

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

### **Series: Next!**

(studies in the book of Acts)

## **Welcome to a Terribly Exciting Journey!** Study #16

(Acts 13:1-13)

### **Introduction: Muddy trails to you...**

As you may or may not know, the second week of my vacation was spent with my younger son, Zach, and my brother-in-law, Bob, backpacking in the Weminuche, a half million wilderness playground on the Continental Divide carved out of the San Juan Mountains in southwestern Colorado.

I've been taking these kinds of trips for a number of years. It's refreshing to get out of San Antonio's summer heat and to go get lost in the mountains for a few days.

Now this year was a bit different than most. (For one thing, my other son, Ben, was not with us, which was a bummer.)

On the night before we were to hit the trail, a tremendous thunderstorm struck Pagosa Springs and the extended area where we were hiking. All we could think of was camping for five days in a monsoon. It was not a pleasant thought.

We did start the trek on the next day, though, in relatively dry conditions. But within the first several hundred yards of the trailhead, we found the going really tough because of trail conditions that were worse than any I had ever seen.

Now, I know that some of you here love horses. Out in the field, I think horses are beautiful, even majestic animals. But horses can really muck up a trail.

The horses' heavy hooves, coupled with their relative unsanitary hygienic habits, plus days of heavy rain made for an absolute mess for us backpackers.

We slogged through miles of terrible trails on Day One. Shoes got heavy. Socks were soaked through. Certain members of our party (who shall remain nameless, whew!) got a little testy. And it almost became way too much when I nearly face-planted in the middle of an exceptionally horse-polluted spot on the trail.

I'll admit it. I was been tempted to pack it in early. I remember thinking that if it was this miserable on Day One, Days Two through Five might be worse, especially if it rained (and it did).

Have you ever faced the temptation to call it quits early? After a difficult start to some journey have you ever seriously considered ending the adventure before it was scheduled to be over?

Any of us who start out on journeys do so with a hope of great adventure. We wouldn't ever take a step if we didn't think that the rewards outweigh the risks, that the process is worth the product, and that the gain is worth the pain.

But there are risks and pains associated with every great adventure, and the temptation to quit is common to most of us.

If you have ever faced the temptation I faced on my most recent expedition, and you stuck it out to the journey's end, you probably learned things you wouldn't have learned if you had quit. There were likely latter parts of that adventure that turned delightful, that were life-changing, and that were rewarding.

Well, this morning we come to the beginning of a great adventure for Jesus' followers, a beginning that is filled with hardship *and* adventure.

We'll first watch that challenging kick-off - and then keep watching as the journeyers face a "quit or continue" gut-check.

*Review - from prayer meeting to prayer meeting*

In our last look into Acts (three Sundays ago!), we watched as the church at Jerusalem responded to a crisis by turning to God in prayer.

With the apostle Peter imprisoned, prayers were fervently prayed and God delivered.

This morning we turn our attention from the church in Jerusalem to another church, the church that will soon become the center of the action in the book of Acts: the church at Antioch.

As we turn to Acts 13 the church at Antioch is engaged in a season of prayer. But unlike the scene in Acts 12, the Christians at Antioch are not praying in response to a calamity.

They are praying because of a burden, a passion, an urgency to fulfill Jesus' Great Commission.

And today we will see what the Holy Spirit does when passionate Christians unite in prayer for outreach.

### **A Commissioning in Antioch (vv. 1-3)**

#### **Leaders of the Antioch Church (v. 1; 2a)**

*The church at Antioch was blessed with spiritually gifted leaders (v. 1a; 2a)*

#### Prophets

***[1] Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets...***

Clearly, there were men and women with the prophetic gift in the early church. Agabus (Acts 11:28; 21:10) and the daughters of Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:9) are specifically mentioned as having the prophetic gift.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The combo of Judas and Silas who delivered the letter to the Jerusalem Council with Barnabas and Paul (15:32) are also referred to as prophets.

These prophets received supernatural revelation from God and spoke in God's Name to the early Christians.

Today, the prophetic gift is more normally exercised by someone proclaiming truth that has already been revealed in Scripture (which is what happens in most churches on most Sunday mornings).

As well, in the church at Antioch there were, as there have always been, teachers.

#### Teachers

***[1] Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, ...teachers***

A teacher's ministry is less spontaneous than that of a prophet. And before there was a written New Testament a skilled teacher was worth his weight in gold to a congregation.

