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The Good Old Days

Acts 15

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“Father in Heaven, we do want Jesus to walk with us. Lord, it’s the longing of our hearts to have an experience with Him that will get us from where we are to where You want us to be, and of course ultimately to Heaven. We are praying Heavenly Father that today’s message will be just what You want us to hear. So we pray that You would be the One who teaches, You would be the One who gives the proper impressions through Your Spirit, and that You Heavenly Father will be so powerful in our midst that all of us will be changed and affected for eternity for what is said here. We ask this in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Forty four years ago this Fall, I started the fourth grade. And it was a big occasion for me because our family had moved to a new town. I didn’t know anybody. I would become acquainted with the kids, it was a small town. And we probably had 35 kids in our class, and there were several fourth grade classes. But there was one kid in particular that I remember. I remember his name, his name was Denis. But he was never called by that name. Now, the teacher called him that so we knew that was his name, but he had another name that everybody else called him. And I asked my brother who still lives in that town and Denis still lives there, I said, “Does he still go by that other name?” And he said, “Oh yes, everybody calls him that.” The name!

You know in the Bible the parents were very particular about the names that they gave to their children. Names were important. In fact, they would teach their children a Bible verse that used either a part of their name or all of their name and that became known as their name verse. And a Hebrew child growing up would pray a prayer every night before they went to bed incorporating that verse in the prayer. That was their name verse. Name! The Bible talks of name in terms of reputation. “It’s better to have a good name than to have riches. It’s better to have a good name than to have sweet smelling perfume,” Solomon said, the first one in Proverbs and the second one in Ecclesiastes. A good name! A good name was associated with reputation.

Now, I don’t know how Denis got his nick-name? I’ll leave it to your imagination. But his nick-name was “Buggers.” He still has that nick-name today. Fifty something years old, “Hey Buggers, how are you doing?” “I am great, how are you doing?” A name! What is your name, what is your reputation? I’d like to study that with you today in Acts chapter 15. In Acts 15 we have been looking at the Jerusalem Council. Paul and Barnabas were in the city of Antioch. They had returned from their first missionary journey. And when they returned, there was trouble. “Judeizers” as they were called had come into the region of Antioch. And they were trying to convince the Gentiles that they had to be circumcised and they had to keep the Law of Moses. It created a tremendous tension in the church.

So the church asked Paul and Barnabas to go to Jerusalem to talk to the leaders of the church and get some resolution. They did, and the church decided to send Judas and Silas with a letter, and they went back to Antioch. The letter was read to the Gentiles, there was great rejoicing, and we come to our story, verse 36. Chapter 15 verse 36: "Then after some days, Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we had preached the Word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.' Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work."

"Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches."

Wow, I could show you in the Bible that the Bible says Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit. Barnabas was a good man filled with the Holy Spirit. Two men filled with the Holy Spirit in such contention they can't get along anymore, they split up. They go different ways. What is going on? One of the things, you know Paul sees the big picture. "We got to get out there and win the world to Christ. We'll go from city to city to city and we will conquer this land for Jesus." And you know there is truth to that. And Barnabas sees things a little smaller. He says, "But wait the minute. People are more important than just a mission. And Mark is a person, and the Gospel is more important to him." So Barnabas sees every individual. Paul sees the crowd. They are both right, they are both right but they have such a sharp contention and disagreement that they end up splitting up.

The Greek word that is used is "paroximos." It's the only place in the Bible that is used. There is an English word, and strangely I can pronounce the Greek one easier than I can the English one. The English one is "paroxysm." And in English it means "a fit, an attack, a sudden increase or reoccurrence of symptoms." And if you are in a medical world, it would be like a disease that paws, it comes on. It's considered like a convulsion, a paroxysm of coughing, just violent, just really quick, fast, sudden. It also means a sudden, violent emotion or action, a paroxysm of rage. So here you have Paul and Barnabas in a rage. Well who is right? The Bible does not tell us who is right, just records the story.

