

## **The Trouble With Ministry**

Albert Schweitzer, already a successful theologian and world-class musician, entered medical school at the age of thirty so he could “cross the border” of his cultured, European life and become a medical missionary in malaria-infested West Africa. It was Schweitzer who toward the end of his life wrote these words:

Anyone who proposes to do good must not expect people to roll stones out of his way, but must accept his lot calmly if they even roll a few more upon it. A strength which becomes clearer and stronger through its experiences of such obstacles is the only strength that can conquer them. <sup>i</sup>

Some people think that the words “trouble” and “ministry” shouldn’t go together. But it was Jesus who said just the opposite. He said:

**No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. (John 15:20)**

As we continue in our study of “The Adventures of Paul the ‘Border Crosser,’” we find him now confronted with three forms of trouble: none of it caused by his environment; all of it caused by people. First we see...

### **I. Paul’s Trouble with Conservatives**

Now, you might be thinking, “How could Paul have trouble with conservatives? Conservatives are the ones who want to preserve, conserve the truth! Conservatives don’t cause trouble for Gospel-bringers! They pave the way for the Gospel.” Well, yes, that’s often the case, especially when the Gospel is under attack by those who want to re-define its doctrines. But at various times in world history, God was the one changing His method of presenting His eternal truth to us in this world. He wasn’t changing the truth but He was changing the method of communicating the truth. When Jesus said, **“I am the way, the truth and the life...”** who got upset? It was the ultra-conservative Pharisees. They just refused to see that Jesus was not violating their Scriptures but fulfilling them.

The same was happening in Paul’s day. Jesus told Paul that he was to fulfill the Scriptures that prophesied that *“all the world”* would be blessed THROUGH the seed of Abraham, which was Himself, Jesus. But the Christians who belonged to the ultra-conservative Pharisee group couldn’t believe that the Gentiles could be saved by grace alone. So what did they do? They pulled a Harold Hill. Remember Harold Hill, “The Music Man”? There really wasn’t any trouble in River City, but Harold NEEDED there to be trouble so he could sell his instruments and uniforms for a boys band. Harold “created” an impression of trouble in this memorable way...

[show YouTube, “The Music Man, Ya Got Trouble”, 3:27 to 4:42]

Acts 15:1, 2:

**Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were**

**appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.**

So, how does Paul deal with trouble like this? Before, during and after any kind of trouble in his life, Paul dealt with it by prayer. Before he crossed the border into Gentile territory, he fasted and prayed, remember? In the midst of trouble, he prayed. It's not stated that he prayed on this trip to Jerusalem, but we have record of what he asked of the believers on a subsequent trip. Rom. 15:30-32:

**I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed.**

And after Paul did ministry in a place, he wrote his letters and told them how he was constantly lifting them up in prayer. To the church in Philippi he wrote:

**I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel... (Phil. 1:3-5)**

When they got to Jerusalem, they brought this dispute before the Council of the Apostles and Elders. James, the half-brother of Jesus, was the leader of the Council. The Council clearly affirmed that the Gentiles were saved by grace alone. Obeying the law was good, but not the basis for salvation, so circumcision was NOT necessary. In his letter to believers that we call the Epistle of James, listen to his advice about how to deal with trouble:

**Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray... Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well... Therefore confess your sins to each another and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. (James 5:13-16, selected)**

How big a role does prayer play in your life? Are you praying before, during and after trouble or just during trouble? "Help me, Lord, get me out of this!!! Save me!!! I'm gonna die!!!" Then He saves you and you don't even thank Him. "Oh, wait... it's over. Great. Whew, that was close!" Prayer is not like a fire extinguisher that you keep in the closet just IN CASE you have an emergency. Prayer is like oxygen. It's what keeps you spiritually alive daily. It's your smart phone to God. It's your Internet connection to the One Who knows you better than your best friend but loves you twice as much. How connected are you to God through prayer?

Our new Prayer Room isn't just a place to come and pray. It is that and we want you to come and pray there, but it is also a place to learn to pray. It is divided into six biblical focus areas of prayer. If you pray your way around the room, you will experience "Whole Prayer," prayer that both speaks and listens. Prayer that both confesses and praises. Prayer that both looks inward and looks outward. Our prayer room will resource you so that you can go home and pray like James and Paul. You are invited to visit our Prayer Room tonight/today. Prayer is your first remedy for trouble. Next we need to see...