He would give doctrinal summaries and lead in hymns that spoke truth. He would use rites like baptism and the Lord's Supper to illustrate Christian truth.

In the church at Antioch, the prophets and teachers were also fervent, passionate worshippers.

#### Worshippers

***[2] While they were ministering<sup>2</sup> to the Lord and fasting...***

This word "**ministering**" is a word that was used to describe the service that priests would render in the Temple. It involved prayer and singing - the same things that we do today. And these guys were fasting, to boot, as we also sometimes do today.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The word we translate "ministering" is not the same word as is usually translated "serving" although it relates to serving God. It is a "stained glass" word, the word from which we derive our English word "liturgy." People who are "ministering to the Lord" are performing spiritual service to God.

<sup>3</sup> The combination of the activities of prayer and fasting occurs occasionally in Scripture. (Jeremiah 14:12; Nehemiah 1:4; Matthew 6:5, 16).

Five men are listed here. These are likely five of the primary leaders of the church.

*Some of the gifted men, listed (v. 1b)*

***[1b] Barnabas,<sup>4</sup> and Simeon<sup>5</sup> who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene,<sup>6</sup> and Manaen<sup>7</sup> who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.<sup>8</sup>***

These five were probably chief among those who instructed the church in the fundamentals of the faith. They were the “go-to” spiritual leaders.

And what a list of ethnic diversity! Here is a Hellenistic Jew, an African, a Romanized Jew, an aristocrat, and a trained rabbi. Yet despite their disparate backgrounds, these men harmonized beautifully, a real testimony to the unifying influence of the Gospel.

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<sup>4</sup> First mentioned is **Barnabas** (the Son of Encouragement), a man we already know as a hero of the first century church. I suspect he is listed first because he was pre-eminent among the other leaders.

<sup>5</sup> Then, there is **Simeon**, whose nickname was “Niger.” Taken from the same root word as the African country named Nigeria, the Latin word means “black.”

<sup>6</sup> Next mentioned is **Lucius** of Cyrene. Cyrene was a city in North Africa. Lucius’ name is Latin, indicating Roman roots. Some Bible scholars have wondered if Lucius was in Jerusalem when the initial persecution against Christians hit (after Stephen’s martyrdom). If so, forced to flee, he made his way to Antioch.

<sup>7</sup> Then comes **Manaen**. This fellow was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He hob-nobbed with royalty, as is seen by the fact that he was “brought up with” (raised with) Herod the Tetrarch (also known as Herod Antipas). This Herod was the one who ruled over Galilee and Perea between 4 B.C. and A.D. 39 - that is, during Jesus’ ministry. He was the one who had consented to the death of John the Baptist. He was also the one who treated Jesus so shamefully at His trial. (Luke 23:7-12). Having a childhood pal in the Herod family probably indicates that Manaen came from society’s upper crust.

<sup>8</sup> And finally, Luke mentions **Saul**, whom we know as well as we know Barnabas. A violent persecutor of the church, he was saved in a blinding encounter with the risen Lord Jesus. He was welcomed by Ananias in Damascus, sponsored by Barnabas in Jerusalem, rescued from threat of death by the church there, and then sent back home to Tarsus. Now, he has been brought back to Antioch by Barnabas where he is recognized as one of the church’s primary teachers.

Obviously, one of the Holy Spirit’s most amazing works is to bring unity out of diversity in the church. And He did that spectacularly in the church at Antioch.

Another of the Holy Spirit’s amazing works involves thrusting Christians into adventuresome ministry, something He does right here in Acts 13.

### **THE LEADER of the Antioch Church (v. 2)**

***[2] While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart<sup>9</sup> for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”***

Questions arise as we read these words, and the answers are not easily arrived at.

For instance, was the entire church engaged in a period of prayer and fasting, or was it just these five?

*WHO was praying?*

With respect to WHO was praying, I have a sense that it was a larger group than the five who were ***“ministering to the Lord and fasting.”***<sup>10</sup>

This was a very healthy church and the “they” of verse two could easily be a much larger “they” than the group mentioned in verse one.

Another question concerns HOW the Holy Spirit “said” what He did about separating out Barnabas and Saul for a special work.

