**Stowe Church June 6th 2021**

**The origins of the journey**

We are starting a series today looking at Paul’s second epic missionary journey.

So let me take you through the events that took place right at the start of this second journey and then reflect on what they might teach us today.

Paul and Barnabas are in Antioch having recently returned from Jerusalem where they had been at a meeting of the church leaders. On the first missionary journey many Gentiles had become followers of Jesus but some Jews felt they should also become part of the Jewish faith, males being circumcised and all keeping the laws of Moses. Paul and Barnabas , and indeed Peter, objected as they had all seen the Spirit poured out on the gentiles as had happened at Pentecost. They believed it was not necessary for Gentiles to embrace the Jewish faith to become Christians The church leaders agreed only asking the Gentile Christians to steer clear of idol worship and sexual immortally. A letter had been written to be taken to the churches established during the first journey setting out this decision.

So the second missionary journey begins with Barnabas suggesting they returned to the churches they had planted on the first journey to see how they were getting on and to deliver the decisions of the church leaders about the gentile Christians .

But suddenly a difficult start to this mission

A dispute arose between Paul and Barnabas over who should go with them. Barnabas wants to take John Mark, his nephew, but Paul refused. John Mark had been on the first journey but had left them part way through which Paul saw as desertion and Paul did not want to risk that again.

Paul was a driven and passionate man. You will recall how, when known as Saul, he persecuted followers of Jesus with such vigour when he thought they were threatening his Jewish faith. Then he had that amazing conversion on the road the Damascus when he met the risen Lord. Paul was transformed and all his passion and drive went into spreading the good news of Jesus. Paul was in many ways task driven and for him the mission was the focus and he clearly felt very unsure about John Mark and did not want him on the mission team. , Paul gave and wanted 100 % to the mission. Barnabas was perhaps led by the family ties and the desire to encourage. Barnabas seemed more a people person and for him John Mark was someone needing encouragement

So Paul and Barnabas disagreed and parted company. Barnabas took John Mark with him to Cyprus to continue his work there leaving Paul to set off with Silas

When Paul arrived in Lystra he found a replacement for John Mark when Timothy joined the team for what was to become the main part of the mission. Timothy was the child of a mixed marriage, Father was Greek, mother a Jew. Timothy had been taught the Scriptures by his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois. What a wonderful; grounding. It is possible that Timothy became a follower of Jesus when Paul visited Lystra on his first journey preaching the gospel there.

So Paul decided to take Timothy with him . From a later letter to Timothy Paul reminds him of his calling, confirmed by prophecy, and the laying on of hands by Paul and other before he set off with Paul. I suspect this confirmed Paul’s’ decision to not take John Mark.To allay any needless opposition from local Jews Timothy was circumcised before leaving. Pau did not want this issue to hinder Timothy’s ministry Timothy became a key co- worker with Paul and is mentioned in Paul’s letters to Rome, Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica Philemon and Colossae. Paul saw great potential in Timothy and regarded him as his spiritual son.

After leaving Lystra and Iconium Paul and the team left their previous mission fields behind and seemed to be heading down the Lycus vslley towards Ephesus in Western Asia Minor but the Spirit directs them firstly northward toward Bithynia on the northern part of what is now Turkey and then redirects westwards to Troas where as we shall see next time a totally new mission field is opened for them . It is not clear how the Spirit spoke to them, whether through prayer or a prophetic word from for example Silas but we see clearly God changing their plans and them responding willingly .

So what can we take from these events , which would have been spread over many months, as this second missionary journey got underway Three key points to reflect on :

The disagreement between Paul and Barnabas

The call of Timothy

The intervention of the Spirit

The disagreement between Paul and Barnabas

So what do we make of this disagreement? Should this have happened between these two leaders?

This was not a dispute over doctrine it was about a difference of opinion. It seems that Paul’s main focus was the task, the mission. For Barnabas it was about John Mark , to encourage him and give him that second chance.

