

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Disciples, on the GO!

(Studies of the book of Acts)

Check Map and Compass - Often!

(Acts 13:13-52)

Study #17

Introduction: Lost, but making great time...

In August of 2010, my son, Zach, and my brother-in-law, Bob, and I had broken camp on the third day of our backpacking trip in the San Juan mountains of southwest Colorado.

We had been hiking south on the Continental Divide trail for a couple of hours when we saw a lone hiker walking toward us. Since the Weminuche Wilderness is a relatively remote area, when you meet someone on the trail, you stop and talk.

This guy we met asked about our travel plans and we told him. And he happily told us his.

He was what you call a “through hiker” and had been on the trail for sixty-seven days. His plan was to hike the entire Continental Divide Trail, starting at the US/Canada border and ending up at the US/Mexico border.

On this part of our trek he and we were on the same trail - the Continental Divide Trail. And it was as he was telling us about his trip that I raised my eyebrows.

See, we were hiking south on the Continental Divide Trail (toward Mexico). And when we bumped into each other, he was walking toward us (toward Canada).

So, I asked him to clarify, “*Did you say that you are traveling FROM Canada or TO Canada?*”

He clarified. “*I left Wyoming weeks ago and I’m heading south.*”

Now you want to be careful in this kind of a situation. Caution is called for when questioning a man’s grilling skills, mechanical skills, or sense of direction.

It would be especially dicey to question someone who had already hiked hundreds of miles and who had been on the trail for weeks. But somebody had to say something. So, I did.

“Friend, you need to check your compass. We’re going south and you’re going toward Canada. You’re going the wrong way!”

After a moment of staring at us, he did check and saw that he was, indeed, going the wrong way. He thanked us profusely and headed back the way he had come.

As we watched him jog down the trail, we knew what had happened. He had done what many others have done. When setting out for the day’s travel, he had failed to consult his map and compass.

In the mountains, there is sometimes a beautiful sameness to the scenery that can be disorienting.

Our through-hiking friend hadn’t noticed that he was seeing things a second time. He lost his bearings and as a result lost nearly a half day’s travel time.

But get this.

The morning we met, he had hiked quickly. He was lost, but was making excellent time.

The point? In the wilderness, it can be disastrous to go in the direction that *seems* right. Always follow the compass. Always consult the map.

What is true in wilderness travel is true when it comes to following Jesus. Regularly consult the map and compass of Scripture to stay on course.

This morning, we are tracing the steps of Paul and Barnabas on the First Missionary Journey. And we get to watch as they stay laser-focused on their mission, despite devastating disappointments.

Review...

The first steps on this journey on the island of Cyprus were filled with high adventure and mission success. However, as they left Cyprus and sailed to the Asian mainland and to the region known as *Galatia*, their helper, John Mark, abandoned Paul and Barnabas and went home to Jerusalem.

By leaving John Mark did two things.

One, he made the rest of the trip much harder for Paul and Barnabas. Two, he missed the joy of seeing God's amazing grace and life-changing power.

The message last week was, "*Don't follow John Mark's path! Don't quit! Get in the game. STAY - or GET - on mission.*"

And, if, this morning, you find yourself in John Mark's shoes, needing to get back "on mission", look for a Barnabas here who can help you get "on mission."

And if you are living as a Barnabas of a Paul, on mission for Jesus, GREAT! But, please, keep your eyes open for a John Mark, and help him or her take next steps with Jesus. The encouragement you can offer to someone who is "off mission" will make all the difference.

This week, watching Paul and Barnabas continue their journey, we hear a different message.

This week, it's not "*Get in the game.*" This week, it's "*Stay on course. Check map and compass often. Don't go in the direction that seems right. Depend on the direction God gives in His Word.*"

During His three years of ministry, Jesus issued a lot of commands. Over the centuries, Jesus' people have seen three of these commands as so central to His message, that they have named them.

- There is Jesus' **Great Commandment**. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. (Mark 12:30).
- Then, there is His **New Commandment**. We are to love each other, our fellow Jesus-followers, the way Jesus loved us. (John 13:34-35)
- There is His **Great Commission**. We are to GO and MAKE DISCIPLES - help people take spiritual next steps - TEACHING them to observe all that Jesus commanded, BAPTIZING them in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I'll go out on a limb and say that if you're keeping the Great Commandment, the New Commandment and the Great Commission on your life's front burner, you're doing just fine.

Of those three, the third - MAKE DISCIPLES - takes center stage today.

When we catch up with Paul and Barnabas, they have sailed from Cyprus and are heading into the treacherous territory of Galatia.

The first place where they spend significant time is in a city called Antioch.

Taking Jesus on the Road (vv. 13-15)

All the Way to Pisidian Antioch (vv. 13-14a)

[13] Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem. [14] But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch...

The team had been sent out from a city called Antioch. But THAT Antioch was in the region of Syria, far to the east.