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<sup>9</sup> In his writings, Paul mentions being set apart three times: First, at his birth (Galatians 1:15); Second, at his conversion (Romans 1:1); Third, here, to specific service.

<sup>10</sup> Darrell Bock believes that the Spirit’s call came in the context of congregational worship. John Martin (Bible Knowledge Commentary, Dallas Seminary) thinks that the message came through a prophetic revelation.

*HOW did the Holy Spirit say what He said?*

There are actually a number of ways in which He might have done this.

- He may have given identical simultaneous inner urges to each of those praying (I think this the least likely explanation).
- He may have spoken audibly, as God did when Jesus was baptized, or as when Jesus spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus.
- Or, He may have spoken through one or more of the prophets in the church. (I believe that this was likely the means of communication.)

We could debate the means of communication till the cows come home - but clearly, the explicit will of the Holy Spirit could not have been more clear.

He wanted Barnabas and Saul, two of the leading lights of the church, two of the church's greatest resources, to leave the church for a season to spread the Gospel of Jesus.

Now, it's possible to read these verses from the Bible pretty quickly. But the season of fasting and prayer and listening and receiving the Spirit's guidance could have taken days, weeks, or even months.

When the church, though, finally discerned what the Spirit was directing, they took action to comply.

**Led by THE LEADER and Leaders "to the Remotest Part of the Earth..." (v. 3)**

*A laying on of hands (v. 3a)*

On the BIG DAY, when it was finally time to leave and to begin this Gospelizing ministry, the church held a special commissioning service.

***[3] Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them...***

The church (either all those in the church, or vicariously through the leaders) laid hands on Barnabas and Saul, identifying themselves with them, sending them out to minister in the power of the Spirit and in the Name of the Lord.

And with that, the missionaries were sent off!

*A powerful, loving send off (v. 3b; 4a)*

***[3] Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. [4a] So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit...***

Luke tells us that the church sent them away. And then he tells us that they were sent out by the Holy Spirit. OK, Luke, which is it?

Sent by the church

Well, the believing community, sensing God's clear direction, sent them out. They willingly gave up two of their choicest servants.

The Christians in Antioch understood that churches are not just places or communities for worship. Churches are also missional communities that are to carry God's heart for people to the world.

No doubt about it, the church at Antioch sent out Barnabas and Saul. But Luke says that the Holy Spirit was also the sending agent.

Sent by the Holy Spirit

And when we read that both the church and the Holy Spirit sent Barnabas and Saul out I think that Scripture is telling us that when a local church, after prayer (and fasting?), discerns (through consensus, or through a realization of what is "ministry smart" or through a direct revelation) that the Spirit-led thing to do is to engage in a ministry initiative, and they commission people and resources for that purpose, then you can just as easily say that church did it or the Holy Spirit did it!

Who commissions the youth and adults of our church who have traveled to Russia and New Orleans and Uruguay? We do - and so does the Holy Spirit!

The Spirit of God was directing the mission of that church and He is directing the mission of this church - and He is using the members of the Body to accomplish that directing.

Having seen their commissioning, we trace their first steps on the journey.

### **A Journey Launched from Antioch (vv. 4-13)**

#### **Phase One: Travel (vv. 4-6a)**

*[4b]...they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. [5] When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper. [6] When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos...*

#### *Resources*

This team was well resourced. I assume that the church resourced them financially. While we are never told about the money side of things, it is inconceivable to me that the church at Antioch did not bless Barnabas and Saul with some money to help defray expenses on the road.

Then, too, these two had the resources of the Holy Spirit's gifting. Both of these men were powerful teachers, and Barnabas had a gift that is VERY helpful on a long trip - the gift of encouragement.

And they had the additional resource of John Mark. John Mark was the son of Mary, the woman who owned the home in Jerusalem where the prayer meeting was being held for Peter's release from prison.

John Mark's role on this missionary adventure was to be a "helper" to Barnabas and Saul. He was their "go-fer." Consider John Mark an apprentice missionary.

And, while he had not been specifically "set apart:" for the trip like Barnabas and Saul had been, the Holy Spirit certainly didn't exclude him. Barnabas and Saul had perfect freedom to bring John Mark along.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Some have wondered if John Mark was an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry, something that neither Barnabas nor Saul could claim.