Well, when I read this I thought, "Well okay, well what do we study here?" "God can and does work despite human error," well that's preachable. But I just preached that sermon to you. How about this one, "The Good Old Days" that's what the sermon title is, because on Wednesday I was thinking, "Oh yes, I can get some traction with that." Because a lot of people think Christianity was better back then. Or even in our denomination it was better back then.

Oh, if we could just go back to the good old days where we all looked alike. We were all dressed alike and we all ate alike. Yes, good old days!

But here in the Bible I could show you in the Book of Acts that good old days were filled with conflict. People didn't get along back then any better than we get along now. And the truth is, the church was not perfect then, it's never been perfect and it never will be perfect. In fact, the good news is, someday, we won't be able to buy or sell, you are not going to have Pastors overseeing you; you are going to have to walk with Jesus. That will be the church. That's when it will be perfect. Take the organization out of it. But until that day we need the organization. Please don't misunderstand what I am saying. We need organization, we need the conference. I don't know about the other levels of administration, but we need the conference.

These guys back then fought and struggled, tried to figure things out. I wondered, you know, here maybe we can talk about conflict resolution. It may save some marriages, or some relationships that are tending towards marriage. Because you have the classic, "He is right; he is right" well here, but in the marriage it will be, "He is right, she is right." And by the way, most divorces happen because both people are right. Paul sees plan A or option A, Barnabas sees option B, that's it. They are both right. Barnabas is going to help save Mark; Paul is going to help save the world. "And Mark quit on us, we don't want him anymore." And they are both right. And they are both digging in, and they are budding heads over it.

And that's what happens in marriage, and that's what happens in all kinds of relationships. Two people are right. They only think there is their option. You know, there are the only two options. But then at last, God forces the third option. "Paul you take Silas, Barnabas, you take Mark." The third option, I thought, "Man I can preach that." That even has a nice ring to it, "The third option." You can save your marriage. Take the good from you and the good from the other one, humble yourselves in the presence of God and say now how do we weld these two together and come up with that third option which is going to be better than the one you came up with anyways individually. But, well I just preached that sermon to you, so okay, work on that third option.

By the way, the plan of redemption is the third option, did you know that? That's what really got me excited about it. Adam and Eve were told, "Obey and live, disobey you die." Jesus is the third option after their disobedience. Well, I thought too, well, these men aren't perfect but they are filled with the Holy Spirit that would be good. I could go through the Bible with you and look at one character after another and point out their flaws. That would give us hope. You know, Noah was a blameless man, perfect in his generation. Turn two pages and you'll find him laying drunk in his tent. It might give you some courage. Abraham lies to Abimelech. Plague comes on the household. God says to Abimelech, "Yeah, you know that guy that lied to you, he

is my prophet. He'll pray for you and you'll get well." I thought that could be a good sermon, but I just preached that to you too.

But here is what I think God wants us to hear today. And that is this: how do you restore a reputation that has been hurt, maybe even destroyed. How do you restore it? How do you get a good name back when you have done something that has taken that good name away? It maybe something you did in high school? People are stuck with names forever. They are stuck with reputations forever. There must be a way to overcome it. I know there are people who have been in church and they have made a mess out of their lives in some ways. And they feel like, "Oh man, if I go to church, everybody will be staring at me because they'll all know, I am the one. Oh yes, I am the one, I did it, it's me."

So we are going to look at Mark. We are going to see what his reputation was, how he lost it, and how he got it back. Let's turn to Acts chapter 12 beginning with verses 11 and 12. We are going to look at some passages and then we are going to piece together. Rather fascinating story, Acts 12:11, "And when Peter had come to himself, he said; 'Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people.'" What does that mean 'he came to himself'? Well the story that we are involved in here, Peter had been arrested, he's put in prison and he is chained to his guards. And at night an angel came, woke him up, unchained him from his guards, lead him through the gates, out into the street, and the whole time Peter is thinking, "Am I dreaming this or is this real?" He keeps pinching himself, whatever he does; he can't tell. When he finally comes to himself, he is outside; he is in the streets of Jerusalem. He realizes, "Wow, I have been delivered from prison, the chains are off."

