

## STUDY GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS

### The Journeys of Paul

Week 3: Week of February 2, 2020

Sermon Title: *People Come and God*

Text: Acts 15:36-16:5

#### **(For Facilitators mainly - optional for the group)**

Luke's concern here is to bridge the gap to the next phase of Paul's mission. This stresses Paul's role both as an emissary for the apostolic decree and as representative of the Antioch church.

There is a sharp dispute between Paul and Barnabas relating to the question of John Mark's resuming the role of their assistant (15:37-39). This was very distressing to Paul (Gal. 2:11-14) and not least Barnabas (Gal.2:13). Paul had clearly felt that the question of Jewish and Gentile believers sharing table-fellowship raised the same fundamental issues as had the question of circumcision; but Peter and Barnabas had disagreed. It looks like Paul couldn't convince them. It was a breach over Mark's suitability. Luke doesn't disclose everything to us but rather he chooses to show Paul's solidarity with the Jerusalem church.

There are hints that Paul and Barnabas were reconciled (I Cor. 9:6; Col. 4:10) and that when given a second chance by Paul, Mark did not fail him again (Col. 4:10 and Philemon 24).

Often this is described as "the second and third missionary journeys". This is really not accurate. Luke presents it as a coherent and integrated unity. It has a clear beginning: the mission was entered upon with all the marks of divine prompting (16:6-9). It has a clear end and is climaxed and concluded with a speech which has all the appearance of Paul's last will and testimony (20:18-35). Paul has two headquarters: Corinth – for 18 months and Ephesus – two years with occasional trips to Antioch.

We've noted that the incident between Paul and Barnabas also meant that Paul and Antioch were also strained. Paul's disappointment is expressed in Gal.1:6-9, II Cor. 12:11-13; Phil 3:2 and II Cor. 10:13-16.

It is clear that the Aegean mission was at the heart of Paul's missionary work for Paul himself. Apart from Galatians and Romans, all the letters written by Paul were to churches he founded. Timothy is introduced as a disciple. Timothy's mother (Eunice II Tim. 1:5) had married a Greek. Such intermarriage was discouraged in most Jewish communities. The fact that Tim. had not been circumcised also indicates that his mother had ceased to practice as a Jew. On the other hand, II Tim. 3:15 speaks of Tim. as having been taught the scriptures so it may be that it was

Timothy's Greek father who refused to allow him to be circumcised. Paul circumcised Tim is regarded as inconsistent with Paul's opposition to circumcision elsewhere. But Luke explains it. Jewish identity was regarded as coming through the mother. Timothy was a Jew. As a Jew, Timothy's lack of circumcision would have been an affront to most Jews. Paul regarded the circumcised status as quite acceptable for Jews is confirmed by Gal 5:6; 6:15; and I Cor. 7:18, 9:20; it was the insistence that Gentile believers had to be circumcised to which he objected.

## Discussion Questions

### Opening Questions (optional – pick only the ones you want to choose).

- We have people coming and going in our lives. When have we experienced that? What is that like?
- When have you felt the tension of being a Christian in the context of our culture?
- Have you every struggled with compromising your faith?

### For reflection

- Read 15:36- 16:5. What was the basis of the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas?
- What good seemed to come about of Paul and Barnabas splitting up.
- What do we learn from their resolution?
- With whom do you relate more, Paul, Barnabas, or Mark? Why?
- Have you ever had a strained relationship with another Christian? What happened? What didn't happen?
- What key ideas do was see in chapter 15 that would help in dealing with disagreements among Christians?
- How might these be applied to disagreements among believers we are facing now?
- Paul's missionary approach was to go to the synagogue first when he arrived in town. With Timothy being Jewish and not circumcised would have been problematic. Timothy didn't need to be circumcised to become a full member of God's people but because it would be much easier to advance the mission and proclaim the gospel. Apparently, Paul felt that different ministry situations called for different practical approaches. What examples can you think of today in which this would also be true?
- Look at I Corinthians 9:20-22. How would we apply that to our context today? What would that mean for us as we think about our role as "ambassadors for Christ?"
- How is this problem of culture a continual one for the Christian church, even when the particular issue is not Jewish-Gentile tensions?
- How have we seen God's providence in our lives even when there is ongoing transition and change?