#### *Activities*

As they traveled, they were to proclaim Jesus. Their first destination was the island of Cyprus, and Acts 11:19 tells us that there had already been previous Gospel activity on the island. Either from Jerusalem or Antioch, Christians had brought the message and a Christian beachhead had been established.

But this trip was not so much about enjoying Christian fellowship along the way as it was about engaging in pioneering Gospel work.

The idea was to proclaim Jesus to people who had never heard about Him. And in most every place they would follow a pattern of going first to the Jewish synagogues and then they would go to the Gentiles. They would preach Jesus until there was fledgling church established - and then they would move on to the next major population center.

Luke gives us the basics of the itinerary they followed, so let's trace the route the dynamic three-o traveled.

#### *Itinerary*

They left Antioch, heading for the nearest coastal city, which was Seleucia. Then, taking a ship west and south through the Mediterranean, they headed for the nearby, large island of Cyprus<sup>12</sup>, which was Barnabas' home.

It's not surprising that Barnabas would want the first stop on a Gospel trip to be his old stomping grounds. After all, we all want our loved ones to know Jesus, and so did he.

They made for the easternmost port city of Salamis, the largest city on the island, and immediately began to talk about Jesus to the Jews there.

There were several synagogues on Cyprus, and it made sense to go to the Jews first, as they already had a monotheistic base, knew the Old Testament, and understood the implications of a claim that Jesus was the Messiah.

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<sup>12</sup> Cyprus was famous for its copper mines and its shipbuilding industry. Known in the Old Testament as Kittim.

They traveled the one hundred and forty mile length of the island, making it to the westernmost end where their travels brought them to the city of Paphos

Paphos was actually the capitol city of Cyprus. It was a large city and famous for its worship of the Greek goddess of love/lust, Venus. The worship of Paphia, equivalent to Aphrodite was also centered at Paphos. And it was while they were in Paphos that they met two individuals, the two central characters in the first real drama/challenge of the First Missionary Journey.

## Phase Two: Spiritual Warfare! (vv. 6b-12)

*The two main characters (vv. 6-7)*

Bar-Jesus (Elymas) (v. 6)

***[6] When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus<sup>13</sup>***

When referring to someone by the term used here for “magician” there is no necessary assumption that he is evil or sinister. (God’s people, both Jews and Christians, have always stood opposed to the world of the occult because a focus on it takes away from a trust in Almighty God.)

The word can refer to someone who is a counselor to royalty, or to someone who is an honorable gentleman. However, it CAN certainly speak of a fraudulent wizard, as here!

This Jewish magician, who went by the name “Bar-Jesus” (the name means *son of salvation* and has no relationship to the Lord Jesus who lived, died and was resurrected in Palestine 15 years earlier), served in the court of the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus.<sup>14</sup>

Luke calls Bar-Jesus a *false prophet*, not because he gave false predictions (why would Sergius Paulus have kept a man like THAT hanging around?). He referred to him as a false prophet because he falsely claimed to be a prophet.

He wasn’t a prophet at all, but was simply a man willing to tell a pagan ruler what he wanted to hear, perhaps using his Jewishness to gain credibility

The other major player in this story is the ruler, Sergius Paulus.

Sergius Paulus (v. 7)

***[7] who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus<sup>15</sup>, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.***

In contrast to the Jewish false prophet stood Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of the island of Cyprus. He was an intelligent man (Does Luke call him intelligent due to his being open to the Gospel?).

And in addition to intelligence, the proconsul was a man with a genuine spiritual thirst. When he heard that Barnabas and Saul were in his city preaching a life-giving, soul-satisfying message, he sent for them!

*When powers collide (vv. 8-11)*

Elymas’ opposition (v. 8)

***[8] But Elymas<sup>16</sup> the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.***

We don’t know exactly why Elymas opposed Barnabas and Saul, but I suspect that it was the fear any phony has of the genuine article.

<sup>15</sup> Rome had two types of provinces - those under the emperor and those under the senate. Judea was governed by procurators appointed by the emperors. In 22 B.C., secular history tells us that the status of Cyprus was changed from imperial to senatorial province, as Luke correctly indicates.

<sup>16</sup> Elymas, another name for Bar-Jesus. A semitic word bearing a meaning similar to the Greek “magus” or magician.

<sup>13</sup> The first opponent of the missionaries is named “son of Jesus.” How ironic.

