it is used by god to strengthen and multiply the church and it's funny i don't know if you noticed but in our passage there's not really much mention of the lord other than the brothers commending paul to the grace of the lord there isn't much mention of god or the spirit or what god's doing it all looks rather earthy rather grounded and messy the things that only we can see things that look messy and uncertain discouraging and divisive but when we learn that god is still in control god can still strengthen the church when these things happen god is still working in times like these even when it doesn't look or feel like it and not just in spite of it god does his work through these people and through their weaknesses not in spite of them god works through our weaknesses he uses our imperfect efforts to accomplish his perfect will he's not working against us he's for us so brothers and sisters don't let yourself be distracted by disagreements don't let yourself be discouraged by divisions yes seek both restoration and faithful service but never think that you cannot be used by god never think that when we make mistakes whether as individuals or as a church never think that our mistakes equal god's mistake he knows both who you are and he knows what he is doing you can't surprise him none of the things that happen surprise god never think that he's not in control or that he cannot accomplish his purposes through people like me or you he can turn division into multiplication if he wants especially when people focus on the mission and the message rather than dwell on the mess of our mishaps as sad as it may be at times these things do not need to weaken the church or wound the individual while the lemons may be bitter the lemonade is sweet the end of our text is that the churches were strengthened in the faith were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers this is what god can do if we want to see strength in faith and increase in number we mustn't dwell on differences but focus on the one

[20 : 20] message and see how god can make sweet lemonade out of our lemons brothers and sisters i'm sorry i can't be with you but the lord bless you the lord be with you and may he bless your time together in his word and singing his praises god bless you amen