

Who Told You To Stop?

Acts 13:13-52

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I ran track in High School and my thing was running the sprints, 100, 200, hurdles, relays and such. In my Junior year the School hired a new track coach. At every practice this coach would give a short talk on strategy and tactics for our next track meet. At first, we were all bored to tears with these talks, but as the season progressed, we slowly realize how valuable his planning was.

A scout was sent to review the next team we would be facing. The scout would come back with various recommendations from what were the best lanes on the track to use, what size spikes we should wear on our shoes, to how long the guy who started each race paused before shooting the starting gun.

The best tactic our coach every came up with was in our sprint relays. In a relay, you hand a baton from runner to runner. Durning the handoff, the runner in front who receives the baton does not look back, so the running in back who is handing off the baton yells out something so the man in front knows to reach back to grab the baton. The rules were that you could say anything you wanted to when you were handing off the baton. Most teams would call out the name of the person in front of them, like, "Jack," or "Randy" and then Randy would reach back and take the baton. Some teams would use the name of their school, "West High," "Diamond High." Our relay team used the name of our high school.

Well, it was the end of the season and our 400 relay team had reached the regional finals and we were up against teams that were very fast - we knew we stood no chance at all. Our coach was well aware of this, so he told us we had to use this new word, and we were to spend half of each practice handing off the baton yelling this new word, which we grudgingly did.

So when time came, we all went to our places and stood ready to run, the gun sounded and the runners were off. I was the last man on our team, the final leg of the race, so I watched with growing disappointment as our team fell father and father behind with each handoff.

Finally, it was my turn. Now even though we were dead last, all the runners were very close to each other, no team had pulled very far ahead of another team. I started running and my teammate Mike came up behind me and shouted our new word that the coach had insisted we use, Mike shouted, "STOP!" I took the baton and ran as fast as I could

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and hit the finish line seconds later....all alone. All the other teams, had done exactly as my teammate Mike had shouted, they all stopped.

They stopped, but who told them to stop?

The NT tells us a total of six times that our Christian life is like a race (Acts 20:24; 1 Cor 9:24; Gal 2:2; Gal 5:7; 2 Tim 4:7; Heb 12:1). Our goal is to continue.... We read in Hebrews 12:1, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

Are we called to success in our Christian walk? Actually, no.

In our story we see twice as much failure as success. Now, let's set aside the thoughts of success and failure for a moment. The Apostle Paul. He is considered one of the great men of the New Testament. What makes Paul great? Is it the ratios of success over his failures?

Paul wasn't great because of more success than failure in his Christian walk, Paul was great because he knew Jesus Christ well. What made Paul great was how closely he knew Jesus Christ.

For you and I, what will make us great in the kingdom of God. Success? No, Knowing Jesus Christ well.

We are called to neither success or failure, instead, we are called to obedience to the Holy Spirit. See, in our story today Paul and Barnabas experience great success with many believing the Gospel of Jesus Christ - is their success because of their own power, or is it by the power of Jesus Christ? In the same way Paul and Barnabas experience great failure when many reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ and expel them from the city - again, is their failure because of their own power, or is Jesus Christ in control of the situation?

We see this determination throughout the book of Acts. If there are great obstacles the believers keep on endure. If they achieve great success, they continue on. Success and failure, good circumstances and difficult circumstances these are not the things to focus on in our Christian walk - our focus should be getting to know Jesus Christ.

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I think if we are honest with ourselves, when we are doing well in our Christian walk, we believe that God is happy with us and in contrast when we see that we are not doing well, we believe God may not be pleased with us. I think much of that kind of thinking is the result of us not seeing that both success and failure in our Christian walk have one thing in common for us: They both allow us to become closer to Jesus Christ

Let's look at how these men experience both failure and success and allow both to build their walk with the Lord Jesus. We can apply their experience to our lives.

Paul, Barnabas and John Mark have had great success on the island of Cyprus and now they set sail to [Perga](#), except, John Mark has gone home to Jerusalem. It is so quick it almost is like it is a passing thought there in verse 13, but this is a major event.

