

Sermon Title: The New Team Roster
Scripture Text: Acts 15:35 – 16:5 (Acts #37)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-17-24

It is our joy to return again to the Book of Acts, and we are going to pick it up where we finish Chapter 15, and we are going to begin Chapter 16 this morning. I'll explain why we are doing it that way in a little bit.

As long as I can remember, I have been a baseball fan. I was an eight-year-old little boy looking forward to being old enough to play Little League. The year that the Dodgers moved to the West Coast, I was immediately hooked on following them and listening to that mesmerizing voice of broadcaster Vin Scully, who carried it on for another 58 years after he got there.

Well, my career as a baseball player was a rather profound dud. As a youth baseball player, I turned out to be a fairly successful bowler. Later, I went on, and I did play a lot of years of softball. I wound up coaching youth baseball all the way through Brad's high school career, and I mitigated my withdrawal from baseball and from coaching by working with Dirk for a couple of years as he was still coaching Josh's teams at that time.

I still enjoy the intricacies of the game. I still love "Dodger Dogs"—we all have our weak points. So, spring is a hopeful season for *every* baseball fan and every baseball team. Youth coaches are drafting their teams. High school coaches are holding their tryouts. College coaches recruit. Professional teams scout players worldwide, and my Dodgers just spent 800 million dollars on one guy—hope *that* works out. There are trades, there are injuries, there are blossoming rookies, and there are skillful coaches forever trying to put together the team roster that has no weaknesses and that can win the championship.

Now, you're saying, "I've looked at Acts all week. *Why* is he talking about baseball?" Well, it's a fairly lame analogy, but it *is* an analogy. There is a connection from the mindset of trying to build the best team roaster that you can in *any* sport, and our passage for today, because we are going to see God orchestrate putting together the best possible teams for missions, and especially the Second Missionary Journey of the Apostle Paul. It doesn't involve open tryouts or negotiating contract or Spring Training drills or practice games, but it shows *God's* hand at work overseeing in the lives of His people and His churches.

We are going to ignore the chapter division from 15 to 16—it doesn't really help anything—and we are going to see God lead through different men and through circumstances that *He* arranges in His providence.

And as we see this unfold, I want to suggest to you that you will see four important truths about what we call "missions"—spreading the Gospel, and especially *internationally* spreading the Gospel. Here they are—not a profound list, but just to draw from the text:

- Number 1: The Basis For Missions Is The Church (15:35-36)
- Number 2: The Men For Missions Are Fallible (vss. 37-39)
- Number 3: The Team For Missions Is Important (16:1-3)
- Number 4: The Purpose For Missions Is The Church (vss. 4-5)

It goes full circle: The church does missions. Missions benefit the church.

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Now, remember the setting of this; this is very important. This is one of those passages that does not have a command—it doesn't tell you to go do anything; there are no "shoulds" in here. This is a narrative, but from what actually happened, we draw good principles that we can apply. So the setting is crucial.

The church that had been planted in the city of Antioch in Syria sent out Paul and his coworker Barnabas on the first extended outreach into Gentile territory; that started in Acts 13. They first worked their way through Cyprus, where Barnabas was from. Then they headed up toward the general area of Galatia by way of a region called Pamphylia. "Barnabas' nephew Mark" (Col. 4:10, YLT) abandoned the team before they crossed the Taurus mountains; he turned around and headed back to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas—and there were others with them who are not named in the Book of Acts—they continued on. They led many to Christ; they planted churches in several cities. And once they reached the city of Derbe, they doubled back and visited the new churches they had planted, where they then established the first elders in those churches. In all, that journey lasted about a year and a half. When they came back to Antioch, there was great rejoicing in Antioch for all of the Gentiles who had believed.

But that rejoicing was cut short by the arrival of the ones we call the "Judaizers," who tried to redefine the Gospel by adding works to faith, and demanding either that Gentiles become Jews before they could become Christians, or that once they became Christians, they would live like Jews once they came to Christ. Well, that led immediately to the "Jerusalem Council," which once for all settled the fact that the message of Paul was exactly the same as the message of Peter (Gal. 2:7). The Gospel preached to the Gentiles was the same as the Gospel preached to Jews (Gal. 1:6-9). The salvation that came to Gentiles was the same as the salvation that came to Jews (Acts 15:11), and it was all "by grace" alone "through faith" alone (Eph. 2:8) in Christ alone (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12).

