

Divided Over John Mark

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, June 15th, 2025. My name is Kent Dixon.! It's my joy to be the pastor here. Today is, as Len gave us a little bit of a teaser, today is Father's Day.

And I want to take a moment this morning to recognize dads. Speaking from experience, being a father is one of the greatest adventures, one of the greatest challenges at times, and certainly one of the greatest joys of my life.

And particularly now, as we watch our children as they continue it as young adults on their own journeys. Right, Connor? He's like, what?

Oh, sorry to wake you. I didn't mean to. This morning, though, we also recognize that being a father can be hard at times. As a father myself, I have made bad decisions.

I have said and done things that I regret, things that I can apologize for, but can never be taken back. And sadly, in our world, we recognize that broken families and divorce are far more common than we would like.

[1 : 13] We recognize that men can become fathers in less than ideal circumstances, and without even having healthy models of their own to be fathers.

And for others, and this is very true for me personally, they deeply miss their fathers. And they long for one last conversation, one last shared experience.

And I'm seeing some nods and some tearful eyes. And personally, I think no matter how long it has been since your father has been gone, you miss them.

For some men, though, they may reflect on a father that they never really knew. That's possible. A father who is never there for them, either literally or figuratively, or in fact, maybe they're even glad that the person that they recognize to be their father is not involved in their life.

We also recognize that Father's Day can be challenging for women as well. If they find themselves missing their own father, the father of their children, or really any other challenging emotions that may be associated with this day.

[2 : 30] So this morning we recognize that Father's Day can be a time of celebration for some, but also a time of grief and longing, or even anger and frustration for others.

But regardless, my friends, of your circumstances, may this be a time of joy and reflection, if that's your situation. And may God bring peace and comfort and healing to you, if that is your circumstance in this time.

And in all these things, we can celebrate that we have an amazing God, who is our Heavenly Father. And He loves you, my friends, just as you are.

Happy Father's Day. Happy Father's Day. This morning we're continuing in our ongoing sermon series, Acts to All the World. Through this series we're exploring the New Testament book of Acts. And after the controversy over circumcision, see that got everyone's attention, last week we looked at that, then another conflict emerged.

[3 : 43] Shocking that the church would have conflict, right? Acts 15, 36 to 41. So if you want to grab a Bible, you can turn to that, or if you have your Bible with you, just keep your finger in the book of Acts for this morning, around that Acts 15 neighborhood.

So at the end of Acts 15, we heard it last week, right at the tail end, and maybe you remember last week's sermon, it all fit, and then there was this odd kind of jog.

I read the whole passage, all of Acts 15 for us last week, and there was this odd jog at the end, right, where all of a sudden we're talking about Paul and Barnabas. So I debated whether I should leave that on or not, and so I left it, as you notice.

But we're going to focus in more closely on that. It kind of passed by on us last week, so we're going to dig into that. Paul and Barnabas, when we get to Acts 15, 36 to 41, Paul and Barnabas

were preparing for another trip.

So they debated whether they would take John Mark with them or not. So you're saying, who's John Mark? Don't worry, we're going to unpack that really well together.

[4 : 52] So Barnabas wanted to do that. He wanted to take John Mark with them, but Paul disagreed. Because, Paul disagreed, because John Mark had abruptly left them on their previous trip together.

Maybe you remember that, and if you don't, that's okay. So this may seem to us as not that big a deal, right? He's coming, he's not coming. Like, have you ever been on a trip somewhere? And, I mean, usually this happens on vacations. If you go in a group, some people want to go and see the statue with the lion on it. Other people aren't that interested in that, so they go somewhere else.

But, and that's generally okay, right? So does it matter that John Mark didn't come? Is that a big deal? Well, we learn that the tension and disagreement over this circumstance became so strong that ultimately Paul and Barnabas went their separate ways.

Wow. So Acts 15.39 says, they, they, Paul and Barnabas, had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company, right?

