

The Chapel Booklet



CLEARCREEK
CHAPEL

Ministry Partners

Russ Kennedy

*S*avoring the *S*upremacy of *G*od
*S*tudying the *W*ord of *G*od
*S*haping the *P*eople of *G*od
*S*preaching the *G*ospel of *G*od

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Barnabas – The Encourager | 3 |
| John Mark – The Enlister | 13 |
| Aquila and Priscilla – The Enablers | 21 |
| Epaphras – The Entreator | 33 |
| Ministry Partner Summary | 39 |
| Outlines | 0 |

© 2004 by Russ Kennedy
All rights reserved worldwide

Revision # 12 as of June 20, 2004
Doc: Ministry Partners.Doc

Introduction

Tonight we begin a four part series on Partners in Ministry. Over the course of the next month, we will take an intensive look at the lives of Barnabas, John Mark, Aquilla and Priscilla, and Epaphras. Why do this?

There are two purposes. First, Hebrews 13:7 calls us to “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” Hebrews 11, as we have recently considered in the Sunday mornings series with Russ, calls us to reflect seriously on the lives of those great giants of the faith who have gone before and by their examples, shown us what it means to *live* lives of faith. Proverbs 13:20 says, “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise...” And Jonathon Edwards has told us, “There are two ways of representing and recommending true religion and virtue to the world; the one, by doctrine and precept; the other, by instance and example.” So over the next four weeks, we look to instances and examples of men and women of faith in order that we might know how best to live in God’s world.

Have you ever asked the question(s) – [the answers this series gives]? Second, we learn how it is we as the *body of Christ* are to function in ministry, or rather, how we are to partner in ministry. As we observe members of the first century church and their interaction with each other as they determined to serve God, we are informed as to how we, as members of Clearcreek Chapel are to live and serve among each other. As much as I would like to say that we know exactly how it is we are to live among and minister to each other, it only takes a quick glance in the mirror to realize that we yet have much growth to do.

Observing the lives of others is an opportunity to see truth communicated in living action. Have you ever experienced the power of a Christian’s biography or autobiography? Hudson Taylor is a favorite of mine. I read it in college and I can remember make paper placards of several statements in that book and posting them on the outside of my dorm room door. God, in His good and perfect Word has chosen, in many instances, to *show us*, versus *tell us*, what the grace full life looks like. He does so with pictures of failure, success, and much of that which lies in between. Just as your children learn far quicker to do what you do versus do what you say, we are often more apt to be influenced by the example of a godly life set before us. Similarly, we as a church *body* can benefit by observing the functioning of individuals in the context of the first century church.

Let’s do that together.

Barnabas – The Encourager

Acts 11:25

Devon Berry

Introduction

Tonight we take time to consider the life of Barnabas. As I began preparing for this message I realized that I did not know all that much about Barnabas. I knew that we had been nicknamed the “Son of Encouragement” and that he spent a great deal of time with Paul, but otherwise the details were rather sketchy. So I thought we would start out by doing a brief survey of Barnabas’ life. This survey will then set the context for considering more closely several events in the life of Barnabas and those he partnered with in ministry. It is from these considerations that we will make several observations and applications for our own lives.

A little more consideration of how this sermon will influence us...

Life of Barnabas

Let’s walk together through the life of Barnabas and develop a bird’s eye perspective on his life and his times. I want to briefly survey his life with you as a biographer might as they outlined the major events of their subjects’ life. As we do, keep in mind that Luke, the author of Acts, the book in which we find the bulk of references to Barnabas, purposefully selected and made decisions about what he would choose to tell us about Barnabas. This “material” on Barnabas then, if you will, comes to us not only in the context of the blossoming of the first century church but also with the intention of the Holy Spirit as He guided Luke that we learn from what was written (1 Corinthians 10; 2 Timothy 3:16). So we must not regard the mentions of Barnabas as incidental to the storyline, but rather as the record of a man’s character and activity from which we are to be both inspired and instructed in glorifying God.

We can divide the mentions of Barnabas in the Scripture into 3 basic movements: Luke’s Introduction of Barnabas, Barnabas’ Ministry with Paul, and Barnabas Following His Split with Paul.

Luke’s Introduction of Barnabas

In Luke’s introduction of Barnabas, we are given three introductory vignettes that set the stage for the appreciation certain elements of Barnabas’ character that will typify his ministry throughout the rest of the Scriptural account. Barnabas is first introduced to us in Acts 4 near the advent of the early church, sometime shortly after Jesus death between 33 and 37 AD. Acts 4:32-37 reads:

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as

were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

This is early in the history of the church shortly after many had been saved in Jerusalem and many at this time were selling personal items to meet the needs of other believers. Barnabas is not the only one engaging in this practice, but he is the one that Luke chooses to identify and give us some personal information about. Apparently, Barnabas was already well known to the apostles as he had been given a nickname by them. His true name, Joseph, had been replaced by “Barnabas,” which is the Greek word *paraklesis*, meaning to call along side, capable to encourage, exhort, comfort, or console. This is the title that is used throughout the rest of Acts by Luke and by Paul in his writing in the rest of the New Testament.

The next time we hear of Barnabas is in Acts 9:26-31:

²⁶And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.²⁸ So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.²⁹ And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists.^[2] But they were seeking to kill him.³⁰ And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.³¹ So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied

In AD 37, Barnabas resurfaces in Luke’s storyline as the one who brings Paul to the apostles and convinces them of his genuine conversion. [B.G.: Shortly after Paul’s Damascus Road conversion he began sharing the gospel after spending some time with followers in Damascus. Paul grows in power, but ministering only to the Jews at this point. Paul flees Damascus after a plot to kill him is uncovered. He goes to Jerusalem and attempts to join the disciples there. They would not believe he was a disciple. Barnabas steps in and takes Paul to the apostles (“took him and brought him”) (and then “declared to [the apostles]”) and told them Paul’s story, in effect stating his belief in the truth of Paul’s conversion.]

Finally, in Luke’s introduction of Barnabas, we see Barnabas being sent out by the apostles to minister to the new believer’s in Antioch shortly after he brings Paul to the Apostles (AD 46/47). In this account, Luke gives us the most succinct yet descriptive account in all of Scripture of the man Barnabas, Acts 11:19-26:

¹⁹Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists^[2] also,

preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. ²²The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, ²⁴for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. ²⁵So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

Not only do we see Barnabas *sent* by the church here, we see Barnabas enlisting the help of Paul, who had been sent to Tarsus by the disciples in Jerusalem for his own safety. The fruit of the Holy Spirit's labor through them is realized over the year they spend together there. Here in Antioch begins Barnabas and Paul's ministry together.

Barnabas' Ministry with Paul

At the end of the year in ministry in Antioch, Barnabas and Paul are asked to take a gift from the church in Antioch to the church in Jerusalem. When they return to Antioch, they bring John Mark with them, the same John Mark who wrote the book of Mark. He is Barnabas' cousin and presumably some one younger in the faith than Barnabas and Paul. Shortly after returning, the Holy Spirit speaks to the church in Antioch and instructs the believers there to "set apart" Barnabas and Paul for missionary work, in what would eventually become a ministry to the gentiles. Acts 13:1-3

¹Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger,^[1] Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

We can not trace Barnabas and Paul throughout the entirety of what is commonly known as Paul's First Missionary Journey. We can track them from Acts 13-15 throughout their entire course. There are several important observations that can be made along the way:

Antioch to Seleucia to Paphos (on Cyprus). In Paphos, while sharing the gospel with the proconsul and a local magician who wanted to turn the proconsul away from the truth, an important change occurs. This local magician, Elymas, is rebuked sternly by Paul and made to be blind for a time. As a result of this act of power, the proconsul believes. Also as a result of this act, a transition takes place. The Scriptures from this point on excepting two incidents, reverses the order of mention. Whereas previously it had always been Paul and Barnabas, it is now Barnabas and Paul. Luke changes focus. Paul now becomes the focus of the narrative. Acts 13:13, immediately following

the blinding of the magician, states, “Now *Paul and his companions* set sail from Paphos...”