So, when they solved that, the Council then drew up some recommendations to help guide these new Gentile Christians in their relationships with Jewish Christians; and then they sent Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch, and they also sent along two guys from Jerusalem. We saw that in Chapter 15, Verse 22—"Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted) So they were both among the leaders in Jerusalem, who sent them along to the leaders in Antioch. This "Judas" and "Silas" spent considerable time there. Then Judas returned to Jerusalem; Silas stayed on in Antioch. And that brings us to our text for today. Now, if you are not *really solid* in understanding what the Jerusalem Council was all about, and *why* it was so important in affirming the truth of the Gospel, I recommend you go back and listen to our previous three sermons, or do some other study on your own.

But for our text today, let's look first of all: The Basis For Missions Is The Church. Chapter 15, starting at Verse 35. The first principle you are going to see illustrated here in our passage is that it *is* the responsibility of *every* local church to take the initiative to spread the Gospel. As Jesus said: "Go...and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19; cf. Is. 49:6; Mk. 13:10; 16:15; Lk. 24:47; Acts 1:8; 8:4).

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This is why we are still here on Earth! If the whole purpose of our salvation was so that God could be praised, it would be more merciful to just save you and then take you straight to Heaven; you wouldn't be tainted by anything. If the whole purpose was to fix your aches and pains, the best thing to do would be to take you to Heaven; you're going to be really healthy there. If it was all about us praying—well, why not just take us to the Source, and we can just talk to Him? The only function that the Church has on Earth that is *only* to be on Earth is spreading the Gospel.

Call it "missions" if you like. We tend to say, if it is a certain number of miles from home, it's "missions"; any closer, we call it "evangelism." The whole thing is about spreading the Gospel. That becomes the natural outflow of the constant work of the church building up the disciples to maturity in Christ (Eph. 4:12-16).

So, Verse 35 of Chapter 15—"But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord."

We have already seen that God raised up several strong preachers and teachers and leaders and missionaries in Antioch. It was in the regular course of their "teaching and preaching" that they were more than ever convinced that they needed to not only send out that first team, but now it is time for the next round; and Paul very soon wanted to continue the work further.

So, Verse 36—"After some days"—how long is that? It's exactly "some days"; more than the day before yesterday until tomorrow; but after a while, "Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.' "

Now that this disruption at the hands of the Judaizers was behind them, they are back in the routine of "teaching and preaching," week in and week out, and Paul was ready to get back to the task of taking the message to lost people (Rom. 15:20).

He never forgot, he never questioned God's plan; it had been revealed to him first through a man named Ananias. Ananias was the one who actually knew God's will for Paul's life before Paul did. Remember, Paul was blinded on the road outside Damascus, and then God called this man named "Ananias"—a Jewish Christian in Damascus—to go talk to "Saul" at that time (see Acts 13:9). Ananias wanted *nothing* to do with that; he knew that Paul was on his way to arrest Christians, and he said, "Uh, Lord, I think You got the wrong name here! You don't want me to go talk to *Saul*, do You?" Then we saw, back in Chapter 9, Verses 15 and 16—"But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he"—Saul—"is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.' "

So, another insight into missions strategy is to have that attitude that it is all about continuing to build up the ones who come to faith. Babies don't reproduce themselves; mature adults reproduce. In the spiritual realm, it is mature Christians who bear the most fruit. So Paul's immediate plan—"Let's go back to the churches that we planted on that first trip."

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But, Paul and Barnabas had a problem, which leads to our second observation: The Men For Missions Are Fallible.

Look at Verse 37 and 38—"Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work."