[6 : 01] That's a pretty strong reaction. That is tough, right? We know that Paul and Barnabas had served together closely. They had shared meals together and joys and challenges and probably slept on the floor together and probably did all sorts of things, right?

Smelled each other's morning breath day after day. So they sought God to serve together. As they, as they served together, they sought him without reservation.

They worked together very unified, in a very unified way. And then they ultimately went their separate ways. This is kind of a sharp right turn, right?

So Barnabas took John Mark with him, this passage tells us, and Paul took Silas. So they chose their traveling companions and they said, eh, we're going different directions.

So we can see how this disagreement and division could cause a fracture, right? Could cause some sort of a problem in their mission to bring the gospel to people they visited.

[7 : 10] But sometimes, if you take nothing else away, here's one piece to remember. Sometimes despite the worst case scenario in a situation, our expectations of doom and gloom, everything works out in the end.

So our sermon this morning is titled, Divided Over John Mark. We're going to take some time here, as I said, to remind ourselves of the background as the lead up to this, and then consider some of the important context that we can get out of this because it's great for me to unpack a passage for you, but if you walk away going, eh, that was great, I guess that was helpful.

If I don't give you something that we can learn from it and take away from it, I don't think that's helpful. So that's the goal this morning, to give you some takeaways. So who was John Mark?

You can cheat and look ahead at those bullets, or not. So let's take some time to remind ourselves about John Mark and who he was. Acts 12, verse 12 says, when this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.

So John Mark's mother's name was Mary. And then John Mark, we learn over time, also owned a house in Jerusalem. And many people gathered there to pray for Peter.

[8 : 43] You can maybe remember that. So interesting, in my research on this, some scholars actually believe that it may have been John Mark's house where the Last Supper was observed.

Interesting, right? Not 100%, not guaranteed, but it's an interesting thing to reflect on. So that's a critical location in Scripture. So Colossians 4, verse 10 says, my fellow prisoner, Aristarchus, sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.

Interesting, right? We're filling in some blanks. And we've talked about this previously in this series, that John Mark was Barnabas' cousin. Some people, some scholars have suggested nephew, because the terminology is a little bit interchangeable, but by far, it's leaning towards cousin.

So John Mark was Barnabas' cousin. And maybe that's partly why Barnabas wanted to bring him on the trip, right? We can see that being fair. Why he ultimately chose to take him with him when he split off from Paul.

We all have cousins, most of us, probably. Do you have cousins that you would like to travel with? And that would be awesome. Do you have cousins who, oh no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

[10:02] We are cousins, but that is where the relationship ends. So interesting, though, that there's a relationship here between Barnabas and John Mark, such that Barnabas would choose him.

Acts 12, verse 25 says, when Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark. Acts 13, verse 5 says, when they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues.

John, John Mark, was with them as their helper. So we can see there in those two verses that John Mark was connected to Barnabas and Saul, Paul, as their assistant, their helper.

He was a critical part of their team. So John Mark joined them as they returned from Jerusalem to Antioch, and he went with them on their first journey.

We know that. So John Mark played a key role in Paul and Barnabas joint ministry, and he was part of their plans. He was a critical part of their plans to the point where we hear him mentioned.

[11:10] We hear him included. So what did he do? Right? We always want to know the dirt. If he caused this big rift, what did he do? We've got to know.

So what did he do to contribute to this issue? Well, Acts 13, verse 13 says, from Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John Mark left them to return to Jerusalem.

So that was the first trip. John Mark bailed. Right? It wasn't as if the trip was over. Right? We're at the port. We're all done. Okay, see ya.

Have a good summer. No. He bailed in mid-trip. So John Mark left Paul and Barnabas in the middle of their journey. Many scholars have speculated as to why John Mark bailed early, but we really don't know for sure.

No one can point to a specific reason. And Luke, the author of Acts, he doesn't give us a clear explanation. He doesn't even shed any real light on it.