## **II. Paul's Trouble with Relatives.**

Anybody here have trouble with relatives? No, I'm sure none of you do, but let's look at Paul's trouble with relatives anyway, because you might know somebody else who has this kind of trouble.

In Acts 15:36-41, Paul is ready to get back to his God-given mission of "border crossing" to testify to the Gospel of God's grace. So, he says to Barney:

**Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing. (Acts 15:36)**

Barney says, "Great idea! I'll tell John Mark."

Paul says, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Not John. We're not taking Johnnie."

Barnie says, "We have to take Johnnie. He's my cousin. (Col. 4:10) He's family. Of course we're taking Johnnie."

Have you been in this conversation? John Mark violated Paul's trust on the first trip. He abandoned him in mid-air. He's a quitter! Let's face it, he was a big risk. Barnabas was willing to take the risk because he had a different relationship with John Mark. In a sense, he had a bigger club than Paul did; he was an older cousin. Both Paul and Barnabas had legitimate reasons for their positions. So, how do you deal with trouble like this – family trouble?

As we saw several weeks ago, family is an institution created by God. As we've been discovering in Men's Fraternity, God designed an orderliness in the family. Men and women are absolutely equal before God but separate in their individual roles in the family as assigned by God. Adam was assigned the role of "leader", Eve the role of "helper." So, what does this mean?

As leader, this meant that Adam was ultimately held responsible for their decisions and actions. For example, even though Eve appeared to sin first, God came looking for Adam. After they sinned, Gen. 3:9 says:

**But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"**

Now, they both sinned so why didn't God confront the woman first? Because Adam was the leader and so God held him responsible. While his wife was being tempted, he stood there and did nothing to protect her, advise her, or tell the serpent that, if he wanted to pick a fight, he was going to have to pick it first with him. Adam sinned by dropping his responsibility to defend his wife from evil.

Genesis 2 makes it clear that God created Eve to be Adam's helper. So, what does it mean for Eve to be the "helper"? Is that like the Hebrew equivalent of slave? Hardly. The Hebrew word for "helper" is used for only three other persons in Scripture besides the woman. They are God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. So, "helper" is actually a pretty lofty title and role. Yes, in Ephesians wives are told they must "submit" to their husbands (another obvious example of the husband as the leader) but husbands in that same passage are told to love their wives as Christ loved the church and "gave up himself for her." This is not "domineering" leadership. This is to be "servant" leadership.

Now, what on earth does all of this have to do with the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas? I'm convinced that Barnabas was exercising his responsibility as a family leader. Barnabas was a cousin of John Mark's mother, Mary. John Mark's father is never mentioned in Scripture, which usually means he died early. When Barnabas takes John Mark the second time, it says in Acts 15:39,

that “...they sailed for Cyprus” which is where Barnabas was from. It doesn’t say that they went beyond Cyprus and we don’t hear of John Mark again in the book of Acts.

So, while we don’t know much about John Mark, we do know Barnabas. Barnabas was a great mentor, a great encourager. Barnabas took Paul under his wing when everyone else was scared to death of him. Is it possible that while Paul and Silas “crossed the border” to do their ministry, Barnabas crossed a different border and went home to Cyprus with an immature John Mark to do his ministry, the ministry of reclaiming a broken life?

I think it’s more than possible. I think it’s probable. I think so because we do see John Mark about a decade later. What is he doing? Is he deserting again, quitting before the job is done? No. He’s being sent by Paul (Yes, that’s right! By Paul,) to Colossae; he’s being sent off with Timothy to Asia. And later still, he’s serving as the ghost-writer for the apostle Peter who called him, “...my son Mark.” (I Peter 5:13)

We all know the results of Paul’s missionary journeys, but are we equally impressed by the results of Barnabas’ missionary journey across the border of family lines to reclaim the life of a cousin? Without Barnabas the name Mark might have ended up on the same scrap heap as the name Judas. Instead, it’s a name today that any man would wear proudly because it announces, “By the grace of God, I’ve been redeemed!”