Christians will disagree over issues in the life of the church. Indeed sometimes disagreements are needed for us to see God’s will. It depends how we handle them. If we are caught in one how does it affect us because sometimes they can become divisive and personal so it crucial we learn to disagree in love and work those disagreements out together and not let them fester. So easy to dwell on the issue and personalize the problem, this we must avoid.

Three quick warnings for what to avoid

Do we lie awake at night thinking about what has happened, allowing the issue to become a controlling obsession.

Do we start plotting to win the argument?

Do we start putting the other person down , making it personal rather than focusing on the issue

All pitfalls to be avoided

So it is crucial we learn to disagree in love and work those disagreements out together. We can see in this situation that it was probably right that John mark did not go as it could have been a running sore and been a distraction to the main purpose – mission, bringing people to know Jesus.

The key thing is always - the work of God must not suffer .

I saw this quote the other day

To dwell above with the saints we love, O that will be glory. But to dwell below with the saints we know, well, that’s a different story!

Whilst Paul and Barnabas parted company we know that Paul still held Barnabas in high esteem and speaks very positively about him in his letter to Corinth. And we also see John Mark being with Paul in Rome when Paul was in prison and Paul sending him out on missions, a sign of restored trust

We must always look to for unity and never lose our love for one another

The call of Timothy

In our passage from 2 Timothy we get a picture of Timothy. He had been grounded in faith by his mother and grandmother and become a follower of Jesus.

And here is a challenge for us to try and pass on to those in our family the faith we have, to share it and pray for them.

Back to Timothy who was a gentle shepherd of the sheep, quite sensitive. In his letter Paul remembers how Timothy wept when they had last parted. Paul feels he is too timid and 25 times urges Timothy to be bold. He urges Timothy to stir up the gift God has given him . He reminds Timothy that God did not put a spirit of timidity within him rather a spirit of power

Could it be Timothy found up front speaking difficult or more likely did not like confrontation. Whatever Paul says he must be bold if he is to fulfil his ministry

Paul was so fond of this young Christian leader and wanted him to fulfill his God given calling and potential.

And I think this is a message for us today. Most of us are probably like Timothy , more timid about our faith than bold Paul. But God has gifted each one of use to serve him and we to must pray for a spirit of boldness and not timidity. The Spirit will empower us if we open our lives to Him. We also need to encourage one another in our faith and the calling we have been given in being part of God’s mission.

The intervention of the Spirit

Paul had a clear idea of where he felt they should take the mission next. We suspect he was heading towards that great city of Ephesus . But then God intervended.

It is important we have plans in our lives , God expects us to use our God given minds to plan and make decisions but there will be times when there is a bigger picture involved and God calls us to new direction.

For Paul and his team it was crucial to follow God’s promptings

We must always remember God is the source of mission. It stems from His heart of love to reach out and call people to himself through Jesus. It is not our mission, it is not the churches mission, it is God’s mission . Mission is not an item on a churches agenda,. We are called to be part of God’s agenda to reach out into his world,

There is church because there is mission, not mission because there is church

Mission has its origin in the heart of god. God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest sort of mission David Bosch.

So we today need to be open to the prompting of the Sprit to point us, guide us, take us to where God is calling us in mission. We all have a part in mission

And we will see over the coming weeks the amazing opportunities and responses that arose during this second mission journey. It started with a disagreement but God called Timothy to join the team and the Spirit led them to the next crucial step. In all these steps we see God’s purposes being worked out.

But as they headed to Troas they were still not clear where God was calling them to go next

But Paul and his team were in tune with the Lord and went forward obediently.

Two verses to encourage us to step out in faith, to respond to God’s promptings to share in His mission.

Joshua 1 verse 9 Be strong and courageous . Do not be terrified, do not be discouraged for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

Jeremiah 29 v 11

God said I know the plans I have for you for you plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future