[12:13] Right? He just says he left. He reports that John Mark left and that's all he says, Luke, in his account. He doesn't even insert his own opinion. Luke doesn't generally do that.

He doesn't editorialize often in his writing. But he doesn't insert his own opinion or make any sort of assumptions. Like, you don't get a sense from Luke's writing in Acts that, well, John Mark left and, well, he was a troublemaker from the beginning, to be honest.

Right? There's nothing like that. So what we do know is that he left and his departure caused tension and disagreement and then ultimately a rift, a significant rift in a relationship that seems to have been quite tight and committed.

This relationship between Paul and Barnabas, John Mark leaving them ultimately was a trigger for a separation there. And so we've also already considered how close their working relationship was.

Right? They served alongside each other for a long time. And then we can also probably safely assume their personal relationship would have become close as well.

[13:23] So this is not just some very superficial relationship that was fractured here. We don't know why John Mark left, but it clearly created bad feelings with Paul.

We can see that very clearly. And so much so that those feelings lingered with Paul. He didn't want John Mark to join him.

He was actually dead set against it for him to join them on their next mission. But then in contrast, Barnabas was essentially adamant that John Mark would join them.

So there was a very clear, very opposite reaction to John Mark being involved. And we do know that they could not come to a compromise.

Maybe they didn't try that hard. But they didn't come to a compromise or an understanding of any kind. So Paul with Silas and Barnabas with John Mark went their separate ways.

[14:22] They just called it a day and moved on. So what finally happened here? Well, Scripture, as I said, doesn't give us any details of a timeline.

Right? There's no timeline beyond the disagreement and the fracture in the relationship. But despite this rift that came between Paul and John Mark, we do know from Scripture that they eventually reconciled at some point.

Interesting, right? Well, Pastor Kent, how do we know that? Well, Scripture tells us. That's how. Paul says in Colossians 4, verse 10, my fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.

You have received instructions about him. Paul's talking about John Mark. If he comes to you, Paul says, welcome him. Right? This doesn't sound like a relationship that is still broken.

He's telling a particular audience to specifically welcome John Mark if he comes to them. Paul instructs the church at Colossae to welcome John Mark and receive him.

[15 : 34] That's another place Paul talks about John Mark later. Paul included John Mark in a group of people that he listed that he said specifically had been a comfort to him.

Right? Somebody you're mad at and hold a grudge at, you don't say, well, that's been a real comfort to me. Right? We don't generally say things like that. In Philemon 24, Paul refers to John Mark and others as fellow laborers.

That's pretty significant. He's essentially saying there that he is a teammate of mine. So, again, the relationship seems to have changed. In 2 Timothy 4.11, Paul tells Timothy, only Luke is with me. He's telling Timothy, get Mark and bring him with you because he is helpful to me in my ministry. Interesting, right?

Doesn't smell like a rift to me anymore. So, it's worth noting that Mark, which is how he came to be known more frequently over time, had also become close to Peter.

[16 : 43] And Peter referred to John Mark, Mark, as my son, he said. So, there's clearly a very close relationship between John Mark, Mark, and other people.

So, as I've mentioned when we talk about Mark before, he is also considered to be the author of the Gospel of Mark. Interesting, right? So, whatever reason John Mark returned to Jerusalem, left that first trip, no matter how it divided Paul and Barnabas, things turned out well in the end.

So, as we consider, here's the promise I gave you, as we consider this, what are some things that we can learn, some things that we can observe here? Well, Barnabas, we've seen that he was determined to give John Mark another chance.

Maybe because John Mark was his cousin, right, as we talked about. But we've also considered previously that Barnabas was a man who was known for his encouragement of other people. He even encouraged Paul over time. So, Barnabas seemed to have been someone who also bridged relationships. It was Barnabas who went with Saul to Jerusalem to make the awkward introduction that this man who fiercely persecuted the church is now going to be our partner in ministry.

[18 : 11] So, he introduced Saul to that early church and bridged the gap there. Kind of endorsed him in a way. Barnabas seems to have been someone who is inclined to give people a second chance.