There is no record of what was said, or what went down between these men. But, in Chapter 15 we see that Paul refuses to take John Mark with him, apparently because he feels that he cannot trust him. Paul regards this as a desertion and for a time Paul does not want to work with John Mark.

Scholars find John Mark leaving Paul and Barnabas a mystery. Here these men have had great success on the island of Cyprus. They have seen many people come to the Lord and and they have seen a powerful movement of the Holy Spirit - Why would John Mark want to leave after such phenomenal success? It would seem to make more sense if they had suffered great persecution, but they did very well.

What we have here is some sort of personal failure between the men that is probably based upon personal interaction, rather than their success. Somehow, somehow they did not get along. In the end, these men do come to terms with each other and Paul who is clearly put out by John Mark (chapter 15) eventually praises John Mark as a man who is a great help.

Yet here, on the tail of a great success, they have a personal failure. Paul and Barnabas go on their way.

Now, let me stop here a moment and ask: Is your faith based upon how well you do in your spiritual walk? I mean for example, if you had a personal failure like Paul and

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Barnabas did, and they did, on a level that was so great John Mark walked away, if you had a personal failure like that, what effect would it have on your faith?

Is our faith an emotional thing? Does it rise and fall on incidents in our life?

D.L. Moody was a man known for a great faith, this is what he said about his faith: "I prayed for a faith and thought that someday it would come and strike me like lightning. But the faith didn't come to me. One day I read in Romans that faith comes by hearing the word of God. I had up to this time closed my bible and prayed for faith. Now I opened my bible and began to study, and my faith has been growing ever since.

Don't wait for your faith to come to you, grab your bible and find your faith.

These men, in spite of a great personal failure, sail to Perga [\[photo's of Perga here\]](#). Perga stood near the river Cestrus, it was seven miles up river from the Mediterranean Sea, but at that time you could sail the seven miles right up the river to Perga. Perga had extensive wetlands and Malaria was known to exist there. It has been suggested that Paul caught malaria here as in Galatians 4 he talks about being ill in this time. It is speculated that Paul would have sought to travel to the higher altitudes to recover and Pisidian Antioch where they are headed was located at 3600 feet. But, the truth is we have no idea what illness came upon Paul, we do know it caused him to stay in this area longer than he had planned.

After they land at Perga they then head through the Tarsus mountain range through the Klimax pass and then down into the Anthios valley then up to Pisidian Antioch. Remember, these men are not just wandering about, they are guided by the Holy Spirit to this city. There were several cities in the Roman Empire named Antioch and this Antioch is, [Pisidian Antioch](#), it is a different Antioch than the one they were originally in chapter 12.

This is not such an unusual thing to have many places names the same. The state of New Jersey has 13 towns all named the same: Hamilton.

So again, as we saw in Cyprus, Barnabas and Paul start in the city of Pisidian Antioch at the Synagogue. What would happen is that these two men would be quickly noticed as Jewish visitors and they would be approached by a member of the Synagogue, after

finding out that Paul was an educated rabbi, there would then be an invitation from the synagogue leaders for Paul to speak. Here we see the invitation comes after the reading of the OT. Notice that Paul stands up to talk. In the Gospels we see Jesus sit down to speak, but here Paul stands up. Paul is asked to give word of exhortation and this was given while standing. However, if one was expounding upon the scriptures that were just read then one would sit, as we saw Jesus did. So, Paul is not necessarily interpreting the Scripture for the day, he is just speaking a word of exhortation to the congregation.

Paul uses a form of exhortation called - a historical retrospect. What he is doing is taking the historical elements from the OT and using them as a prelude to the Gospel. Those in attendance would know these stories by heart. Paul sets the listener up to put the pieces together on how the OT leads to Jesus as the Messiah. This style sermon was the model for evangelism in the early church. It is specifically designed to reach a population with an understanding of the OT.