Paphos to Perga to Antioch in Pisidia. Two events to note in this leg of the journey. First, John Mark, who had been with them since they were sent out from Antioch, abandons the mission and returns to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Second, Antioch in Pisidia is where the Paul and Barnabas start to first encounter serious resistance to their ministry.

Iconium to Lystra to Derbe (and back to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia). In these cities Paul and Barnabas encounter heavy resistance, even up to the level of Paul being stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19ff). Through all of this, however, Paul and Barnabas continue to proclaim the good news, see converts made, and establish churches. They even return to those cities in which they were driven out of to be sure that the young believers were strengthened, encouraged, and that elders were installed.

Antioch in Pisidia to Pamphylia to Attalia to Antioch (sending church). Paul and Barnabas wrap up their trip by returning to their sending church and giving a report of their work, “declaring all God had done with them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27). All in all, Paul and Barnabas spend 1 to 1 ½ years together on their missionary journey. Subsequently, Paul and Barnabas attend the Jerusalem Council and argue strongly relating God’s work among the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas return to their sending church in Antioch in Acts 15

Barnabas Following His Split with Paul

Acts 15:36-41

Paul and Barnabas prepare to go on second missionary journey revisiting the churches that were established on the first missionary journey.

They disagree about whether or not to take John Mark, who abandoned the work on the first journey. (AD 49)

They go separate ways, Paul taking Silas and Barnabas taking John Mark.

After this time, there are only several other mentions of Barnabas in the New Testament and Luke’s focus remains primarily with Paul.

1 Corinthians 9:6

Paul is discussing his refusal to receive support for his missionary work so that it could not be said that he was motivated by money. He mentions that Barnabas also utilizes this same practice. Either Paul is referring to the first missionary journey or Paul and Barnabas remain in contact and aware of each others’ practices. And this is around AD 54, some years after the split, when Paul is writing to the Corinthians.

Galatians 2:1, 2:9, 2:13

Paul makes mention of Barnabas at several points recounting his role in his own early ministry. And the shares “so that *even* Barnabas was led astray by

their hypocrisy” Gal 2: 13). Barnabas had fallen into the trap of treating the Gentiles differently when in the presence of Jews.

A few things are clear from these subsequent mentions. First, Paul clearly maintained a high regard for Barnabas even after their split. Secondly, John Mark, the man over whom Paul and Barnabas disputed, later become integral to the ministry of the early church in the NT. Paul instructs the Colossians to “welcome him” (Colossians 4:10). Peter calls Mark “my son” in his own letter (1 Peter 5:13), and Paul, toward the end of his ministry (and some 15-20 years after the split with Barnabas), requests that Mark be brought to him because, “he is very useful to me for ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11).

What can we learn from this consideration of Barnabas life? What observations can we make about his biography? How might they inform us at Clearcreek Chapel as we partner in ministry with others?

Partners in Ministry

So why did Luke spend all this time recording these details about Barnabas? So that we could learn from them of course. Consider these four aspects of Barnabas life.

Have character worth writing about.

Proverbs 27:19 reads, “As in water face **reflects** face, so the heart of man **reflects** the man.” Why was Luke so drawn to Barnabas? He was not an apostle in the strict sense, he clearly fades into the background shortly after Paul begins his first missionary journey, and he wrote no books of the Bible. In part, I believe that Luke tells us so much about Barnabas because Barnabas was a man worth telling about. It is clear from early on in the church Barnabas’ character stood out. He had been nicknamed by the apostles – The Encourager during the days shortly after Pentecost when *many* were being saved. Today we might nickname someone for their physical characteristics, such as Shorty or Butch, or occasionally for some negative dispositional quality such as Grumpy, but rarely do we nickname someone for a positive quality such as “Encourager”. Not only does Barnabas receive such a nickname, but both Luke and Paul choose to use it throughout the whole of the NT. There was something about the way that Barnabas consistently treated people that caught the attention of the apostles, Luke, and Paul.

As mentioned earlier, the most succinct and cogent description of the person of Barnabas can be found in Acts 11:23 – 24. Here Luke tells us that Barnabas, as he exhorted the believers in Antioch to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, was a “good man full of the Holy Spirit and faith.” Beth pls see sentence construction Greek. In fact, the reason that Barnabas exhorted the believers this way was because he was a good man – and what made Barnabas a good man? Barnabas did not receive faith and the Holy Spirit *because* he was a good man. The Holy Spirit and faith *made* Barnabas a good man. This fullness of the Holy Spirit and faith produced in Barnabas an apparent natural bent toward encouragement and exhortation of the believers toward faithfulness and steadfast purposefulness in their commitment to the Lord.

So we see that Barnabas “was the way he was” because of the goodness produced in him by the Holy Spirit and faith, but I think there is another angle that we should appreciate as we try to understand why Barnabas’ impact in the NT is so profound. I believe there was something about the way that Barnabas viewed other believers that caused him to be who he was. And I believe that this view of other believers is directly related to his view of God – as is all of life.

Was Barnabas perfect? No more so than any one else. We know that Barnabas and Paul had at least two “run-ins.” The first is mentioned in Galatians 2:11-14 where Barnabas loses his orientation and along with Peter seriously sins against his Gentile brothers. They are publicly rebuked by Paul. And then the “sharp disagreement” between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark also occurred. The parting ways itself is not in and of itself wrong, honest and sincere men had honest and sincerely different opinions. They part ways, God uses them both (and John Mark). Only what occurred during the “sharp disagreement” (Acts 15:39) in as much as interpersonal sin may have been involved is disheartening. There is every reason to believe, however, in the evidence that the rest of Scriptures gives us that a mutual respect and friendship was maintained between Paul and Barnabas even after these disagreements. (The rebuke in Gal. 2 likely occurred before the separation over John Mark and even in this Paul speaks respectfully, note v. 13 and use of *even Barnabas*. Further, Paul’s mention of Barnabas in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Col. 4:10 both likely occurred after the split, suggesting a maintained relationship.)

Demonstrate a capacity for seeing and being made glad by the grace of god in others’ lives.

I think the first clue can be found in this same passage, Acts 11:23 – 24, notice closely vv. 22-23:

²²The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose,

The church of Jerusalem hears of the good consequences of the stoning of Stephen – a strange way to think of it, but it is clear that one of the consequences of this tragedy was the spreading of the gospel to further regions and to people groups other than the Jews. Upon hearing, their minds turn to Barnabas. An individual trusted as one who can teach, preach, and encourage the new believers in Antioch. When Barnabas arrives, Luke tells us, “he...saw the grace of God [and was] glad.” Barnabas is quite simply made glad by seeing the power of God transform the lives of the believers in Antioch. He savors and rejoices in the opportunity to see life-changing, God-derived, grace in action in the hearts and lives of believers. I believe that this is at the core of why Barnabas is known as “The Encourager.” Consider several other examples of a man who loves to highlight the grace of God as it is exemplified, or in some cases, hoped for, in other peoples’ lives.

Barnabas, convinced of the grace of God radically transforming Paul on the Damascus road, “took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them...”

(Acts 9:26-31). This is after the apostles had refused to allow Paul to join them because they were afraid.

Later we see Barnabas, after being sent to Antioch by the church, again remembering Paul who was in Tarsus after being sent there by the believers in Jerusalem for his own safety. Barnabas goes and once again takes Paul and “brought him to Antioch” (Acts 11:26). Paul had been in Tarsus for somewhere between 7 and 9 years at this point. Barnabas has not forgotten this Christian-killing ex Pharisee-henchman any more than he has forgotten the grace of God. In fact, it is this action by Barnabas that effectively launches Paul into his career as a missionary and as a man who is used by God mightily in many, many ways. Perhaps Paul’s mind had wandered back to Barnabas when he penned Philippians 1:3-7, as someone who not only believe in these truths for his own life, but was able to believe in them for the lives of others.