THIS Antioch (Acts 13:14) was a Roman colony far off the Mediterranean coast in the rugged Taurus Mountain range.¹

This region was home to some very tough, independent mountain tribesmen. Among examples from their history we could list, the Galatians were famous because centuries earlier, they had been tough enough to have fought off the whole Greek army.

They were dangerous people and Galatia was a dangerous place. But, despite the danger, Paul and Barnabas plunged deep into this region to bring these rugged people the good news about Jesus.

Now, whenever Paul went to a new location with the gospel, he always went to the Jewish population first. So, when they rolled into Pisidian Antioch...

A Saturday Visit to the Synagogue (v. 14b)

[14b]...on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

For one thing, it made sense to go to the Jews first because they were kin. Barnabas and Paul were both Jews and to go to the synagogue felt like home.

In addition, the Jews were familiar with the Old Testament's teaching and they knew that God was going to send a Messiah/Savior. They were much more likely than the local Gentiles to be receptive to a message about Jesus being God's Messiah.

And then, I suspect that Paul and Barnabas had a strategic reason for heading to the Jewish synagogue first.

¹ Pisidian Antioch was on the border separating the political regions of Phrygia and Pisidia.

When God first spoke to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, God blessed him and charged him to *"be a blessing"* to all the nations of the earth. (Genesis 12)

Paul and Barnabas "got" that Jesus was - in the ultimate sense - the blessing of Abraham to the nations. They also would have figured that this blessing would flow to the nations through Abraham's offspring, the Jews.

In other words, they are going to the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch first to win Jews to Jesus who will win Gentiles to Jesus. Brilliant!

So, Paul and Barnabas walked into the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch and sat down for the worship service, listening politely through the whole thing (just as you do, week after week after week).²

Near the end of the service, the regulars noted the presence of these two visitors.

An Invitation Paul Couldn't Refuse (v. 15)

[15] After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it."

Obviously, Paul didn't need a second invitation.

Taking Jesus to the Jews (vv. 16-41)

A Lesson in Jewish History (vv. 16-22)

If this was a normally constructed synagogue, Paul would have stepped on to a raised platform to stand behind a podium (called a *bema*) to present the message that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah for whom these Jews had been waiting.

² In the first century, a Jewish service consisted of two public readings of Scripture, one from the Law and one from the prophets, an interactive discussion of the readings, and a time in prayer.

[16] Paul stood up,³ and motioning with his hand said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen:⁴ [17] The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. [18] For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. [19] When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance - all of which took about four hundred and fifty years.⁵ [20] After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. [21] Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. [22] After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, ‘I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.’”⁶

Everybody in the synagogue was nodding at this excellent re-telling of Jewish history. Still, as accurate as it was, it didn't seem very relevant. After all, David had been dead for a thousand years.

But, then Paul's talk transitioned from history lesson to “News Flash!”

He told his audience that sovereignty had returned to the house of David, passing from David, generation by generation, to a man named Jesus.

Telling the Story of Jesus (vv. 23-31)

[23] “From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, [24] after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

³ Evidently, standing was the posture for preaching in these synagogues. Jesus, however, stood to read and then sat to expound. (Luke 4:20)

⁴ Luke records several sample sermons from Paul in Acts (14:15-17; 17:22-31; 20:18-35). This message shows how he preached to an audience grounded in the Old Testament.

⁵ The 450 years would include the 400 years of Egyptian captivity, the 40 years of wilderness wandering and the 10 years of conquest under Joshua.

⁶ Like Stephen's sermon (and Peter's on Pentecost), a retrospective on Israel's past.

[25] And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’

[26] Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. [27] For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him (i.e. - Jesus).

[28] And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. [29] And when they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.

[30] But God raised Him from the dead; [31] and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people.”

So, in this out-of-the-way synagogue in central Galatia, hundreds of miles from Jerusalem, to a group of Jews who had never heard the story, Paul told the story of Jesus.

And then he invited all those present - men and women, young people and children - to place their trust in Jesus for eternal life.

Evangelizing (vv. 32-40)

[38] “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, [39] and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.” [40] “Therefore, take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you:

[41] ‘BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH; FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU.’”

Whenever we tell someone the good news about Jesus, listeners are presented with a choice.

Some who listen choose Jesus. Some don't. We never know what the response will be as each person weighs the evidence, considers, reflects...

But the initial response in Antioch to the apostles' invitation was very promising.

Taking Jesus to the Gentiles (vv. 42-50)

Some Respond Positively (vv. 42-43)

[42] As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath. [43] Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God.

I picture Paul and Barnabas, greeting people at the door of the synagogue as they left, shaking hands and hearing, *"Fine message, preacher. Looking forward to hearing you again next week."*

So, this is great! They are going to get a second chance to talk about Jesus.

Maybe there will be converts. Maybe the converts will take the gospel to the Antioch Gentiles. Maybe there will be the beginnings of a church. Who knows what will happen. It's all VERY exciting!