What we must not miss here is that all borders to be crossed are not geographic. At least some are within families. Dads, don’t make the mistake of Adam. Don’t stand by and watch your family be cut to shreds by the serpent. It’s your responsibility to stand between them and evil.

Moms, don’t make the mistake of Eve and think you can fight the serpent on your own. God placed you in a family to be part of a team. Be a great team member. If you are a single mom, do what John Mark’s single mom did – find a Barnabas to fight with you. That’s how we should deal with the trouble of relatives. Lastly, we need to see...

### **III. Paul’s Trouble with the Lucratives.**

(I don’t know if “lucratives” is a word, but it does rhyme with Conservatives and Relatives!) The third encounter with trouble for Paul is with those who valued money (lucre) over a person’s spiritual well-being and life well-being. As was read earlier, in the city of Philippi, Paul and Silas were confronted by a girl with a “spirit.” This is a demon by which it says “*she predicted the future.*”

Now, let’s be careful here. Can demons actually predict the future? No. Demons are limited by God in space and time and are not omniscient like He is. But they can MANIPULATE the future. So, for example, the league of demons working together can tell you to go to such and such a place and meet a person of such and such a description who will tell you so and so. They then get on their demon smart phones and tell the demon handler of a person of that description to get them to such and such a place to fulfill the prediction. You show up and viola! It “appears” as if the fortuneteller predicted your future. But it’s a supernatural scam and God categorically warns you to have nothing to do with fortunetelling, known as divination in Scripture, whether it be by tea leaves, crystal balls or astrology.

So, back to the story. Paul is so “troubled” by this girl’s situation that he forces the demon to leave the girl, by the power of Jesus’ name. However, the girl

has been making lots of money for some fortune-telling pimps. And they call a town meeting and get Paul and Silas arrested and then stripped, beaten, flogged and thrown in jail. For what? According to Roman law of the time, what Paul did by rescuing the girl was probably illegal because he brought “monetary hardship” on her pimps.

Aren't we glad nothing like this happens in our day, in our country? Last Tuesday was the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision legalizing abortions. Since that time, 55 million young lives have been snuffed out, mostly the children of young girls. That's 17.6% of our current population. We all grieve deeply for the 20 young lives that ended in Newtown, but each year in Connecticut, over 13,000 young lives are ended through abortion. And the #2 reason given for having the abortion is money, money over life.

So, what can be done? Well, putting money over life is a heart issue. How do we change hearts? Changed hearts will change votes.

Paul and Silas went to jail, paid the social cost of doing what was right, rescuing the young girl. And in prison what are they doing? Organizing their legal defense strategy? No, they're praying and singing. Boy, talk about being out of touch! Out of touch with society maybe, but not out of touch with real power.

**Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. (Acts 16:26)**

The jailer wakes up, thinks everyone has escaped and he prepares to commit suicide. But Paul and Silas don't leave the prison. They stay and tell the jailer “good news” which changes his heart, which is why they came to Philippi in the first place.

I want to speak to anyone here, male or female, who has been in emotional jail for years because you participated in an abortion. Like the jailer, you feel condemned and in your heart you've said what the jailer said, “What must I do to be saved?” How can I be released from this enormous weight of grief and guilt? Let me tell you a true story.

A number of years ago, a father from this church told me that he had visited his adult daughter, who as a teenager got pregnant and had an abortion against her parents' will. She told her Dad when he came to visit her that one day she was praying and telling God again how terribly sorry she was for killing her baby. She told God that the pain was just too much. Then she said to her Dad, “Suddenly, a warm calm came over me and I heard a voice say...”

And her Dad stopped her and said, “Wait! What do you mean? Did you actually hear a voice?”

She said, “Yes, I heard a real voice say to me \_\_\_\_\_ (called her by name), your sin was forgiven the first time you asked me. Your baby is here with me. Her name is Elizabeth. She can't wait to see you. Don't worry. She is fine.”

Dear One, do you see how much the Father loves you? Your child is safe with Him. Are YOU safe in Him? You can be if you will ask for His forgiveness today. Do it now. This is the ultimate solution to any kind of trouble - RUN to the Father. Let's pray...

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<sup>i</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *Reverence for Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1993)