³I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷**It is right for me to feel *this way* about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace,** both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

Lastly, we can briefly consider the case of John Mark. How much clearer can the pattern be? Barnabas, against the better judgment of Paul and perhaps even the church in Antioch, takes John Mark on what would have been his second missionary journey with Paul, while Paul takes Silas and heads a different direction. Barnabas, again convinced of the power of God’s grace to change lives, stands by the deserter, John Mark, convinced of better things. And indeed better things came – John Mark authors the book of Mark, he becomes profitable to Paul and is one of the last persons Paul call for near the end of his life (2 Timothy 4:11), and Peter comes to regard him as “my son” (1 Peter 5:13).

A few observations on this particular quality of Barnabas are in order here. First, some might say that Barnabas was a “risk-taker.” After all, Paul may have been a spy and John Mark a true “loser”. But was Barnabas really taking a *risk* by hoping in grace in the view of a sovereign God? Perhaps not. Second, we cannot separate encouragement from Christ. Apart from Christ, there is no basis for gladness in seeing the grace of God. Whatever good we see, whatever change we witness, is a temporal illusion. Barnabas, undoubtedly, was convinced of the work of Christ and its consequent benefit for believers. This is what enabled him to truly be glad in the witnessing of the grace of God and to exhort believers to remain faithful and steadfast in their Godward purposes. Barnabas rejoiced because what he witnessed pointed him to Christ – not to man.

Have a glad & ready abandonment of the temporal.

Throughout his ministry Barnabas exhibited a readiness to part with the temporal things in exchange for eternal ends. When we meet Barnabas in Acts 4 he is selling property to supply the needs of the believers in the new church. We see Barnabas regularly submitting himself to the ministry of the gospel and the needs of the body as he willingly goes to Antioch from Jerusalem to serve and teach the new believers there at the request of the apostles. He remains there for approximately a year. He then sets out with Paul on his first missionary journey as he was sent by the church in Antioch, this journey not only takes 1-2 years, but also repeatedly puts him in harms way (Acts 13-15). Barnabas also carried money and letters between churches. In 1 Corinthians 9:6, Paul tells us that Barnabas refused to accept monetary reimbursement for his ministry lest he be accused of “doing it for the money,” freely giving up what was rightfully his. In all, Barnabas probably dedicated over 20 years of his life to the work of the ministry.

Barnabas was a man who consistently and readily disentangled himself from all that would tie him to this world for the cause of the Gospel and good of the body.

Have a vision for the spreading of the gospel and the growth of the church.

A final quality we can note about Barnabas is his direct involvement in carrying out the great commission as described in Matthew 28:18-20, making disciples in all nations, and Acts 1:8 as witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Barnabas was active in Jerusalem and throughout Asia Minor. He was instrumental in the events and the issues that led to the clear proclamation of the gospel to the Jews and then the Gentiles including settling the issue of Gentile circumcision. And he was certainly involved in the preparation and encouragement of those who would go on to help in fulfilling the great commission. So Barnabas involved himself in the growth of the church geographically, theologically, and practically.

It is also important to note that across the years of church growth that Barnabas witnessed and aided, he knew how to fade into the background when it was necessary, and how to step into the fray when it was necessary. As we noted earlier, Barnabas steps out of the leading role in the ministry team shortly after the beginning of Paul’s first missionary journey. He is always, however, there teaching and preaching with Paul, enduring many of the same hardships, and being there to help Paul after such severe events as stoning (as in Lystra – Acts 14: 19-23). He steps into the fray when supporting Paul at his introduction to the Apostles, advocating for John Mark, and arguing against Gentile circumcision at the Jerusalem council. Barnabas had a distinct sense of 2 Timothy 4:2 where Paul is instructing Timothy, perhaps as Barnabas himself instructed Paul or John Mark, “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

Principles for Ministry

Our observations from his character and conduct.

1. True Christian character is born of Christ and His work applied, not values education or character development
2. At the heart of encouraging others is our own appreciation of the grace of God
3. Effective ministry is marked by a disentanglement with the things valued on earth and an entanglement with the treasures of heaven
4. Effective ministry happens through the thoughtful, systematic, planned, and purposeful advancement of the church and the gospel through missions, continual growth in our understanding of God and His Word, and the discipleship and development of other believers to carry on the work.

John Mark – The Enlister

2 Timothy 4:11

Ken Ebert

Introduction

All of us at one time or another has known a young enthusiastic person who was eager to volunteer for ministry, someone who is always ready to raise their hand to say pick me I'll go without fully realizing what may be required of him for that ministry.

John Mark was a young man much like this. He was eager to enlist, and volunteer for ministry. I like to begin this evening by setting the stage as to why this young man John Mark may have become enthusiastic about wanting to enlist for this ministry. Try if you will to put yourself in the shoes of John Mark for the next few minutes. He come from, you might say, a good and a godly family. He is around people who are obviously quite well-known as Christian leaders. One day these gifted Christian leaders approach this young man, and ask "John Mark "would you like to assist us on a missionary journey. We are going Antioch, to minister, and share the gospel, and there is a variety of ways you can help us, and perhaps there will be some spiritual activities that you will be of assistance to us as well". I believe a young man who was eager and enthusiastic to minister would say "are you kidding; I would love to go", not realizing what sacrifices, hardships, and dangers that would lie ahead for him. You have to imagine that John Mark was probably very flattered to have been asked to go and minister with these well know, and Godly men. Perhaps he thought to himself "they must see something useful in me, and I must be valuable to them if they want to take me with them when there are others to choose from". So you can imagine that John Mark must have felt very encouraged, maybe even flattered, to think that here were these two well-known Christian leaders that were going to take him on this great missionary adventure.

John Mark may have never been away from home before, and thinking of sailing across the Mediterranean, to the island of Cyprus was I'm sure very exciting for him. He may have been thinking to himself "we can start church after church, and share the gospel throughout the island, and God will draw many to Him", but John Mark wasn't fully aware of laid ahead of him, and he wasn't fully prepared for the circumstances that would arise in the future. Before we go any further let take a deeper look into scripture to learn more of who this young man John Mark was, and look at the men he partnered with in ministry.

Partners in Ministry

His story as it emerges from the pages of Scripture.

His Connections

Colossians 4:10; Acts 12:12, 25

What do we know about this man John Mark, and his relationships? In Colossians 4:10 we see some of the connections he had. Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions if he comes to you welcome him). So we see from this passage that John Mark was a cousin to Barnabas.

What else do the scriptures tell us about John Mark? In Acts 12:12 we read “When he realized this (Peter who was rescued from prison), he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying”. So we know that John Mark had, and was raised in a home where there were many Christians, as well as family members who prayed. There is no record of John Mark's father, but we do know something about his mother Mary. She obviously had quite a large house because there the Christians or at least a large number of them in Jerusalem, were meeting together to pray for Peter who had been incarcerated in prison. Remember that the church at this particular time, and for about a hundred and fifty years after this, did not have church buildings. Today when people talk of a church, they usually mean a building, but the church is not a building at all; it is a building in which the church meets. The church is the body of believers. At the beginning the church rarely met in a public place building. For the most part they had none. They met in homes, and Mary's home was a place where the church meets.

Peter was to have been put to death the next day; and they got together to pray for his release. They gathered together much like we gather together each Wednesday night at flock to pray for one another and encourage one another. When sickness, discouragement, and personal problems are affecting us we need to come together in prayer for one another. We need to take off our masks of everything ok with me, and become more transparent so that others will know how to pray for us that we might be encouraged, and in return be encourager to others in times of difficulties. Even when we think we have no human hope, and we have no power to heal or deliver, we must realize that God may still work in changing the outcome. Prayer does not always operate as we would prefer, but that doesn't mean that it is ineffective, or that it is little more than talking to ourselves. There is power in prayer; it can make a difference in the outcome of events when we become a church family who fervently prays for one another, and it did here in the house of Mary, in answer to their prayers of the release of Peter.