There is a subtlety there that runs deeper than what you can put into a straightforward translation; you have to add some circumlocution, or hire a preacher. It is the verb tenses that tell you this was not just a conversation over dinner. It says: "Barnabas *wanted* to take John Mark" and "Paul *kept insisting*." Those two verbs—"wanted" and "kept insisting"—are both imperfect tenses, different than what we have in English. It means this was an ongoing discussion. You could have translated it: "Barnabas *kept wanting* to do this," and "Paul *kept insisting*..."

Well, Barnabas—he had a good point. His very name means "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36). He wanted to take Mark again. He knew Mark better than Paul did because he was his relative; he was family. And obviously, he saw potential in Mark; he wanted to keep working with him.

Ah, but Paul saw it differently. Paul was more focused on the rigors of the ministry. He did not want to do any babysitting on this next trip. He didn't want to be left a man down when they were heading to the toughest parts. He wanted a reliable team that could be counted on all the way.

Neither Paul nor Barnabas were *wrong* in their convictions. Oh, but they were both adamant! Barnabas probably explained, over and over, the potential that he saw in Mark. I'm sure he believed that Mark was contrite over having left the team the first time, and he further believed that a second chance was in order. He probably believed that Mark would be all the better because of the lessons that he had learned from the first time around. But Paul wouldn't have it.

We don't know how many times they talked about this and tried to work it out; we don't know how long this went on. But as I say, those verbs make it clear that it was an ongoing discussion; and talking about it more and more *did not* close the gap.

So, Verse 39—"And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus."

We get a glimpse into a couple of things here:

First of all: Paul and Barnabas are human, and they are fallible. It was a genuine disagreement, and neither one of them believed that he could or should compromise and defer to the other.

That word "sharp disagreement" is the translation of a Greek word that actually made its way into English directly by transliterating letter by letter. The Greek word *paroxusmos*

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became the English word "paroxysm." Go ahead—you probably didn't use it all week long, but look it up in the dictionary. A "paroxysm" is "a sudden attack or violent expression of a particular emotion or activity."

When I had the joys of joining the club of a heart arrhythmia, they said: "You have paroxysmic atrial fibrillation." I couldn't even *spell* it all when I first heard of it. Well, what does that mean? From time to time, you have this *sudden* attack of this thing coming on you. It's not there all the time, but you better do something about it!

In this case, neither one of Paul or Barnabas wore the other one down. Instead of whittling their way toward agreement, this implies that they became *annoyed* with each other. It was "paroxysmic"! I would think it is pretty safe to say that they *probably lost sleep* over this.

Now here is the second thing we see from this: Neither Paul nor Barnabas was about to allow their disagreement about the qualification or lack of qualification of Mark for the next missionary journey to cause them to back off from the plan: spreading the Gospel, strengthening the saints. So it says "they separated from one another"; and what that literally means is: "they separated from one another." They actually decided to go in opposite directions—not opposite *purposes*, but different directions.

They did *not* call for a "Second Jerusalem Council." They did *not* badmouth each other. They did not try to manipulate either one; they respected each other. They did not pout. They did not complain. They didn't even post about it on social media.

The disagreement was over a man's qualifications: Is he the best choice for this team? It was *not* about doctrine. We *know* these guys would go to the mat for doctrine; *they just did*, in the previous chapter. But since they could not agree, what they did was: They both served the Lord according to their own convictions, and they respected each other.

And we should apply that today to *any* disagreement we may have which is not over the truth of God's Word. We should practice grace toward one another (Rom. 12:10; 1 Pet. 5:5). You can be friendly and cordial and respectful to fellow Christians who maybe do things differently than you do, who maybe see things differently than you do. If they are not denying the Gospel, if they are not disobeying the Word of God, it is a matter of personal conviction about a so-called "gray area" where God doesn't say "You must do it" or "You must not do it." In all the rest of that stuff, we can get along (see Ps. 119:63). Not only *can* you do that—if you do *less* than that, it is *sub-Christian* behavior! Jesus said they will "know that you are My disciples" by your "love for one another" (Jn. 13:35).