What is he going to do? Verse 12: "So when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying." So here you have some information. Mark is called John sometimes, sometimes he is called John Mark, sometimes is just John and sometimes is just Mark, that's him. And he has a mother Mary. And it's her house, which means she is a widow. She is a wealthy widow. It's a large house. The Christians are gathered there praying. This is the story where Peter goes to the gate and he knocks, and Rhoda the servant girl comes and looks and says: "Aha it's Peter." And runs back inside and tells the people that are praying, and they said, "It can't be. It must be his ghost, he is locked up." And Peter keeps knocking, comes in eventually, has prayer with them and he leaves. Mary's house! Mark is a son of a wealthy widow. Paul will ultimately consider him 'a rich Mama's boy.' And he will demonstrate that type of behavior at least in one incident in his life.

Let's go to Acts chapter 1 verses 12 and 13. Jesus had just gone up to heaven and this is an incident in the early church. Verses 12 and 13, "Then they returned to Jerusalem from the

mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying..." and it identifies the eleven apostles that were left after Judas had hung himself. They went into the upper room. That's Mary's house. Peter came to Mary's house in Acts 12. He had been there earlier. In Acts chapter 1, but they had all been there earlier than that.

Let's go to Mark 14. It's an amazing time period in the life of Jesus. During that last week of his life, this story takes place. Mark 14 verse 10 it says, "Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. So when they hear it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Jesus." Jesus knows this. He knows Judas for thirty pieces of silver is going to betray Him. He understands that. Jesus wants to spend some quality time with His followers before He is arrested. He needs a private place to do it. So Jesus is going to work with some intrigue here. He's got to work in such a way that Judas does not know where He is going to be meeting with the twelve. And Judas is one of the twelve, so how do you do that?

Ah, that's the genius of God. It's kind of humorous in a way how the Lord does this. But in verse 12 you read: "Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare that You may eat the Passover?" Now if you do a little cross-referencing here, you'll discover that Peter and John will be the ones that Jesus sends. Verse 13: "So Jesus sent out two of His disciples and said to them, 'Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water, follow him.'" Hello, follow what? "Lord, You sent us on a lot of crazy missions, but this is, common. There will be over a million people in the city. They are going to sacrifice two hundred fifty thousand lambs over the next few days of Passover. I mean, it is just chaos in there, and You want us to walk into that city and you want us to find a man carrying a water pot and follow him?"

Now, that's pretty strange. And even what is more strange is that, we don't know this in our culture, but in their culture, men didn't carry water pots, only the women did. So you can imagine Peter and John on their way into the city, "Why do we have to follow some sissy guy that's carrying water, some girly man, you know. Oh man, Jesus is a nut here, man what is going on?" But what do you do? You know it's God. Have you ever noticed sometimes it takes faith to serve God? "Go into the city." They did. They found a man carrying a pitcher. Verse 14 Jesus says: "Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and prepared; there make ready for us."

"So they went out. They came into the city, and they found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover." It's the upper room. Same place that they were when they were praying after Jesus went up to heaven. Same place they were when they were praying for Peter

to be delivered from prison. Now the upper room, the last supper experience, Thursday; it's all set up and ready to go, and Judas doesn't have a chance to tip anybody off. And so Jesus and the twelve come to the upper room. And it is there that they celebrate the last supper together.

Now, I will not read the passage, but I will leave it for an assignment for you. If you will turn to John 13: 21 and following, you'll discover that Judas will leave that room before everybody else. Here is what's happening. The table is kind of in a horse-shoe shape. The table is just actually a couple of inches off the ground. And they recline around the table. They lay on their left side, on their left arm and they eat with their right. Furthest one on the right is John, then you have Jesus, then you have Judas. And it goes all the way around 'till you have Peter over on the far end. And in conversation Jesus is telling, "One of you is going to betray me." And the story kind of goes like this: Peter goes, 'Pst, pst, hay John, ask Him who it is?' You know Peter. He is a sanguine, 'Ask Him who it is, let's find out.'

