

TUESDAY 02 August 2022 "John Mark's desertion" (Acts 13:13)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

A change of mind and heart can be a very important event, can't it? In our journey with Barnabas, Saul who had changed his name to Paul, and John Mark, we saw yesterday that the proconsul of Cyprus Island, Mr. Sergius Paulus changed his mind and accepted the Gospel as he heard it from them. We have no record of how that affected the growth of the Jesus movement on Cyprus Island, but we should assume it was significant.

The record says: **"From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them and returned to Jerusalem."** (Acts 13:13) I wonder if you notice two significant **changes** in that brief statement? First, did you notice the travelers are now referred to as **"Paul and his companions"**. Up until this point, it had been Barnabas and Saul and their helper John Mark. **Barnabas was the leader of the team**. Barnabas had gone to Tarsus to find Saul and invited Saul to join him in Antioch where they spent a year together teaching the new believers in Jesus. Barnabas led the team to Cyprus, his home, and we can well imagine Barnabas was often the one introducing Saul and John Mark to those who recognized Barnabas on the Island.

But now as they leave Cyprus and head into Central Asia, **Paul is identified as the team leader**. Why? Well, the power showdown between Saul and Elymas the sorcerer was a major spiritual battle and a victory for the Holy Spirit of God at work in Saul Paulus. Not only did Saul change his name to Paul then, but that spiritual event propelled Paul into the leadership of this ministry missionary team.

The other significant change I see here is the departure of John Mark. We have no explanation as to why, but we do know John Mark headed back home to Jerusalem. Perhaps he had employment responsibilities or obligations in helping to care for his mother Mary back in Jerusalem. Perhaps he felt he'd accomplished his mission of helping Paul and Barnabas launch their first international evangelism trip. Here's something I urge us to consider... John Mark had gone with Barnabas and Saul from Jerusalem to Antioch simply to experience that great city for the first time and see for himself what God was doing there. The commissioning of Barnabas and Saul on this first voyage to share the Gospel with others outside Israel was in response to a clear calling from the Holy Spirit of God which we saw in Acts 13:2,3. In that calling the Holy Spirit had specifically named Barnabas and Saul as the two spiritual leaders in Antioch whom God was calling to be **"...set apart for the work to which I have called them."** *John Mark is not mentioned in that call from God* and Luke makes the note **"...John Mark was with them as their helper."** (Acts 13:5)

It's important my friends that we recognize there is a big difference between receiving a call and commissioning from God to a specific God assignment and simply going along on the journey as a 'helper'. John evidently had no sense of personal call or commissioning from God for this voyage, and we can presume his interest waned after the excitement of the adventure wore off. In fact, only a few years later Luke records an important perspective of John Mark's departure. After this first missionary journey had been completed Paul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch, given a great report of their first journey; then in Jerusalem they debated the authenticity of salvation by faith in Christ alone for Gentiles; and then later they were preparing to launch out on a second evangelistic journey. The record says: **"Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them. But Paul did not think it wise to take John Mark because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work."** (Acts 15:37,38) So from this perspective, it appears young John Mark had simply grown weary or bored with the evangelistic spiritual work Paul and Barnabas were doing in Cyprus and left them to return home to his life in Jerusalem. Having served internationally as a foreign missionary myself, I have seen first-hand the dramatic difference between those who leave home following a clear call and commission from God and those who do so with other motivations.

But please notice one other important aspect to John Mark's decision in Pamphylia. *John Mark was not turning his back on God, nor did God turn HIS back on John Mark.* After Barnabas and Paul disagree about taking John Mark with them on their second missionary journey, the record tells us: **"Barnabas took John Mark and sailed for Cyprus while Paul chose Silas...and he went through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches."** (Acts 15:39-41) History tells us John Mark also accompanied Peter on one or more of his apostolic journeys and finally John Mark was called and commissioned by the Holy Spirit to write an account of the life of Jesus which we have in our Bibles as the Gospel of Mark, the second book of the New Testament! So, let's be careful, my friends, that we learn here with John Mark that God had not given up on John Mark just because he chose to abandon Paul and Barnabas and head home. He was still in the maturing phase and after a few more years of the refining work of the Holy Spirit in his life, John Mark became a powerful force in the Jesus movement of the first century. The 16 chapters of John Mark's account of the life of Jesus have impacted hundreds of millions of people around the world over the past 2000 years! And did you know that often as Bible translators attempt to bring the Bible to a people group who do not have God's Word in their own language, they begin their translation work with... the Gospel of Mark?!

We have no record of what the farewell was like between John Mark, Barnabas and Paul. But let's pause and watch as they embrace and then John Mark slings his bag over his shoulder and heads down the road. Let's make some very practical application of John Mark's decision to leave the adventure with Paul and Barnabas and return home to Jerusalem. Perhaps you have a teen or a young adult child or grandchild that appears to be making decisions that are not advancing their maturity, perhaps even choices that appear to be wasting their life. Don't give up my friends.

Challenge them to understand the importance of personal progress and development and that self-motivation and self-discipline are very important in adulthood, and pray for God's continuing, personal work in their development.

Perhaps you are considering a job change or sensing God may be leading you to change jobs or schools or even relocate from one place to another. *I urge you to take great care to 'finish well' as you transition from one situation in life to another. Don't burn any bridges, don't leave a bad reputation behind.* God may have you circle back around, and you may find His assignment for you some day is right back where you are now leaving!

In closing today, let me show you something that happened several years later, as Paul was nearing the end of his life. He was in prison and in writing his final letter to Timothy Paul wrote: "**Do your best to come to me quickly for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me... Get John Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.**" (2 Timothy 4:9-11) John Mark had matured, and so had Paul! Near the end of Paul's life, they longed to be reunited. Live today in anticipation that you will come to the end of your life at peace with everyone your life has touched. And here's a song to help us reflect on that...

Today's Scripture is Acts 13:13.