If there is someone that you *cannot* serve alongside because he or she practices different convictions on an issue that is not Bible doctrine—then, wish them well, pray for their ministry, and serve in another way. You don't leave your church family over it, you don't gossip about it, you don't pretend that you must *win* this argument. I say: Just go find your own Mark, and go do something for the Lord. Go find your own Silas, and do something for the Lord.

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It says: "Barnabas took Mark with him and" he went and he did what? *Exactly* what he and Paul had expressed was their desire to do: They went back to the first churches that they planted on the previous trip—and that was very logical, because Barnabas' home region was the island of Cyprus.

So, Verse 40—"But Paul chose Silas"—he's that guy who came from the church at Jerusalem after the Jerusalem Council, and he had stayed on there [at Antioch]—"Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia" (vss. 40-41). So, Team Paul—now with Silas as the right-hand man—*also* did exactly what Barnabas and Mark were doing. The difference is: They went in opposite directions. While Barnabas and Mark went where they had *first* gone—from Antioch down to the seacoast city of Seleucia, to the port city, and then sailed the short distance across to Cyprus—meantime, Paul and Silas headed north; they took the *shortest* route to the places that they had reached at the *farthest* end of their First Missionary Journey.

I have showed you maps of Paul's First Missionary Journey several times. Looking at the second one—this map is a whole lot busier than the first one, because the second trip covered most of the same territory as the first trip, except there was no stop in Cyprus. Why would they do that, because Barnabas and Mark had already gone there? This one added in a stop in Jerusalem on the return trip. So you are going to have to be familiar with your Bible Book of Maps while you trace this amazing journey. And we will be at it for several visits to the Book of Acts.

At this point, we are not told any more about the ministry of Barnabas and Mark as travelling missionaries, except that we know they headed to Cyprus. I think there is a very good reason for that: God is telling us the story of how He used *Paul* to open up the world of the Gentiles, so Paul is the main figure. The other Apostles did not take early retirement when Paul rose to prominence and the Gospel was going more to Gentiles than to Jews, but the other Apostles' ministries—they are just not recorded in Acts. And similarly, Barnabas did not quit when he and Paul had their paroxysm; he took his nephew and his understudy Mark, and they continued to pour their lives into Christians through the Roman Empire. And *both teams* were still rooted in their home church in Antioch.

Now, if you start reading commentaries here, you can read a lot of, frankly, wasted ink, or you can read a whole bunch of wasted bandwidth online. People feel like they have to decide: Who was *right*—Paul or Barnabas? And you can read how one or both of them *sinned* by not giving in.

And some of the commentators declare that Barnabas—well, he *should* have given in because, hasn't he read the Book of Acts? *Paul* is the key "Apostle" to the "Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13; 1 Tim. 2:7). And so, since Barnabas was just an *assistant* to the Apostles, he should have submitted to the authority of Paul. But Paul did not *demand* submission to his authority! (e.g., 1 Thess. 2:6; Philem. 8-9) That is not how *anybody* in authority leads in a godly way: You don't *demand* it, you command it by your actions and by your attitude (Matt. 20:25-27; 2 Cor. 1:24; 1 Pet. 5:3). And Barnabas winds up doing exactly what Paul was going to do. We wound up with *two* teams instead of one!

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Then there are others who declare that it is obvious: "Well, we know Paul was right because Verse 40 says that 'Paul and Silas' were 'committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord,' and it does not say that 'Barnabas and Mark were committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.'" It also doesn't say they *weren't*. Don't go making arguments based upon what *is not* said in your Bible. Paul was, by the design of God, the main character; from Chapter 13 on, this traces the ministry of Paul, through whom God "opened" up "the door...to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). If the passage said they *refused* to bless Barnabas and his team, that would be quite a different story.

But understand: These men were fallible—but *oh*, were they *committed*, unwaveringly committed to spreading the Gospel and nurturing the saints. But God is omniscient—He knows everything (Ps. 147:5b; Is. 46:9-10); He is omnipotent—He is all-powerful (Jer. 32:17; Dan. 4:35); He is fully in control (Ps. 33:11; Prov. 19:21); He is absolutely sovereign (Ps. 103:19; Eph. 1:11); He is *always* "good" (Ps. 119:68). And if you stick with what the text says, and you don't get riled up about what it *doesn't* say, you just say, "Wow! There was a disagreement, and now we have *two* teams instead of one!"