A few verses later in Acts 12:25 we learn a little more about those individuals who were involved in John Mark's life. “*And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark*”. Barnabas and Saul are returning back up to Antioch. If you go back one chapter, the end of chapter eleven of Acts, you remember that there had been a prophet named Agabus who had come from Jerusa-

lem to Antioch to warn them in a prophetic way that there was going to be a great famine, throughout the world, that actually came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. So how did Barnabas and Paul come to know John Mark? They may have stayed at John Mark's mother's house. Most of us if we had relatives, and we were in a strange city would go there in hopes that they would put us up. So it could have been possibly that Paul and Barnabas were actually living there in the house of Mary and they would have got to know John Mark in a more intimate and close way, seeing in him potential, and as a result choose to take John Mark under their wing and mentor him. What a great foundation to have as a young Christian, Key relationships, a good Christian family environment, and having seasoned men of God to mentor you. What a great foundation for a successful ministry. But there more to the story, and John Mark was about to face some challenges.

His Challenge

Acts 13:5, 13

Acts chapter thirteen opens by telling us of the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch, and the Lord has indicted to them that they are to separate Barnabas and Saul for the work to which He has called them so they fast and they pray, they lay hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them on there way. In verse 5 we read *“When they arrived at Salarmis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them”*. So here is John Mark, he is accompanying his cousin Barnabas and the Apostle Paul. Remember John Mark was along to minister as their servant; He was someone who was going to help them in the many task of ministry. As we read on in the chapter we come to the sad incident in verse thirteen, *“Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem”*.

John Mark had gone as a helper, showing willingness to serve, but perhaps his commitment was not strong enough. I once heard someone say, “serving in ministry produces joy but not ease; although at times fulfilling, it also includes hardships”, and perhaps John Mark was taking a second look at the difficulty and danger he would be facing, and what might be in store for him on this journey. We are not told why John Mark turned back, maybe it was a bit of homesickness, conflict with one or both of his companions, a realization that he wasn't ready for ministry, perhaps he was missing his mother and wanted to get home, but most probably it was a case of being fearful. John Mark may have realized that there was going to be beatings and the possibility of death that awaited him if he were to go on with Barnabas and Paul. So John Mark abandons that mission, and he goes back to Jerusalem.

His Conflict

Acts 15:37-39

Now in Acts 15:37-39 we see the conflict that arose between Barnabas and Paul because of John Mark returning to Jerusalem. Now John Mark had returned to Antioch to the church there. Barnabas wanted to take him with them on the next journey. He wanted to give him another chance. Follow along with me in Acts

15:37-39 “*Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus*”. Try to image for a minute their discussion with each other. Paul saying “listen Barnabas, John Mark just doesn’t have what it takes to be a missionary. He came with us the first time. He saw how the Lord provided all the time, but when it comes to risk he can’t take the heat he is to wet behind the ears. I won’t take him with me. He abandoned us the first time; there no way we can rely on him for what’s in front of us now. He blew it, he’s not going. But Barnabas, the encourager might have responded by saying “Paul he may be a little wet behind the ears, but can’t you see what he did right? He’s wasn’t a total failure. I see a lot of potential in him. After all he did have the faith to at least come with us didn’t he? If we’re just patient, gracious, and mentor to him I believe John Mark can be valuable to us and a partnership can be developed. I believe the Lord has great plans for John Mark”.

Barnabas went the extra mile to help John Mark. Barnabas took a young inexperienced zealous man with him, and we find out later that Barnabas’s support, encouragement, and mentoring changed the life of John Mark. We need people in our lives like John Mark had; people who believed in the greatest Encourager. Don’t turn there, but in 2 Cor. 1:3 “*Gods word says “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God”*. The grace of Jesus changed Barnabas into a son of the Father of encouragement. Like Father, like son. So Barnabas was treating others the way God treated him with grace. He knew the source of encouragement, and he became a wonderful imitator of our Father Love, mercy and kindness.

His Commendation Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11

Now as we look in 2 Timothy 4:11 and Colossians 4:10 we come to a touching reference from the hand of Paul. 2 Timothy 4:11 “*Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry*”. In the last imprisonment of Paul, he asks Timothy to bring a number of things with him when he comes to visit before winter. One of those was John Mark. Paul says bring him he is useful to me. Colossians 4:10 also indicates to us that John Mark had been fully restored to a place in ministry that was profitable. *Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions if he comes to you, receive welcome him)*, Paul again is saying welcome him as he is useful to you.

Paul recognized the value that Mark had for the ministry. So we see that Paul by this time was more then pleased for John Mark to be involved again in the ministry. So obviously Mark had been completely rehabilitated by this time. So in the end, John Mark received praise, approval, and commendation.

Principles for Ministry

What do we see, and learn from the observations of John Marks character and conduct? Ministry partners:

Are cultivated not in isolation, but in personal relationships.

If we are honest, we have to admit that John Mark would not have been able to be mentored in a way that would have brought him to the place of restoration in the ministry if he had not allow himself to seek out, and make relationships so that he could be mentored. We will never be able to cultivate relationships with other people if we remain isolated. It will require us to step out of our so called comfort zones, and become engaged with people that are in ministry, which in turn will allow us to partner with others in ministry.

Are developed through patient mentoring.

When we look at different types of ministries, do we include the ministry of mentoring? Mentoring is the way of partnering with other to make disciples. We need to be partnering together in Christ. Mentoring is important to developing gifts so that others can learn to minister. Barnabas gave us that solid biblical model for mentoring others. On the flip side of the coin there are those who need to seek out a mentor. The distressed need comfort, workers need compliments, new believers need support, and wayward Christians require help. Allow someone to mentor you, and take you under their wing like Barnabas took John Mark under his, so that you can again become useful for the kingdom of God.

Sometimes fail in ministry in spite of the best of intentions and instructors.

Sometimes when we read biographies of great Christians, missionary it looks very exciting to us. We may think would it not be wonderful to be a missionary. Would it not be wonderful to be a preacher of the gospel and to be used like that, but often times we are not told of the blood, sweat, and tears in between, and as a result we fail in our ministry. Possibly this was what it was like for John Mark, being a missionary was not quite as he thought it was going to be, even known he had the best of intentions and instructors. Remember to fall is not failure but to refuse to get up again is where the real failure takes place. Even when we fall into sin we can repent and get back up again and continue partner with others for God glory. All of us at one time or another will fail. Perhaps you can identify your life with that of John Mark when there were times you were active for Christ in a great way, and there were other times your were not. The reality of any Christian serving God is found in our willingness to be faithful and actively partnering with others to serve our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes need to be given opportunities to try again.

John Mark's story is an encouragement and proves that failure is not final and that God extends the promise of a second chance to each of us. John Mark learned from his experience that God used it for good. What happened to John Mark can happen to us today, and we like John Mark can move forward for Christ to become faithful reliable Christian soldiers for the Great Commission. Our Father wants you to continue His work, and you can start tonight.

Those of you in leadership positions, are you large hearted in your attitude of others who have failed in ministry? Are you a leader that will go the extra mile like Barnabas did for John Mark? Are you encouraging people who may have failed, and finding ministries that may be better suited for them, and help them to cultivate, grow and go in those ministries? If people were to give you a nickname, as they did Barnabas, would encourager apply to you? Look for those who have failed and need to be given another opportunity to minister again.

Need to be great hearted towards those who have changed and grown into usefulness.

I believe we can learn a very valuable lesson from Barnabas and Paul's examples. Barnabas had gone the extra mile for the young missionary John Mark. Barnabas took this young and inexperienced missionary with him on his missionary journey. Barnabas encouraged and helped John Mark hone his gifts, and as a result John Mark became useful again for the ministry. We also see that Paul did not harbor any ill feeling towards John Mark because of his past failures, and was willing to accept the changes, and growth that had occurred in the life of John Mark. Can I challenge the ministry leaders tonight to try everyday to express at least one genuine, uplifting comment of appreciation for the people you have in you ministry.

Conclusion

In closing let me challenge some of you here tonight that have never been involved in ministry not to be afraid to step-up and step-out like John Mark did. Realize the any ministry you step into will take time for you to develop, and as we look at the life of John Mark learn to pace yourself, and prepare yourself for what is involved so you don't come to a place in your life where you abandon your ministry, and return home like John Mark did.