So John is leaning on the breast of Jesus, he's called, he is laying there. He's got his head so that's right on Jesus' chest, he looks up and he says: "Jesus, who is it?" And Jesus looks down at him, and He says, "The one in whom I dip this bread and give it to." And Jesus is laying right on the chest of Judas. The Son of God, how can you get much closer than that? His head is right on the heart of Judas. And He dips the bread and He hands it to Judas. And in that story, Judas, it clicks with him. "He knows." Oh yeah, God always knows! And the Lord said, "What you are going to do, do quickly." And Judas got up and left and the others are confused. They don't know what's going on?

Now that helps us in the story because of what we are going to read next. Here in Mark 14 look at verse 48. This is the arrest. It takes place about midnight in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is there with eleven of His followers. Mark 14 verse 48: "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.' Then they all forsook Him and fled. Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him, and he left the line cloth and fled from them naked."

Wow! It's an interesting story. When we piece it all together we have a picture. Here is what happened. That evening Jesus and his disciples are in the upper room at the house of Mary. They celebrate the last supper, and Jesus teaches them. Chapters 13 through I believe it is 17 of the Gospel of John are the things He taught them that night. And then He leaves with those eleven. He goes out into the Garden of Gethsemane. And there at the Garden of Gethsemane He is praying. Now Judas does not know that He left the upper room. So when Judas comes with the priests and the temple police and the soldiers and the rabble, when they come they go

first to the house of Mary. Everybody is in bad by now. Everybody is asleep. They knock on the door. “Where is Christ, where is He?” “He is not here.” Well Judas knows where He prays, up in the Garden. So they head up there but they awoke John.

Now fellows, I am not asking for any confessions, I am not asking for any descriptions but I will say this. I do know that some men sleep with pajamas and some sleep without pajamas and combinations of whatever. Apparently this guy didn’t sleep with pajamas. It’s Mark that is written about here. He writes the story and he writes about himself. And what happens is they are going out to arrest Jesus. So he grubs something quick, throws it around him, runs after them, and when he sees everybody else fleeing, and some of the young men that are there recognized who he is, he starts to take off. They grab the—whatever he is in, and he is—time to get home. He runs home to Mama. And that becomes his reputation. He runs home to Mama. And unfortunately, he did it again.

Look at Acts 13. In Acts chapter 13 Paul and Barnabas are being sent out on their very first missionary journey. It will take about two years; they’ll be gone that long. And it says in verse 5: “And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the work of God in the synagogues, of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant.” Now that’s John Mark or Mark or John, that’s the guy we are talking about. Acts 13 verse 13: “Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.” It got too hard. He ran home to Mama again. So he’s got the reputation, he is a runner. It gets too hard, he books, he is gone. Forget about him.

So now when we come to Paul and Barnabas, you can begin to understand the tension. Paul is saying, “Look, this is for big boys.” Paul is saying, “I was stoned. The only reason they stopped stoning me is because they thought I was dead. This is not for boys. This is a man’s work. And if we are going to have somebody there they’ll need to pull their load; he doesn’t. He runs home to Mama all the time.” Barnabas knows something that Paul doesn’t. You see if you were to turn to Colossians 4 verse 10 you’d discover that Barnabas and Mark are cousins. So when Paul and Barnabas came down from Antioch for the Jerusalem Council, it would only be natural that Barnabas would go stay at Aunt Mary’s house. She’s got a big house and she’s very hospitable, always has people over there.

So there is Barnabas. And Barnabas has been away from Mark now for several years. It’s given Mark a chance to grow up, a chance to get some perspective, a chance for Mark to do a lot of thinking. And sometime during that time period Barnabas and Mark connect. And Barnabas realizes Mark needs another shot. Mark needs another chance. And so when this Council is over, and Barnabas and Paul head back, a short time later, Mark arrives on the scene. Now, as you know, it wasn’t pretty what happened. In fact, Barnabas is never mentioned again in the

Book of Acts. All the focus becomes on Paul. Paul will later write that Barnabas is a good man. But their relationship for working together is over.