This kind of reminded me of the silly arguments back in Chapter 1, where some people say that the Apostles were *in error* when they chose Matthias to replace Judas. Well, that is a nice theory, if you want to make that claim—but *the Bible doesn't say that!* And I've heard, "Well, there's never any record of Matthias after that!" Well, there's never any record of "James the Less" or "Nathanael" or *eight* of the *other* original Apostles!

You just serve the Lord, always in submission to the truth of His Word and within the boundaries of your personal convictions about everything else, and God is going to use you, just as He used Team Paul and Team Barnabas.

Paul would eventually write something about this, regarding personal convictions about secondary matters. I mean, we know how passionate he was about doctrine, right? Read the first chapter of Galatians—serious stuff. Read what he says at the Jerusalem Council—serious stuff. But he *also* wrote this. When it comes to things that are *secondary*, that are the *applications* of biblical principles, he says something pretty profound:

Romans 14, starting at Verse 5—"One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike." Are you going to keep the Sabbath special and also worship on Sunday, or are you only going to worship on Sunday? Are you going to celebrate any of those Jewish feasts that we know from other writings, they don't matter (Col. 2:16-17)—but you can do it if you want to. He says: "Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not"—referring about dietary laws (see Rom. 14:2-3)—"for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (vss. 5-8). Skip to Verse 10—"But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God." (see Jas. 4:11-12)

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I had a friend years ago who was serving as a youth pastor in a certain church, and he was dealing with a physical issue; and when he came to church on Sunday morning, he had a splitting headache—he didn't even know if he was going to be able to stay. And he slipped off into the kitchen, the little snack area they had, and he was getting himself a cup of coffee. And one of the deacons happened to come in and said, "Good morning," and my friend didn't even know he was there—he was just trying to not have his head explode. So that deacon went off and started a big ruckus about how rude the youth pastor was, and how uncaring he was—and *got him fired!* I don't think that guy had read the Book of Acts. "Well, he didn't greet me last week!" or, "I wanted our group to study something different, but you know, I can't ever come to *that* group again!" That happens.

It didn't happen *here*, though. There is a long-term outcome of this story that is *really* encouraging—*especially* if you have ever been through a *paroxysmos* with other believers because of strong personal convictions that differ.

Barnabas wanted Mark *so badly*, he "took Mark with him" and headed back to "Cyprus." Now, we don't know what happened to Mark after that, for a long time. But later on, he shows up as a friend and a co-laborer of Paul in Rome during Paul's first imprisonment there. You can read about it in Philemon Verse 24, and Colossians Chapter 4, Verse 10. Then in Paul's *second* imprisonment, Paul writes to Timothy and he asks that "Mark" be sent to him, and he says: "for he is useful to me for service" (2 Tim. 4:11).

In the meantime, he somehow got connected to Peter. Oh, yeah, remember, it was Mark's mom's house where they "were praying" for Peter to be released in Acts 12:12. Well, that connection continued, and Peter later on calls "Mark" his "son" (1 Pet. 5:13)—meaning it might have been Peter who led Mark to faith as a young man. And eventually, Mark wound up writing the Gospel which bears his name. And most scholars believe—and I think they are right—Peter was the source for the details of the life of Christ.

So, Mark became *very, very* connected with the Apostles Paul and Peter.

You see, some people are especially gifted at building the best possible team roster for the goal of winning the championship this season. They need to be your general manager, or they need to be your field manager in the major leagues.

But *some* are especially gifted at *developing* players, and helping them learn from their mistakes, and giving them second chances so that they eventually become very effective.

If I am going to follow my lame illustration, I would say that on the first journey, Mark came to the major leagues for a cup of coffee, and he got sent back down to the minors. Later on, he turned into a star.

Alright, third thing we are going to learn: The Team For Missions Is Important.