For those of you who need to be mentored. Do you have a mentor or mentors like John Mark did? Are you praying, and asking God for a ministry that you can serve in. Are you seeking out someone who could help you be better equipped to meet the challenges of that ministry? Are you someone here tonight that blew it like John Mark did, and needs to get up and try again so that your God given talents will be used for the glory of God?

We all need to be building relationships with one another just as John Mark had built a relationship with Barnabas humbling himself to become teachable. And all of need to continually be people great hearted, full of grace and mercy for our brothers and sisters in Christ, that we will continue to glorify our Father in our service to Him.

Aquila and Priscilla – The Enablers

Romans 16:3

Cary Cupka

**A Personal
Word**

For those of you who may be visiting, I want you to know that I am a guest in this pulpit in fulfillment of course requirements for my Elder Internship. Now I don't mean that as a disclaimer- it is my sincere desire that your indulgence and the raw power of God's word will make this evening together a meaningful event. I am very excited about this opportunity to open the word of God with you. I have gained some valuable insights preparing this second installment in our Ministry Partners series, and I hope you find my excitement infectious.

Preface

Our subject for this message is Priscilla and Aquila, but before we focus on them I would like to examine their context so that we might broaden our perspective enough to develop our principles for ministry. So we will start by surveying the movement of God's favor in the establishment of the church, then focus on the few details we are given in scripture regarding Priscilla and Aquila's role in that emerging church, and finally develop principles we can apply to our own hearts to stimulate our work with the grace of God in his church today.

Before we get underway, lets pause to welcome God's favor on our study tonight. Let us pray "Our Father in heaven, we invite you to open the eyes of our understanding to your ways so that we might walk in them. Let my diligence in speaking and our diligence in listening work together with your purposes to accomplish your will tonight. We seek the pleasure of your glory in Jesus name. Amen"

Introduction

Now to begin. We are going to go surfing- not on the internet or at the ocean but in the book of Acts. Just as we would put on a suit, wax our surf board, and feel the excitement of the crashing surf, I would like us to feel the tide of history as we read through these passages together. Turn with me in your Bibles to Acts chapter four where we will begin our survey of the movement of grace in the emerging church.

Movement of Grace in the Acts

Post Pentecost- Borne by Peter

Ch.4:³²Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul....³³ ... and great grace was upon them all.

Now we recognize that this is the post-Pentecost church and it isn't much of a surprise that Luke would explain these dramatic events with the term "great grace." But we are given a clue here by Luke that where we find "grace" we will find a wave big enough to surf. Let's keep our eyes out on the horizon- we want to be ready to catch that wave.

Sanhedrin

In chapter five we see the opposition to the church mounting with the Sanhedrin very close to murdering the apostles when Gamaliel intervenes with these words of wisdom:

Ch.5: ³⁸ "... for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; ³⁹but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!"

Well their restraint was short lived until Stephan (who was full of grace and power) was dragged from their council and stoned to death. This initiated a great persecution that displaced the disciples from their community and scattered the church. We then see what should have been a formidable omen to the Sanhedrin when Saul is converted to Christ in the very act of his zealous house-to-house hunt for disciples.

Antioch- Borne by anonymous "men of Cyprus and Cyrene"

Turn with me now to chapter 11 and look at what we find in verse 19: "Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. ²⁰But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus." (The Hellenists were Greek-speaking non-Jews.)

Are you watching with me? We have some action here that might be a swell. Let's read on.

Verse 21:

Ch. 11: ²¹And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. ²²The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad...

Okay, there's our clue from Luke- "grace of God" in verse 23. We definitely have a swell and it is HUGE! We need to get into position for the wave.

What does Barnabas do? Verse ²⁵"So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians."

Wow! The surf is UP! Are you with me? Am I making this up or do you see it also?

Paul's 1st Missionary Journey

Chapter 13. ¹Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. ⁴So, being sent out by the

Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.

Okay. We have some action here- definitely supernatural but a bit difficult to interpret. This may be another swell, but how can we know for sure? What are the principles that we can apply to our lives today? Well speaking metaphorically, these preachers and teachers were most likely the ones who surfed that wave at Antioch. Quite possibly they were on the beach reflecting over one of the best surfing days of their lives. Perhaps they were reasoning about the relatively spontaneous nature of that event and wondering if God was going to perpetuate the concept. If this speculation is accurate, Paul and Barnabas basically had an invitation from the Holy Spirit to go with Him and make waves together (continuing the metaphorical thought). At any rate, they engaged the idea and ventured back out into the surf. Let's read on.

Verse ⁴²As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. ⁴³And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God. ⁴⁴The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. ⁴⁶And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." ⁴⁸And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region."

There in verse 47 is the answer to our question about how we should interpret that supernatural event: "For so the Lord has commanded us." Paul and Barnabas interpreted their previous observations and experiences for us. They did this by way of two Scripture passages (Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6) that were very obviously about the Messiah. What are they saying? They are saying that the Messiah Jesus is working through them to shine His light on the nations and bring salvation to the ends of the earth. At the risk of abusing our analogy, they are no longer merely hunting waves to surf; they are now working with the Wave Maker.

How was this actually happening? Let's look ahead to

Ch. 14: ³So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

They were speaking the word of His grace and God was bearing witness that it was indeed His word and grace. Now it is easy to get distracted from the main event here so let's "gird the loins of our minds" for just a minute. Just

as the word of His grace was on the lips of the apostles, so was His witness on the lips of the Gentile converts. Remember back in chapter 13 verse ⁴⁸“And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” While there were signs and wonders being done by the hands of the apostles, I suggest that these were opening and closing acts to support the main event which was the making of disciples.

Luke confirms this all in a summary statement in verse 26.

Ch.14:²⁶and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. ²⁷And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

Paul’s 2nd Missionary Journey

We can see this pattern of going out repeated on Paul’s 2nd missionary journey. Look with me at:

Ch. 15: ⁴⁰but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.

Apollos

Surprisingly we see Apollos (who was not part of the original apostle’s journey or message) working with this grace in his ministry.

Ch. 18: ²⁷ When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed

Ephesian Church Elders

We are now approaching what I consider a major transition in this concept of grace that we have been observing. We caught just a hint with Apollos, but it will become apparent in this next passage. Paul is on his way to Jerusalem and has stopped to give a parting encouragement to the Ephesian Elders. Look with me at:

Ch. 20: ²⁴But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. ³²And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

This same word of grace that we saw sustaining Paul in the establishment of the church is now being described as causing its growth and nurture. Notice that Paul is not commending the word of God’s grace TO THE ELDERS. This was not something Paul controlled and dispensed as he saw fit. Paul is commending THEM to the word of God’s grace. It controlled him and set the trajectory of his life in voluntary sacrifice to the purposes of God. Paul and his sending church at Antioch were completely submitted to the power of God. Paul is now pointing the church leadership at Ephesus to that same power as the Source of their new life and placing them in its care. The word

of grace is the power of God for their own salvation as well as for the church of God in their care.

Movement Confirmed in the Epistles

Church at Colossae

We have seen how Luke has portrayed this movement of God in the book of Acts. Before we move on from this idea to our main subject let's see if we can confirm this perspective from the epistles. In fact we see this very thing happening at the church of Colossae. Turn with me to:

Colossians 1: ⁵ Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing--as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth

Now that we have seen the movement of God over great geographical distances and various people groups, let's focus in and see what that movement looks like in the life of our subjects- Priscilla and Aquila.

Priscilla and Aquila- Partners in Ministry

Their Scriptural Debut

Our story begins in Acts 18 with verse one.

Acts 18: ¹After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. ⁴And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Displacement v.1

Let's focus for a moment on the reason Priscilla and Aquila were in Corinth. Claudius was Emperor of the Roman Empire and in his ninth year (49-50) he commanded all the Jews to get out of his city. So essentially Priscilla and Aquila were refugees.