Some Oppose and Reject (vv. 44-45)

[44] And the next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of God.

When Paul and Barnabas arrived, the place was packed!

Just about everybody in Antioch - Jews AND Gentiles! - came to hear this new message Paul and Barnabas had brought with them.

And then a fly appears in the ointment. There is a wrinkle in this worship service.

[45a] But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy...

Yep. The stakeholders in the synagogue didn't appreciate the attention "their people" were giving to these outsiders and their message. They had been OK with the positive response on Week #1. But the swelling crowds on Week #2 made them insecure. Nervous. Jealous.

So, they ***[45b] began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.***⁷

Now, if we're going to "get" the impact of this disruption to the worship service, we've got to put ourselves in the shoes of the apostles. You are Paul. You are Barnabas.

You are far from home and in rugged, foreign territory. You have come to Galatia with a message of blessing. You have a plan and I think it's clear what the plan is.

You are a member of God's chosen people, the Jews. You blow into Pisidian Antioch, wanting to reach the city for Jesus, so you go first to the Jewish synagogue.

You're hoping to find a warm welcome from your people. You're expecting to find receptive hearts for your message. Your plan is to enlist your fellow Jews who will embrace Jesus to be "on mission" to take Jesus' love and grace to the non-Jews in the city.

Everything was going as planned on Week #1. But your people have now rejected you and your message. Your plan is coming apart at the seams. How deflating. How depressing. How discouraging.

If you're Paul and Barnabas, what are you tempted to do?

⁷ Luke even says that they "*blasphemed*" - which is not to say that they cursed God (the normal sense of the word), but that they attacked Paul.

Are you tempted to lose your bearings, become disoriented. Are you tempted to follow John Mark's lead and head home, quit the mission altogether?

When plans come apart and dreams implode, it's very easy to head off in wrong directions. And while we don't know if Paul and Barnabas considered quitting or pouting, we do know exactly what they did.

They consulted their map and compass. They remembered Jesus' words. His words of Commission pointed them back to true north. They recalibrated to what they were facing and kept right on doing everything they could to make disciples in Pisidian Antioch.⁸

Turning to the Gentiles (vv. 46-49)

[46] Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. [47] For so the Lord has commanded us, "I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH."

The Jews in that synagogue could have been the light that lit up their city for Jesus. They could have been teammates with Paul and Barnabas to bring blessing to the Gentiles of Pisidian Antioch.

They won't be. But Paul and Barnabas still can be. And these two heroes abandoned Plan A and, on the fly, adopted Plan B. Needless to say, the Gentiles were tickled pink.

[48] When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. [49] And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.

⁸ This pattern of turning from the Jews to Gentiles was repeated in city after city.

The two missionaries had initially been "sent out" on their journey by a very friendly [Syrian] Antioch. Now, they're going to be "sent away" by a very unfriendly [Pisidian] Antioch.

Driven Out of Town (vv. 50-52)

[50] But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.

The final report shows the apostles shaking ***[51]...off the dust of their feet⁹ in protest against them and*** leaving town, with the new Gentile believers smiling from ear to ear.¹⁰

Paul and Barnabas stayed "on mission." And now, they aren't confused about what to do next or where to go next. Their way is clear. It's on to Iconium, the next city on the Galatian highway.

Conclusion:

I told the story at the beginning of a hiker who got turned around on the Continental Divide Trail and went the wrong direction. It's kind of a funny story.

But, lest you think I'm above such errors, you should know that I've done the same thing - in a minor way, lots of times; in a major way, twice! - with nearly disastrous results.

The truth is, it's easy to get turned around on the trail. It's easy to lose your bearings and mistake north for south when there aren't any signs.

⁹ Jesus told His disciples to "shake off the dust from your feet" if a town did not receive their message. (Matthew 10:14; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5; 10:11)

¹⁰ And, as we read at the end of Acts 14, the nucleus of a church was established and Elders were installed by the time Paul and Barnabas came back through Pisidian Antioch on the return leg of this journey.

Getting turned around is tragic because retracing steps is exhausting and time-consuming. I regret every time I've gotten lost because I failed to consult map and compass on the trail.

And as much as I regret those errors, I regret even more the times when I've lost my bearings in my walk with Jesus.

Those times have most often happened when one or another of my plans came apart at the seams, or when someone for whom I had high hopes stopped following Jesus, or when something disruptive / disappointing / discouraging happened.

That's when I'm tempted to lose a laser-focus on Jesus' Great Commission.

If that's your story, too, this time to reflect on the experience of Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch is an invitation to take out the map and compass.

Review the commands of Jesus. Think Great Commandment, New Commandment, Great Commission.

Consider the beauty of a life given to worship, love, and mission. THAT's the life you were made to live. That's the life that leads to deep joy and transcendent purpose.

And today, let's refuse to be derailed by the challenges life throws at us. Let's seek and find life in Jesus. And let's grow, together, to be "on mission" for our Savior.