

God's Team

Text:

Acts 4:36; Acts 9:11; Acts 11:25; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

There were three missionary journeys made by Paul, and one very long trek to Rome where his ministry came to a dramatic end. These journeys of Paul were pivotal in the two thousand years of Christian history. It is estimated that Paul travelled from 10,000 to 15,000 miles in his ministry. It is estimated that Paul travelled on foot at least 10,000 miles. To get an idea of this accomplishment, this would be like walking nearly four times from Los Angeles to New York. It is important to understand that Paul was not travelling alone. Some of the better known travelling companions of Paul were Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Luke and John Mark. Today I want to focus on the first dynamic duo, Paul and Barnabas.

After Paul had finished his three years Arabia (Acts 11:25) he returned to his hometown in which he was reared. Our hometown is often thought of as a comfortable place. It is filled with memories from our childhood that often have romanticized over the years, sometimes seeming better than it really was. Paul, like anyone who has served the Lord, will find the Lord knows how to remove us from our comfort zone to the places of His design. Deuteronomy 32:11, 12a: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him...."

Let's look at Acts 11:26: "And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." Imagine what it must have been like when Paul and Barnabas began to unroll the scrolls of Scripture and teach! This practice was confirmed in Acts 13:5b: "...they preached the Word of God...."

THE PRINCIPLE OF TEAMWORK

Exodus 17:8-15. While Joshua fought the enemy in the lowland, Moses prayed on top of the hill. As long as Moses kept his hands up in a posture of prayer Israel would win, but when his hands dropped, Amalek prevailed. So Aaron and Hur held Moses' weary hands up until victory came. The battle was won on the hill before victory was realized below the hill.

Elisha the great prophet of God was known in II Kings 3:11b as a loyal servant to Elijah: "...Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah."

Mark 6:7: "And He (Jesus) called unto Him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits."

Together James and John were known as the sons of thunder. Mark 3:17: "And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder."

In modern history of evangelism and church growth we see this principle of teamwork. We observe it in the ministry of D. L. Moody and R. A. Torrey. Also, the team of D. L. Moody and Ira Sankey brought such great results that the effect is still evident today. Then there is the team of J. Frank Norris and his Sunday School man, Louis Entzminger. With this team, two of the largest churches in America (First Baptist of Fort Worth and Temple Baptist of Detroit) were pastored simultaneously. Many agree that there would have never been the success of Highland Baptist Church of Chattanooga, Tennessee Temple Schools and Baptist International Missions had it not been for the divinely-ordained combination ministry of Dr. Lee Roberson and Dr. J.R. Faulkner.

For every David, there is that friend Jonathan of whom it is said in I Samuel 23:16: "And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God."

Paul made a remarkable statement in I Corinthians 9:5: "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?" Who can deny the power of a husband and wife team, anchored in the perfect will of God? Acts 18:2a: "And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla..." Romans 16:3: "Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus." Had it not been for this husband/wife team, there would not have been the effective ministry of the eloquent Apollos. Acts 18:26: "And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." And most Bible teachers agree that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus who were taught the greatest exposition from the Scripture on the fulfillment of Messianic prophesies as taught by the resurrected Lord Himself was the married team of Cleopas and his wife, Mary (John 19:25; Luke 24:18).

I. GOD'S TEAM IS A HELPING TEAM

Acts 11:27-30.

Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem to help relieve those Christians suffering from the world-wide famine.

II. GOD'S TEAM BRINGS IN THE NEXT GENERATION

Acts 12:25

We see earlier in this chapter, the wicked Herod who is vexing the church and determined to take out Simon Peter as well martyrs James the brother of John. Thankfully, God diverted Herod's plan and took out Herod instead. All along, God was raising up John Mark, the younger nephew of Barnabas.

III. GOD'S TEAM IS DISCOVERED IN PRAYER

Acts 13:1-4

Paul and Barnabas are part of a five man leadership in Antioch. It is believed that Simeon (spelled Simon in Matthew 27:32) was the same man that carried the cross of Jesus and the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21).

We don't know much about Lucius, other than he was from the same area of the country as Simeon. Manaen was known as "...an elderly aristocrat and foster brother of Herod the Tetrarch" (*The Apostle* by John Pollock). After fasting and prayer, two fifths of the Antioch team is called out by God to go to the mission field.

We are easily deceived when we fail to pray. Joshua 9:14: "And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD."

Matthew 17:19-21.

James 4:2c: "...ye have not, because ye ask not."

Psalms 25:4, 5: "Shew me Thy ways, O LORD; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me: for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day."

When Elisabeth Elliot, the missionary and wife of the martyred Jim Elliot was just a young girl, the news reached her home informing her family of the heroic martyrdom of John and Betty Stam by the communists in China. Elisabeth was deeply impacted. She memorized the following prayer that Betty had written when she was only 18, and Elisabeth wrote it in her Bible:

"Lord, I give up all my own plans and purposes, all my own desires and hopes, and accept Thy will for my life. I give myself, my life, my all, utterly to Thee to be Thine forever. Fill me and seal me with Thy Holy Spirit. Use me as Thou wilt, send me where Thou wilt, and work out Thy whole will in my life at any cost now and forever." This prayer was honored in Betty's marriage with John. This prayer also motivated Elisabeth Elliot to do the same.

"Today, the Stams are honored as China Inland Mission martyrs, and for years afterwards the compelling narrative of their tragic deaths and the rescue of the "miracle baby" has become part of twentieth-century missionary lore. The Stams' sacrificial deaths are often cited as galvanizing a new generation of missionary candidates, including 700 young people at Moody Bible Institute, the Stams' alma mater, and 200 at nearby Wheaton College, all pledging to follow their example of selfless Christian service and echoing John Stam's final message to his missionary colleagues: 'The Lord bless and guide you—and as for us—may God be glorified whether by life or by death'" (Wheaton Archives and Special Collections).

-Pastor Pope-