<sup>14</sup> It was a common practice for pagan rulers to have magicians and astrologers in their court, sort of as their personal wizard/fortune-teller. Bar-Jesus served Sergius Paulus in this capacity.

He was afraid of being found out as a fake and he knew that he would be replaced in a heartbeat if Sergius Paulus discovered real spiritual power.

So, shrewdly assuming that Elymas/Bar-Jesus knew what Sergius Paulus' coming to faith in Christ would mean for him<sup>17</sup> - no job! - he opposed Barnabas and Saul and their teaching and was doing everything he could to turn his boss away from the faith.

With the opposition from Elymas firmly in place, Saul (not Barnabas) stepped up to the mic. With Holy Spirit-inspired confidence, Saul/Paul took on Elymas/Bar-Jesus, in the Name of the Lord Jesus!

Paul' opposition! (vv. 9-11)

***[9] But Saul, who was also known as Paul<sup>18</sup>, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, [10] and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? [11] Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time." And immediately a mist<sup>19</sup> and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand.***

We know Barnabas as an encourager. And while Paul could be encouraging, he could also be something of a bull in a china shop.

He wasn't timid and didn't object to getting in people's faces. He was bold and courageous, aggressive and "to the point."

All of that comes out in this little speech to Elymas/Bar-Jesus. *"You're not a son of salvation. You're a son of the devil!"*

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<sup>17</sup> The name "Elymas" means "wise." From one perspective, the false prophet was indeed wise/crafty/shrewd in opposing Christianity, knowing what it would mean for him.

<sup>18</sup> Saul is the semitic form of his name; Paul, the Greek. The Greek form was more appropriate to the Gentile mission. Saul didn't take on Paul as a nickname here. He had always had this double name, and now began using it. It was not unusual for a Jew to have an Aramaic/Hebrew name and a Hellenized form of that name.

<sup>19</sup> "Mist" - used by ancient writers to describe an inflammation of the eye that gives it a cloudy appearance.

Wow! This is one powerful confrontation!!

And he backed up those words with a prediction for this false prophet - blindness. Paul knew from personal experience that God could use a period of temporary blindness to great effect. So, by the Spirit's power he administered the same to Elymas, no doubt hoping that Elymas' spiritual eyes would be opened, just as his had been.

And the upshot of the miraculous blindness is seen in verse 12.

*The response of Sergius Paulus (v. 12)*

***[12] Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.<sup>20</sup>***

This is fantastic! The Roman appointed ruler of Paphos comes to faith in Christ. God is truly blessing the efforts of the missionaries. And who can even imagine all the blessings, all the conversions, all the changed lives that lie ahead of them now as the journey continues.

With Sergius Paulus basking in his newfound life in Christ, the missionaries depart the island of Cypress for more adventures.

**Phase Three: Pressing On! (v. 13)**

*AGGRESSIVE Itinerary*

***[13a] Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia***

They set sail from Cyprus to the mainland, (and look at the way Luke references them - ***"Paul and his companions"***! What a switch from ***"Barnabas and Saul"***), arriving at a city about twelve miles inland from the coast called Perga in the province of Pamphylia.

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<sup>20</sup> There are at least three reasons why this incident is significant. First, it marks the beginning of Paul's leadership. From here through the end of the book of Acts, Paul takes center stage. Two, the Jews' hardness to the Gospel is portrayed through the obstinacy and blindness of Elymas in contrast to the spiritual openness and receptivity of Sergius Paulus. Three, at this point the Christian mission takes on a decidedly more Gentile flavor and thrust.

Their journey is now taking them towards Paul's old stomping grounds, near his hometown of Tarsus. It was also taking them inland toward the region of Galatia.

The upper plateau, comprised of the Taurus Mountains and known politically as Galatia, was known to be a very dangerous territory.

The road leading to Pisidian Antioch was fraught with dangers of every kind - terrible weather, treacherous terrain and roadside bandits.

They will travel nearly nine hundred miles on this journey, and they will engage in the same activities on the European continent that they had been involved with on the island of Cyprus.

#### *LIFE-CHANGING activities*

They will preach and preach and evangelize and make disciples. There will be miracles and healings - yes, and sufferings and hardships and persecutions, too. But there will be changed lives. Just what the church at Antioch had sent them out for in the first place.

And just at this juncture, as they start to head inland, the "helper" - John Mark - does something very unhelpful. He leaves.