Now, what about Team Paul and Silas? As I said: They went the *opposite* direction from Team Barnabas and Mark; they took the shortest route back toward the region of Galatia.

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So, we come to Chapter 16. And like I said: The chapter division does not help you a tiny bit here; there is no change of anything.

Chapter 16, Verse 1—"Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra." That should ring a bell: Those were the last places that they got to on the first journey. "And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium"—mentioning another couple of cities. "Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek" (vss. 1-3).

So, Paul goes right away back where they had been before, to "strengthen the churches" there (15:41b). And while they are there, he and Silas meet "Timothy" for the first time. Now, we are going to see a lot about Timothy in the rest of the Book of Acts—and, indeed, the rest of the New Testament. Eventually, it is going to be to Timothy that Paul writes the largest body of information addressed to the issue of pastoral ministry. He wound up leaving Timothy in Ephesus—one of the biggest churches in the world at that time—to pastor that huge church there (1 Tim. 1:3).

Timothy had a good reputation among the believers all around that region. If you do the math of how the years line up, and you read when Paul talks about Timothy's "youthfulness" (1 Tim. 4:12), he may have been no more than in his teens, possibly his early twenties. He must have been a remarkable young man, and Paul immediately realized he could be a great addition to the missionary team.

Because of his Greek father, and his Jewish mother who had led him to Christ (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15), and his good reputation—what a *perfect* choice for a ministry of a Jewish Apostle going to Gentiles in Gentile territory where they always go to the Jews first! He is the perfect choice.

But, what about Verse 3? *How in the world* could somebody who *soundly refuted* the Judaizers (e.g., Gal. 5:2-3; 6:12) go *circumcise* a grown man on his next missionary trip? You know, I have prepared a lot of people to go on missions trips, and I do my best to make sure they are ready. I have never done that! And not going to happen, either! I don't even *want* to know what the discussions were like.

But here is the deal: Timothy was *already* a believer. This was *not* about making him become a Jew in order to become a Christian! This was *not* about him, as a Christian, being forced, as a new believer in Christ, to now be under the Mosaic Law. The answer is right there in the verse: "because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek." It would never be a problem to a Gentile to deal with somebody who was Jewish, like Paul; but when they went to the *synagogues*, as always was the first plan in every city (Acts 13:46; cf. 3:26), if the people knew that this guy is only *half-Jewish*, if you will, ethnically, if they knew he was not circumcised, they would *instinctively* cast suspicion on Timothy—and, by extension, on Paul—and the issue of his Jewishness, or lack thereof, could be a barrier to the Gospel. So, Paul knocked down the barrier. It is easy to see the wisdom of that decision.

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He would later write: "I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). "I just tried to take *anything* that was not an issue of the Gospel, and *sweep it away!* I'll adapt on *anything* that isn't sinful (see vs. 21) in order to preach the Gospel."

And as a matter of fact, later on—the other side of the coin: When Paul brought Titus into his team, Titus was a Gentile; it was suggested, "Well, you better circumcise him," and Paul said, "No! He's a Greek! We are not going to do that." (see Gal. 2:3)

Well, now Paul's Dream Team is assembled. You know how important it was that Paul was a Jew—he could always go "to the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16). He knew what had been done in Jerusalem. He could connect with Jews and he could help connect Jews with Gentiles (see Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6).

You are also going to see who important it is that Paul was a Roman "citizen" (Acts 21:39; 22:28)—*and so was Silas, and so was Timothy!* They were *all* Roman citizens—and wait till you see just how important that is in working out the plan of God; it would not have been the *same* with Barnabas and Mark instead of Silas and Timothy on Paul's team.

So, to perpetuate my rather lame earthly analogy: God assembled a team with perfect chemistry—in the locker room, if you will—and precisely the best skills for winning the most souls.

And Number 4: The Purpose For Missions Is The Church.

The *Basis* For Missions Is The Church, and through The Men who do the Missions—who are Fallible—they fulfill The Purpose For Missions, which is to build The Church. Full circle.

Here is what Team Paul did in the first region that they visited: Verses 4 and 5—"Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily."