Paul goes through a selection of Hebrew history and notice, he concentrates on David, for God promises David a perpetual kingdom - this was a concrete hope of the Jewish people. Up to this time the Jewish people had in essence equated the kingdom of God with the kingdom of Israel. The two went hand in hand, one could not have the kingdom of God without Israel or Israel without the kingdom of God.

Paul then goes not to explain that perpetual kingdom is not the state of Israel, but revolves around the saving grace of the person of Jesus Christ. Paul separates for them the state of Israel from the kingdom of God.

We read in Ezekiel 21:27 of Israel, "A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! It will not be restored until he comes to whom it rightfully belongs; to him I will give it." Ezekiel is talking about Jesus Christ in fulfilling these words and Paul in his sermon tells them the same thing: Jesus is the Messiah.

Remember this is not about Paul, not about Barnabas, this is all about Jesus - this directly relates to Jesus Christ as it brings people in fellowship with Jesus.

Notice in verse 42, there is a very favorable response from those in attendance, so much so that they are invited back to speak the next week. Now in your bible it says the people invited them back to speak, but the reality was that only the leaders of the synagogue

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could issue such an invitation. So at this point, it appears everyone is pleased with Paul and Barnabas, even the leaders of the synagogue.

But oh what can happen in a week. Word got out in the city and a whole bunch of people show up and seats reserved for prominent families are taken by outsiders in the synagogue. People are looking for answers to life's questions. They are living just like the people on Cyprus and their philosophies and pagan religions cannot answer their questions about life, it sounds like Paul and Barnabas can.

Notice how these men who invited Paul back become jealous and speak out against Paul, and notice a funny thing happens: The gentiles are open to hearing a message they would normally find mostly unacceptable, and the leaders who the message was tailored for who should have found it acceptable were now closed to the message they would normally believe. Those who should believe don't, and those who shouldn't believe do.

Overnight, the Jewish leaders have lost their standing of prominence in the synagogue. This man from the outside has more power than they ever dreamed of. But, the funny thing is, by opposing the gospel, the Jewish leaders give up the very thing they want, legitimacy in the city. If all these gentiles turned to Jesus along with the Jews, who would lead them? The believing synagogue leaders of course. But, there is another element that is behind their unbelief, and it is racism.

Ethnically there was a large population of [Gauls](#) who had settled here in the area around Antioch in the third century B.C. And so, many of the people standing before Paul were Gauls. Understand, the Jews looked down upon the Romans and Greeks as barbaric in how they lived, but understand further, that the Greeks and the Romans looked down on the Gauls as flat out barbarians. To the Jews the Greeks and the Romans were barbaric, but the Gauls, they were like the cast of a Gieco commercial - they were equal with cavemen.

Look, for the early Christian church it was culturally a stretch for Samaritans to become Christians, and they were half Jewish, AND NOW Paul is not only preaching to gentiles, he is preaching to barbarians, is there any limit who these guys would let into the church - apparently not, I mean.....you're sitting here aren't you?

Barbarians in the church, just by saying that they believe? How absurd is that?

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Paul's response Acts 13:46 Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. 47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us: " 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

Now even more of the gentiles believe. Now in verse 48, you can see there in your bible, and all who were appointed for eternal life believed" That particular phrasing conveys the image of names being written down in a registry permanently - these people had a very real belief, and one by the way, that cannot be lost nor taken away.

What Paul is clearly saying is that Jews and gentiles now stand on equal footing before God and can be appealed to directly.

What a great success! Now Paul even has barbarians believing.

This is too much for the Jewish leaders and they incite people of power against them and have them expelled from, not only the city, but the whole region.

Personal failure, triumphant success, failure again as they have lost their chance to bring more to the gospel.

They shake of the dust, a sign of protest and head to Iconium. They return a few months later in chapter 14 but still, they ultimately walk away as failures.

Ok let me ask you this? As Paul and Barnabas walk away, where is their faith at? Is it in the depths? Is it at an all time low?

It is at the same place it always was, for faith is not based upon success or failure. Success and failure was not what made these two men great - it was the one they knew Jesus Christ, and how well they knew him.