#### *DEPLETED Resources*

#### *[13b...but John left them and returned to Jerusalem.<sup>21</sup>*

He left at some point after they landed at Perga. And you'll notice that John Mark didn't return to the sending church, Antioch, but to his home city, Jerusalem. (At least one has commented that he returned to his mother...)

And lest you think otherwise, this departure was a defection. It was not an agreed-upon move. It was an abandonment of the mission and of his fellow missionaries.

So why did John Mark leave? Well, numerous explanations have been offered.

Some have suggested that he resented his Uncle Barnabas taking a backseat to the leadership of this new guy, Saul/Paul.

Others wonder if he was having second thoughts about taking the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Still others believe that Paul and/or Barnabas were recommending a ministry strategy with which John Mark was uncomfortable or in disagreement and couldn't abide by what they were proposing.

A major line of thinking among some Bible scholars is that Paul contracted a disease (perhaps malaria, common in the lowlands around Perga), and that seeing this, John Mark became discouraged and headed back to Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup>

Me? I'm more of a mind that after seeing that the road they were taking led to some of the most inhospitable areas in Asia Minor, where danger lay around every bend and the travel was VERY disagreeable, he decided that Jerusalem was looking better and better.

We really don't know why he left, only that he left. We do discover, in Acts 15, that Paul considered his departure to be desertion, and thought it was inexcusable.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> In Galatians (4:13), he says that he preached there because of an illness.

<sup>23</sup> The "rest of the story" is that Paul and Barnabas had such a sharp disagreement about whether to take John Mark on their Second Missionary Journey that the "dynamic duo" split up, never to work together again. John Mark was not a lost cause, however. Near the end of his life, when Paul was languishing in a Roman prison, he wrote to Timothy that it would help him a lot if John Mark would come to visit for "*he is useful for ministry/service.*" God restored John Mark, as He will do with anyone, no matter what our failure might be.

<sup>21</sup> Regardless of how understanding and compassionate we might be, Paul's assessment of John Mark's departure was correct. He was wrong to have left. The manner in which Paul and Barnabas dealt with the defector (Paul shunned him; Barnabas sought to restore him) reflect their differing gifts and personalities. But there was no justification for John Mark leaving Paul and Barnabas.

Now, what might we say about the impacts of John Mark's departure?

For one thing, regardless of what reason we might propose for his return to Jerusalem, John's absence for the rest of the journey surely made the whole trip much more difficult for Paul and Barnabas.

He was to be their helper, and now the work of three was going to be done by two.

But, there were impacts on himself, too, when he deserted.

He avoided certain hardships, sure. But he also cheated himself out of the rich joy of seeing the powerful hand of God at work.

Had he continued on he would have seen many more conversions and many more miracles. But he didn't see them because he left.

He would have had scores of opportunities to baptize and to instruct young converts. But he didn't get those opportunities because he left.

### **Conclusion:**

Jesus' invitation to follow Him is an invitation to a great adventure. In John 10 He refers to life with Him as an "*abundant life*." And he wants us to follow from this point forward until we take our last breath.

Now by all means I want to avoid casting myself in a hero's light when I tell about my backpacking trip.

True, I didn't turn back after a pretty miserable first day on the trail - but that was because turning back would have meant going back on the same miserable, horse-destroyed trails I had already traveled!

But I do want to say that the trails improved and the views got incredible.

Twenty miles from the trailhead we saw vistas from the Continental Divide that are hard to capture, rich times around campfires, mountain storms (mostly from inside the tent), and a glorious few days in God's beautiful creation.

There was nothing heroic about my finishing the trek. I didn't quit both because I couldn't and because I knew (or at least strongly hoped) the beauty to come on Day Two and following.

And Jesus says to you and to me who have begun to follow Him - "*Don't turn back. The adventure has just begun.*"

If you follow Him you will know the highest highs, some of the lowest lows, keen disappointment, and unspeakable joy.

You will get involved in the messiness of human suffering and sin AND you will get a glimpse of God's powerful redemption.

Following Jesus will bring you to the point of exhaustion, sure. But it will also let you taste spiritual feasts.

None of us want to quit following Jesus now and then have to look back years later only to realize how much we have missed.

No! His abundance is available to those who press on, who stay on the trail. And as we follow Him we prove that LIFE - abundant and full - is found only in Jesus!