The churches send missionaries, the missionaries plant churches, the missionaries build up the saints, the saints are the church, the church sends missionaries, and it keeps going—and it *has* been going for 2,000 years (Matt. 16:18; cf. Jn. 6:37, 39; 10:16; 17:2).

"The decrees"—that is the decisions of the Jerusalem Council. And this is the region to which Paul wrote the Book of Galatians. The Judaizers *really did* gum up the works in Galatia, and Paul had to deal with them *very, very sternly, strongly, without mincing any words whatsoever* (see Titus 1:13). "You change the Gospel, *you are accursed!* Don't listen to *anybody* who does that!" (see Gal. 1:6-9)

But when it was personal convictions, he was willing to accommodate Jews, Gentiles—whoever he needed to (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Sermon Title: The New Team Roster
Scripture Text: Acts 15:35 – 16:5 (Acts #37)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-17-24

So, the question to us is: How committed are you to sending as many missionaries as possible? (see Lk. 10:2) Some of you can go, sometimes. God may call some of you to go for a *lifetime*! The most significant relationships that we have are where we are involved in the ongoing training of people in the church.

Now, I'm all for short-term missions trips. It's the only kind I have ever done; I've led teams, I've sent people. But if it is just, "Go and do whatever you can do, and come back home"—that can be *life-changing* for people!

I always recommend: Get out of your own culture, if you can, and you can sort out the difference between what is Christian and biblical versus what is cultural as a matter of personal conviction. That is a valuable thing.

But for the sake of the growth of the Church, the most valuable thing is the ongoing relationships. It is not an accident that we have sent most teams to the same places, over and over again.

Next question: Are you willing to serve alongside people who are as fallible as *you* are? Are you going to *stop serving* because somebody became paroxysmic toward you? No! Romans 12:18—"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." I am *absolutely* 100 percent sure beyond a shadow of a doubt: Paul and Barnabas *were not enemies* when they went opposite directions! I am *sure* they prayed for each other. I'm *sure* they rejoiced at every point that their lives intersected after that.

And: Are you constantly looking for how we can improve *our* team for all aspects of ministry? I keep saying it: If you take on a responsibility in the church, *just do it*, keep doing it, and make it one of your *highest priorities* to find somebody to help you do it, so you are making a disciple (e.g., 2 Tim. 2:2).

We had a friend who was rather advanced in years by the time we knew him. We found out that before we knew him, at his former church he had taught First Grade for 35 years—*35 years* teaching First Grade! If he was *young* when he started, he was *old* when he was done, and he changed locations. *That* is the kind of faithfulness God blesses. He would have former students bringing *their kids* to his First Grade class! That's faithfulness.

And how many people got the idea from him, what faithfulness is? And how many people are *still* doing something because of my friend's faithfulness?

And if you need to make a change—go find yourself a Mark, and go for it! Look for Silas, and go for it! If you don't think you are the one to take the initiative, find a Paul, and follow him! He said, "Be followers of me, as I am of Christ" (see 1 Cor. 11:1).

Do we want to see what God is doing *grow*? How wonderful that "the churches were being strengthened in the faith, *and* were increasing in number daily." That meant: They were being matured, and the mature ones were reproducing, and people were coming to the Lord (Eph. 4:12-16).

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Well, let's pray:

Father, thank You for this portion of Your Word, and thank You for this setting of this church family where we can apply it. Please, Father, help us to be faithful. As we said earlier, the holiday that people call "Easter" is coming—and oh, what an opportunity for us to introduce people to the crucified and risen and ascended and soon-coming King, our Lord Jesus! So, Father, make us Gospel-minded people. If we have the opportunity, take us to places where the Gospel can be spread. Bring us to people with hearts that need a Savior. Help us to speak the truth always in love; and above all, to be strengthening the saints, so that we may be able to say that You are adding to the number daily. Have Your way with us to this end. That is our prayer. And Father, please—we know that in this fallen world, while we all still battle the flesh, sometimes there are paroxysms. Please don't let them derail anyone from the service of Your Bride, Your Church. And we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.