Dispute and Edict

Look for a moment with me at the historical evidence for this edict.

"As the Jews were indulging in constant riots at the instigation of Chrestus, he banished them from Rome." Suetonius Life of Claudius xxv.4

F.F. Bruce in The New International Commentary on the New Testament The Book of the ACTS makes the following statement about this evidence. "Chrestus was a common slave-name in the Greco-Roman world, and appears as a spelling variant for the unfamiliar Christus. (In Greek the two words were pronounced alike.)"

Disposition

Hospitable v.3

Okay, so moving back briefly to our previously surfing analogy, we see a swell developing- at least for Priscilla and Aquila in this dispute over Christ among the converts of Judaism in Italy. The swell matures into a wave with the edict of Claudius, their displacement to Corinth, and the arrival of Paul in Corinth.

Notice also that the text tells us that Priscilla and Aquila were strangers in a strange place, but they were very hospitable to Paul. They shared with him not only their home but their livelihood as well.

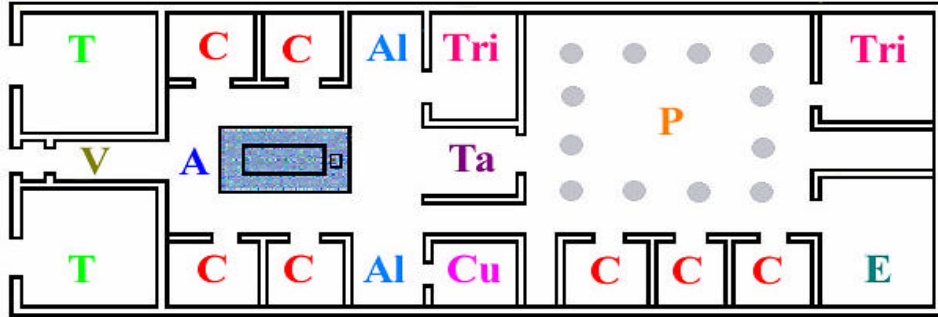
Below is a map of the region. The distance between Rome and Corinth is about the same as the distance between Chicago and Jacksonville in north Florida- 600 miles as the goose flies.



Corinth was a major trade center in that time. As you can see on the map, the isthmus (the body of land between the two seas) was only four miles wide and had a major port on each end. I found some historical information that said Periander constructed a five foot wide rock-cut tract in the 7th century BC for wheeling small ships and their unloaded cargo from one gulf to the other. By 400 BCE, a double wall was constructed to protect a two mile rock paved street, about 40' wide, between the ports.

Being people of means and commerce, they likely would have traveled to Corinth by boat. Here is a model of what those vessels would have been like in that day.





Back in Acts 18, notice with me that Paul lived and worked with Priscilla and Aquila. Above is a floor plan of a Roman house of that period that may have been similar to the house of Priscilla and Aquila. I estimate this to be about 2,500 square feet on the main floor with two or three floors typical. The *cubiculum* was their name for a bedroom. This is a photo of a period bedroom similar to the one Paul may have stayed in. Notice also the *taberna* or shop out on the street front. It had no inside doors and could be leased without granting tenants access to the rest of the house.

Here is an artist concept of a shop as viewed from the street side.



Brief Stay vv.5-7

Back in our passage we read on. (Acts 18: ⁵) “When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. ⁶And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” ⁷And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue.”

It is difficult to say with certainty, but when Luke says in verse seven that Paul “left there” he may have meant that Paul moved from Priscilla and Aquila’s house to live and teach out of the house of Titius Justus. This could have occurred simultaneous to Paul’s transition in ministry from the Jews of Corinth to the Gentiles. At any rate, this was a period of relative stability for Paul as we see in verse 11 “And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”

Notice in verse 12 the reference to Gallio. We have in the historical record that Gallio was proconsul of Achaia from 51 to 52.

Surprising Commitment vv. 18-21

Beginning with verse 18 we see Paul in transition from Corinth to Ephesus.

Acts 18:¹⁸After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. ¹⁹And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. ²¹But on taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills," and he set sail from Ephesus.

Isn't this surprising? We see Paul with Priscilla and Aquila for a relatively short time in Corinth. With the little information Luke disclosed one could easily conclude that Paul's relationship with them was simply one of convenience. But that all changes in verse 18 with Priscilla and Aquila relocating to Ephesus at the same time Paul moves there. Their relationship was obviously more than a convergence of mutual convenience, but what was it exactly? The question becomes even stronger when we see in verse 19 the statement by Luke that "he left them there" suggesting another short period of time together. So we have two fairly intimate and bonding experiences with Paul choosing to part company with them relatively soon after.

In Action

With Apollos vv.24-28

The next passage of scripture finds Priscilla and Aquila in action.

Acts 18: ²⁴Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. ²⁵He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately. ²⁷And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, ²⁸for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

Now this strongly suggests that Priscilla and Aquila were more than mere wealthy merchants on a parallel trajectory of coincidence with Paul. We can safely assume that they were at least vaguely familiar with the teaching about Jesus being the Christ. It would have been reasonable for them to have some knowledge about the purpose of their exile from Rome. But this event demonstrates more than a familiarity. Notice that they explained to Apollos "the

way of God more accurately” even though Apollos “spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus.” In fact scholars have argued that Priscilla and Aquila were believers before they left Rome and may have had thorough knowledge of the gospel.

It is important to notice the apparent results of their relationship with Apollos. After engaging him in the synagogue, they apparently brought him into the gathered church who then endorsed his ministry. Luke was careful to document the effect of this relationship as “greatly help[ing] those who through grace had believed.”

Okay. Now that is the extent of the record we have of Priscilla and Aquila in the book of Acts. But thankfully that does not finish the account of them in scripture.

With church at Ephesus

The next reference we have chronologically to Priscilla and Aquila comes in 1Corinthians chapter 16. Please turn there with me.

1Corinthians 16: ¹⁹The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord.

Paul wrote the first letter to Corinth from Ephesus during his 3rd missionary journey- Sometime between 52 and 56. This brief statement indicates that Priscilla and Aquila (Paul refers to her by her formal name while Luke preferred the informal) had much more than a personal relationship with Paul. They had fully engaged his ministry and were hosting a church in their home. The not-casual greeting to the church at Corinth further suggests that this engagement began back there.

Let’s take just a minute to look at some pictures of a Roman house and imagine what it must have been like for them to host a church in their home.

With church at Rome

Look with me now to the next chronological reference to Priscilla and Aquila- Romans chapter 16 verse 3.

Romans 16: ³Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. ⁵Greet also the church in their house.

There are several significant statements Paul makes about them here.

Their Return

First of all notice that they had moved back to Rome. The historical record gives the date of Claudius’ death at the hand of an assassin as the fall of 54. Recall that it was Claudius who gave the edict to evict all the Jews from Rome four to five years previous? Likely with his death and the reign of Nero at the age of 17 via his mother meant all previous edicts were “off.” Now this is speculative, but one can reasonably imagine that

Priscilla and Aquila made a rather hasty departure from Rome following the edict and may have wanted to get back and salvage what remained of their former life. At any rate we find them back there receiving a greeting from Paul who was continuing his third missionary- probably writing from Ephesus in 56 or 57.

Risked Their Necks

Second we see that they risked their necks for Paul's life. They were not so attached to their affluence as to shrink back from standing with Paul during his crisis. Paul, not given to platitudes, suggests again that this was more than just a personal relationship but that there was something in the resolution of the crisis that served all the Gentile churches.

Workers in Christ

Third we see that Paul refers to them as “my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.” Now it is upon this statement that I have based the theme of this whole message. Priscilla and Aquila are in the scripture to show us today how to engage the command of Jesus to make disciples. We will look more to this when we extract principles in a moment. For now let us look quickly at Romans 15: ¹⁸ where Paul establishes what he means by a “worker *in Christ Jesus*.” He says of his own ministry “for I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me....” In 1Corinthians 15: ¹⁰ Paul further elaborates his standard of service by declaring that “... by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.” It is a reasonable inference then to say that Priscilla and Aquila had the same standards of ministry and Paul valued his relationship with them to that level.