But I have a question for you. What are you supposed to do when your reputation is ruined? What are you supposed to do when you are embarrassed to be you because of what you've done? And you feel like everybody knows about it. Number 1, try again! You've got to try again. Mark is going to. He is going to try again. Number 2, don't deny it! If you failed, don't try to blame any circumstances or anybody else. Don't deny it. Admit it. And it's true, what you were involved in may stay with you for a long time, but I am telling you, that actually may be a symbol of victory. Let me give an example.

In James 2:25 and in Hebrews 11:31 they mentioned Rehab. Now you know the stories of Rehab. The spies came into the city of Jericho, and Rehab ran a—she was a harlot. And these guys came in and they stayed with her. Which I always thought it was kind of fascinating for missionaries, but anyways, they stay with her. And she hides them and says, "Hey, I want to be one of you." And they said, "You can. Put a scarlet cord in the window and anybody that's in this facility with you, your family, friends, whoever is there, they'll be saved." Rehab actually becomes a powerful believer in God. She becomes part of the lineage of Jesus Himself. And she is a great woman, and should we be faithful we are going to see Rehab in heaven.

But nearly fifteen hundred years later, James and whoever wrote Hebrews, still calls her, "Rehab the Harlot." You think you'd outlive that. But no, it became a symbol of victory. Rehab the Harlot! Well she is not active as a harlot, but that's what she did, but she'll be in heaven. Try again! Don't deny it. Number 3, don't forget it! Paul never forgot that he used to drag people off to prison because they were Christians. He referred to it often in his life. He not only would not forget about it, he wouldn't let anybody else forget about it. "That was me" he was saying before Jesus apprehended me on the way to Damascus that was me. And by not forgetting it, Paul realized that not only was that him back then, but the minute he walked away from serving Christ, that was him again.

You see if God comes into your life as an alcoholic and you find victory, take God out of your life, you are back to being an alcoholic again. Don't ever forget. In fact, Jesus tells an interesting story that lays out as spiritual principle that I've seen in people's lives. And He describes it this way. A house is there and the demon is cast out. And the house is swept clean. The demon comes back and finds it empty and brings seven others with him. In essence, Jesus is teaching; once sin, the demon is cast out of a person's life and there is cleanness there. You've got to fill it with Jesus. If not, and you leave it vacant, seven times more problems are coming your way. Never forget! If you forget what you've been delivered from, you forget who you really are without Jesus.



So Mark, try again! Mark, don't deny it! Mark, don't forget it, and Mark overcome it. Look at Revelation chapter 3, our last passage today. In Revelation 3 verse 12, Jesus is the One speaking. He says, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God." Wow! Overcome, become a pillar in the temple of God. "And he shall go out no more, and I will write on him the name of my God." The name of God that means the character of God written upon this person, "...and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from my God, and I will write on him my new name."

Do you want a new name? Overcome! Overcome in the power of Christ and you will have a new name. I don't know what name Jesus is going to give us. But I know it will be better than "buggers." It will be better than that. Some of you may be very discouraged because of your life because of something you have done that has tainted you and given you a reputation. I say this, try again! Don't deny it, don't forget, and by God's grace, overcome it.

So what happened to Mark? You know, what happened to the "Mama's boy," born into wealth? What happened to him? He went on to become a partner with Peter. Most scholars believe that Mark wrote the epistles for Peter. Peter told him what to say, and Mark wrote them. Peter was an eyewitness to the events of Jesus. He told all that to Mark and Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark. Later, Paul would write a letter and say: "Send Mark to me. Send him to me. He is so profitable to be around. He is so helpful. I am in jail, and I need that man." Mark overcame. He was no longer known as the one who would run. He became known as the one you wanted with you, the very opposite reputation that he had.

I have no idea what struggles you have in your heart? What you wish you'd never done. Try again! Don't deny it, don't forget it and overcome it. Oh folks, Jesus is offering us a new name, and if you would like to say, "I want a new name" I am going to ask you to stand right where you are at. "Father in Heaven I pray for victory for all of us here. And you know I'd go through that list again, but I'd forget it. But, these folks can remember it, and I pray they'll apply it to their lives. And victory in Christ will be theirs. I pray this in Jesus name, Amen."