So, the first observation we have here is lift others up and be patient with everyone. Not always easy. What can we learn here next?

Well, despite their disagreement and conflict, we can clearly see that neither Paul nor Barnabas were willing to let that affect their service. Were willing to let that completely sidetrack their desire to serve God.

So, they might not have agreed on some things, right? We've seen that. But they both continued to be committed to serving God. Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus where he was from, while Paul and Silas went to Syria and Silas where Silas was from.

And these two pairs went and strengthened the churches in those places where they went. So, friends, falling out with another believer is no reason to stop serving the Lord.

[19 : 25] That's something that we can learn, too, here, is that the Lord's work comes first. Don't let disagreements and conflict get in the way of that. John Mark could have let his initial failure, whatever it was that pulled him away from Paul and Barnabas, he could have let that discourage him, right?

Again, we don't know what happened, but he obviously thought, no, I'm out right away, instantly. So, whatever it was, whether it was a personal reflection that he said, oh, I failed in this area, whatever, or it was annoyed by something someone else was doing, he didn't let that discourage him.

So, despite being at the center of this conflict between Paul and Barnabas, John Mark didn't let whatever the failure was stop him in his own service to the Lord.

He took advantage of the opportunity to join Barnabas on that next trip. So, making a mistake is no reason to give up on yourself, to give up on trying to continue to serve the Lord and seeking him.

So, that observation, the third thing that we can learn is never give up. Never give up. So, our fourth observation, this one's a good one.

[20 : 45] Despite his frustration with him in the past, Paul was willing to acknowledge Mark's significance later, right? We talked about that. All the ways that Paul referred to him and his value to him and his value to ministry.

Sometimes we may become cold towards someone who's disappointed or hurt us, but not Paul. Eventually, he softened.

He came back around to this relationship that had been so important to him. So, it was meaningful to him, that relationship, and he came back to it. So, don't hold a grudge.

Easier said than done, right? And if you do think of yourself holding a grudge towards someone or about someone, ask God to help you unpack it. What is the root of that?

Because when there's a root like that, sometimes it needs to be dug out. Mark grew to become useful, as we talked about, to the apostles Paul and Peter, right?

[21 : 48] They recognized his usefulness, his value, his skills. And his work in writing the gospel of Mark, continues to inspire and encourage us to this day, right?

That is a living record from John Mark, from Mark, this man that we're talking about this morning. Ecclesiastes 7, verse 8 says, the end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.

Friends, it's not the beginning of our journey that ultimately matters the most. but where we arrive at the end. Be patient. I'd also suggest that it's what we learn and how we grow along the way, sometimes not always easily, that really matters, right?

It's the things that develop in us. And success, I hate to even use the word, I must put quoting fingers, success, now this is success not in the world's eyes, but God's.

Success is measured by how we finish, not how we start. God's measures of success are very different from our own, and definitely very different from those of the world.

[23 : 08] Things certainly turned out well for John Mark, right? I think we'd agree. Despite some of those things that happened along the way, despite disappointing the Apostle Paul, that would have been tough, despite contributing somehow, in some way, to driving a wedge between Paul and Barnabas, this relationship that had been so strong, this ministry that had been so significant.

But, we stop and recognize for a second, if Paul and Barnabas had continued in ministry together, what would have happened to the opportunities that forked out and went different directions.

God knew what he was doing. So, in the end, this story of the division over John Mark is really one of encouragement. It's one that teaches us how failure, in our eyes, can be turned into success.

How nothing that happens in our lives should keep us from trying to serve the Lord. My friends, don't let your challenges or failures of the past, keep you from serving the Lord and his church in the present, and more importantly, into the future.

God values you for who you are. He knew who you were going to be. He knew what your journey was going to be. He called you anyway.

[24 : 41] He loves you anyway. God loves you and values you for who you are, not who you used to be.

Amen. unto Bum Bum Bum