Continued Hospitality

Fourthly we see that Priscilla and Aquila were hosting another church in their house in Rome. Now when I checked my dates I was very impressed to learn that the scriptures document that they hosted two churches in two distant metropolitan centers in less than five years: one church in Ephesus at the beginning of Paul's 3rd missionary journey and one in Rome toward the end of that same journey. That in my opinion is worthy of recognition.

The final Scripture reference for Priscilla and Aquila is found in 2Timothy 4: ¹⁹. It simply states “Greet Prisca and Aquila.” This puts them back in Ephesus before Paul wrote 2nd letter to Timothy (who was in Ephesus) from Rome sometime during 63-64

Principles for Ministry

Maintain transcendent ministry relationships.

We see this in Paul's reference to them as "my fellow workers in Christ." Theirs was a relationship based primarily on ministry and secondarily on similar interests.

Are theologically equipped and engaging.

This was demonstrated by how they engaged Apollos. Remember how they explained to Apollos "the way of God more accurately" even though Apollos "spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus."

Practice Christian hospitality as a lifestyle.

This was evidenced by how they received Paul into their home and business even though they were strangers in a strange place and their consistent hosting of churches.

Possess a proven *cling-free* materialism.

They obviously possessed "mobile wealth" or "portable capital" sufficient to acquire houses large enough to host these two churches, yet they are said to have "risked their necks" for Paul's life.

Are open to being mobile.

They had a mobile lifestyle and moved frequently. Sometimes involuntarily but other times voluntarily. When they moved they continued their same work for the Lord at their new location.

May have a *world-renowned* yet maintain a church-centered ministry.

After engaging Apollos, they apparently brought him into the gathered church and endorsed his ministry. Paul, not given to bragging or overstating spheres of influence, said that "all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks" to Prisca and Aquila for their ministry to him.

Often function as husband and wife teams.

They were always referred to as a couple. They apparently performed their Christian service in unison. If you are married or are preparing for marriage, consider that Priscilla was likely just as theologically competent as Aquila. Contrast our knowledge of this couple's ministry with the anonymous wives who traveled with the "rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas" documented in 1 Corinthians 9:5. We don't even know their names.

Challenge

Reflect with me for a moment on the surfing analogy we developed earlier. Remember how the grace of God moved through the church at Jerusalem and then by way of the persecution to Antioch? Remember how the grace of God was the active ingredient establishing and maintaining the churches on Paul's missionary journeys? Perhaps we do not see masses being converted to Christ, but does that mean that the grace of God is dormant? I think not!

Reflect for an instant on your own conversion. Can you clearly see the grace of God working in that process and continuing to work to present you faultless at the coming of Christ? In the slough of our fleshly contentment, is there a channel open to our senses for detecting an opportunity to work with that same grace in the making of another disciple? Is there a taste in our soul for the eternal that will abandon every temporal comfort to work with that grace? Hear me! That channel is called hospitality and that taste is called Jesus Christ. Let us clothe ourselves with Light and ride the dawn of this glorious gospel of grace into our desperate circumstances and tentative spheres of influence.

Consider Hebrews 5:13-14 "...the word of righteousness.... is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil...." Do we have our senses trained to recognize the goodness of God actively pursuing His own glory in our circumstances? That same passage in Hebrews puts our "work and ... serving the saints" squarely in the context of the preservation of our souls. Do we place that same priority on Christian hospitality or is the grace of God toward us proving fruitless?

Are we confident enough in our ability to rightly handle the word of truth that we might engage the grace of God at that level or are we dependent on someone else to stand in our stead?

Won't you resolve with me not to be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises?

Epaphras – The Entreator

Colossians 1:7; 4:12

Russ Kennedy

Introduction

We've been thinking together about ministry partners – about the men and women who served the Lord in ministry with Paul. Our aim is to learn the character qualities the Bible highlights so that we can grow in them as well.

What have we learned? Barnabas leaves us an example as the encourager. He ministers for the good of others with a gracious and encouraging spirit. Aquila and Priscilla serve the church as the enablers. They use their resources, their time, their money, their homes and even their vocation in order to make the ministry of others possible. John Mark is an enthusiastic enlister. He is growing from youthful zeal into mature usefulness. He shows us how failing can be overcome with ministry usefulness resulting.

In our final study, we will look at an almost unknown ministry partner of Paul – Epaphras. He is a faithful and humble servant of God and the church.

Partners in Ministry

Epaphras story emerges from the pages of Scripture. He was possibly a native of the Lycus Valley in Asia Minor. He served the Lord in such cities as Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis in that area. One authority says that his being named before Mark, Luke, and others (Philemon. 23-24) perhaps indicates the high esteem in which Paul held him. [Harper's Bible Dictionary]

Faithful Serving in Preaching

Colossians 1:7; 4:12

Epaphras was from the church at Colossae. Because of the reference to Epaphras in Philemon and the cluster of people who are both in the church in Philemon's home and are also in the church at Colossae, it is easy to conclude that the Colossian church met in Philemon's home. There, Epaphras had significant relationships and responsibilities.

He had been *A FAITHFUL EVANGELIST* there, with the converts there coming to Christ under his ministry. They had come to know the grace of God through Epaphras. They are said to have *learned it from him*. He may well have been sent out by Paul and the church to take the gospel there. He had preached and taught. God's grace had been the central focus of his evangelism. They had come to know the word of truth, the gospel (v.5) so that hear and understood the grace of God in truth (v.6)

He had been *A FAITHFUL MINISTER* there. Paul refers to Epaphras as both a fellow *doulos*, servant and also a faithful *diakonos*, minister. Paul refers to him as our co-slave and your servant. What a commendation of a good preaching and teach-

ing elder – he is the slave of God and the servant of Christ for his people. This is what we desire to be – servant shepherds who preach the gospel so grace brings people to himself and who teach the Bible so that people come to love in the Spirit.

He had been *A FAITHFUL PASTOR* there. How do I know that? Because he had told Paul of their love in the Holy Spirit. Now this is important. Epaphras has a pastor's heart that is not only concerned over the issues in the congregation, but is complementary of the good things about his people. The church needs to see and know that he has not only brought his concerns to Paul, but his complements as well. So Paul relates that highlighting how much he appreciates their own reception and expression of grace, modeled for them in Epaphras.

All of this is called in Colossians 4:12, working hard for the church in Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis. He worked hard among them. God's faithful slaves and Christ's fruitful servants will be men (and women) who work hard. They are willing to sacrifice for others, for their growth and their good. So, Paul observed and witnessed also to the fact that Epaphras worked hard for them.

Faithful Striving in Praying

Colossians 4:12

How did Epaphras work hard for them when he was not with them? By struggling in prayer for them and over them. Now why would Paul describe prayer in such terms? Why use the word translated, struggle, strive, entreat or agonize? When would prayer become an agonizing struggle?

When we are gripped by *THE GREAT PRECIOUSNESS AND POWER OF PRAYER*. People who pray in a way that agonies and strives have a deep sense of communicating with God. They expect God to move on their behalf. The sovereignty and supremacy of God does not paralyze them, but energize them to praying for people and situations. They have confidence in God, His promises and His power. This confidence then prizes the access and ability that prayer gives to plead and intercede on behalf of others.

When we grasp that *THE SITUATION IS FULL OF DEADLY SPIRITUAL DANGERS*. Epaphras understands that the errors creeping into the church at Colossae (and possibly, elsewhere under his ministry) are going to destroy the people he loves. He has a deep sense of spiritual priorities. He struggles in prayer because he really knows what is important. He understands their danger. This is why he has come to Paul; why this letter was written; why he is on his knees entreating God for his people.

When *THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD SEPARATES US* from the people we care for and are concerned over. Epaphras cannot be with his people to teach them face-to-face. He is with Paul seeking counsel and authoritative apostolic instruction that will deal with the situation. Until he can return with apostolic deposit of truth and present it and preach it, he can pray with great fervency over his people.

I am struck by two contrasts to our way in the church today.

OUR PRIORITIES IN PRAYER ARE MUCH DIFFERENT. We will tend to pass over deadly spiritual dangers and agonize over passing physical difficulties. We are so taken up with the outward that we are not gripped by the inward.

OUR CONFIDENCE IN PROGRAMS REPLACES OUR DEPENDENCE ON PRAYER. I have been personally challenged in meditating on this. Do we tend to pray more or program more when all is not well in ministry? Is our confidence in God so strong that we come to Him when there is spiritual trouble?

Paul's commendation of Epaphras to his home church means that:

- They need to hold fast to the gospel of grace he has taught them. This commended servant had brought them the truth of grace. They should seek no other.
- They need to continue to hear and heed the truth he is teaching them. This commended servant was continuing to preach them truth. They should hear no other.
- They must accept the teaching of Paul and reject the errors creeping into the church as Epaphras ministers that word to them. This commended man was bringing them clarification of the truth. They should believe no other.
- They need to truly mature in the gospel and by grace rather than the "secrets of the Christian life" being taught them by the false teachers. This commended man was growing them with the truth. They should trust no other.

So this servant-shepherd returns with the Scripture to the people he loves and more faithful ministry.

Faithful Suffering in Persecution

Philemon 23

We find in the New Testament one other reference to Epaphras. In closing his letter to Philemon, Paul sends greetings to the church in his home, possibly in Colossae, from Epaphras. We don't know how or under what circumstances, we only know that he is now a fellow-prisoner of Paul's. This may not necessarily mean he is imprisoned with Paul, that is, he is a cell-mate. But it does indicate that this great hearted servant-shepherd is now separated from his people by incarceration in prison.

Further, he is in prison because of Jesus Christ. He is a man whose serving has brought to him persecution. He is suffering for the sake of the gospel he loved, trusted and preached. This so often is the lot of God's men down through the ages. It is a great mercy that, right now, we are free to preach freely in our country. But in many, many places all over the world at this hour faithful servants of God are in prison.

Principles for Ministry

Now let's think about some observations from his character and conduct. Epaphras shows us that ministry partners:

Are deeply committed to truth in evangelism and edification.

We desire deeply to grow here at the Chapel. We hunger to have the grace of God going to more and more people. We long to see the grace of God deepen and strengthen all our people. The leaders here are thinking much now about what that is going to mean for our facilities. And we will not, in our desire for numerical and spiritual growth, give up the gospel for the sake of numbers. We will not water it down. We will not cheapen grace. We will hold high its call to believe and bow.

We are surrounded by churches and preachers who do not see the necessity of calling people to come to Christ the way the Bible does. Almost anything goes in bringing the lost into a church building. Then, in order to keep them coming, the gospel becomes not about their being sinners separated from God needing a gracious and glorious Redeemer and Ruler. Rather it becomes all about their brokenness, neediness, sickness and God is here for them – here to make them whole, meet their needs and heal their illnesses.

Epaphras left us a sterling example of evangelism where people came to know the grace of God in truth because he was committed to preaching and teaching the truth. When error came in, he sought to counter it with the truth. Let us hold fast to truth; let us hold up the truth; let us hear the truth; let us heed the truth.

Develop a Biblical perspective on spiritual dangers.

They have a keen sensitivity to spiritual danger to the people they love and serve. While concerned with their outer circumstances, they are alert to spiritual struggles, to beliefs and wants, to sins and struggles, to error and conduct that is displeasing to the Lord. They understand that people's situations do not cause them to sin, their heart issues do. So they keep watch over themselves and their people for the kind of things that will lead to spiritual decline and deadness.

Understand the priority of and our dependence on prayer.

One thing jumps off the pages of Scripture – Paul and his ministry partners were praying people. They depended on prayer as the energizing power and shaping providences of God in their ministries. They saw the value and worth of praying. They commended people for their praying. They modeled it in their ministry whether in working or in writing.

We need to become this kind of people. We tend to run to programs and organization. While some programs are a part of church life, they can easily become a substitute for real ministry. They can become our ministry crutches. The programs themselves can simply become our ministry. We must depend in God as we pray to Him. Let's not just make this another aim, or mission statement. Let's turn this into real action – praying over our preaching, our Sunday School, our outreach, our worship and music, our people's spiritual needs, our elder's need

for wisdom, unity, faith and courage. Let's set aside times of prayer as we plan and prepare for OACM's house and expanding our facilities. On July 9-10, the Elders will be taking a retreat to pray over and plan for expansion. Why don't a number of you set aside that time to be in prayer for us? As we come to a very important time in our church life, let's take a day of prayer and for those who can, fasting over our church, its outreach and its growth.

Search out the Scriptures for solutions to challenges and trouble.

Epaphras went to Paul to seek the apostolic response to the error invading his church(es). We can still do that. We can pick up our Bibles and there we will find all the answers we need for life and godliness. Faithful servants in ministry will be people who are poised to immediately go to the Bible and seek the answers in its pages. They will tend to reject the wisdom and way of the world so often sought after by the rest of the world and the church. No, we must be the kind of servants of God who trust God and His Word to give us the direction we need. May we more and more become a people who go to the Bible to solve problems, answer error, address issues and do the work of the ministry given us.

Understand being faithful may not always produce faithful ministries.

Consider with me Colossians 4:13 and Revelation 3:14-22. Here is something stunning. Epaphras had labored long and hard with Paul's commendation in the church at Laodicea. Yet, John tells us that it was the least faithful of all the seven churches of Asia Minor. They were rebuked for being neither hot nor cold. There they thought themselves to be rich when they were in fact poor, had spiritual insight when they needed spiritual eye salve.

This is a basic Biblical principle: we are called to be faithful and obedient to God regardless of what it produces. Parents are not commanded by God to produce godly children; but parents must be faithful to obedient and godly childrearing. Servants of God in leadership are to be faithful to the ministry they are involved in. You must teach, lead, serve, give, disciple – whatever you are enabled and equipped for. Your commendation does not rest on whether or not it produces spiritual giants. Praise God for when it does! Pray to God that it does. Examine yourself when it doesn't. But Epaphras can be a good servant-shepherd and still serve a church that turns out like Laodicea.

Challenge

What an example Epaphras is to us. What a high standard of ministry he holds up for us. How we ought to strive to become like this - men and women of the Bible, of prayer, of hard work, caring for people with spiritual priorities and discernment.

Would you commit yourself to becoming a ministry partner? To working hard at developing the character, the concerns, the commitments for faithfulness to God, to His people and to the spread of the gospel.

Please take the ministry partner summary, meditate on it and use the questions on the back for self evaluation and examination.

Ministry Partner Summary

Overview of Principles

From our study of Barnabas, John Mark, Aquila and Priscilla and Epaphras, we learn that partners in ministry for the gospel:

Have character worth writing about.

Have a glad & ready abandonment of the temporal.

Have a vision for the spreading of the gospel and the growth of the church.

Are cultivated not in isolation, but in personal relationships.

Are developed through patient mentoring.

Sometimes fail in ministry in spite of the best of intentions and instructors.

Sometimes need to be given opportunities to try again.

Need to be great hearted towards those who have changed and grown into usefulness.

Maintain transcendent ministry relationships.

Are theologically equipped and engaging.

Practice Christian hospitality as a lifestyle.

Possess a proven cling-free materialism.

Are open to being mobile.

May have a world-renowned yet maintain a church-centered ministry.

Often function as husband and wife teams.

Are deeply committed to truth in evangelism and edification.

Develop a Biblical perspective on spiritual dangers.

Understand the priority of and our dependence on prayer.

Search out the Scriptures for solutions to challenges and trouble.

Understand being faithful may not always produce faithful ministries.

Will you seek by God's enabling grace to become this kind of servant of our Lord?

What ministry partner attributes has God already grown in me?

What areas am I weak in and need to grow and develop?

In what ministries do I serve now and hope to serve in the future?