

Barnabus - The Encourager

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[0 : 00] As we seek the Lord's help, can we turn in our Bibles to the last passage that we read, the book of Acts and chapter 11. Acts chapter 11, and we can read again verse 23.

Acts 11, verse 23. As he's speaking about Barnabas, it says, And when he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose. He exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord. Nicknames are very common here in the islands. When I went home for lunch today, my brother was asking me, did I see this fellow or did I see that person? And inevitably it was nicknames he was using. And nicknames, sometimes they're not very complimentary.

Other times they're pretty vague. Sometimes they make perfect sense. Barnabas was a nickname. The guy's real name we read in Acts chapter 4.

[1 : 14] He was called Joseph. He was from Cyprus. And in Acts chapter 4, we read that the apostles called him Barnabas, which means son of encouragement.

Barnabas was an encourager. And he was a great asset to the New Testament church. And if there's one thing the church needs today, it is encourager.

I don't need to tell you that we meet with plenty discouragement. And even the Christian can find it easy to be discouraged.

And so we need people like Barnabas who will build others up. In fact, we need to become the people who build others up.

We need to practice encouragement. Now, there are some people, and you might say, well, they're unnatural. It's just a gift that they've got.

[2 : 27] But that is not true of the vast majority of us. The opposite is probably true of us. Because we're sinners by nature, and we are more ready to criticize, to find fault, to look for flaws in others, than we are to go looking for potential.

I think that's a fact of life. It's the way we're made. And I don't know, maybe you're here tonight, and you are discouraged. Maybe life is getting you down.

Maybe you're struggling with some issue in your own family, or in your own life, or in your workplace, or wherever it might be. You're finding the going tough. Would it make a difference if someone came alongside you to encourage you?

I'm pretty sure it would. I'm pretty certain it would. But then we've also got to ask, when was the last time I did that for somebody else?

When was the last time I came alongside someone and spoke a word of encouragement? Or did something for them that would help them in a difficult situation?

[3 : 52] So I'd like us to think tonight, or begin thinking tonight, about how we can become encouragers by learning from this man, Barnabas, who was sent by the church to Antioch, where there had been many, many converts.

There had been a work of God's spirit. And he was the man that they sent there. And it can be helpful, I think, to look at this man who has the nickname the encourager, and to learn from the way that he interacts with those that he meets at Antioch.

I want us to see three things tonight about Barnabas. I want us to see that he encouraged new converts, and then secondly, that he encouraged a new preacher, and then thirdly, that he encouraged a deserter.

So these three things about Barnabas tonight. He encouraged new converts, he encouraged a new preacher, and he encouraged a deserter. Maybe just take a couple of minutes to set the scene, get to the context here so we understand what's going on.

The book of Acts recounts for us the dramatic growth in the New Testament church after Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension. When Jesus ascended to heaven, there were 120 believers. [5 : 17] Not that long after that, the day of Pentecost, there was 3,120 believers or so. Meanwhile, after that, it had risen to 5,000. Things were going well.

But then came trouble. Then came persecution. Stephen was martyred, and the believers were dispersed. They had to flee for their lives.

You saw that in verse 19 where we began reading. Those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.

But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists also preaching the word, preaching the Lord Jesus.

Hellenists, if you look at your footnote, it is just non-Jews, Greeks. So the persecution then caused them to scatter. It was bad news, you might say.

[6 : 21] But God often uses bad news for good purposes. And God used that persecution to ensure that his word spread far and wide, that his word spread not just to Jews, but also to the non-Jews, to the Greeks.

And in Antioch in particular, there was great fruit. There were large numbers of conversions. Look at verse 21. The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. And that's where Barnabas comes in. When news of this great work of God in Antioch gets back to Jerusalem, the church need to decide who are we going to send.

And Barnabas is the man that they choose to send to Antioch. Now, we're not told if he was given any particular remit. Was he sent there to assess whether this work was genuine?

Was he sent there just to see what was going on and report back? Or was he sent there to stay and to nurture these young believers and disciple them in their faith?

[7 : 33] We're just, we're not told that. We're not told if he was given any particular remit. But I want us to go on and just look at how he interacts with those that he meets with in Antioch.

So first of all, I want us to see that he encouraged new converts. He encouraged new converts.

Verse 23, we read it already. But it tells us that the first thing Barnabas did on arrival at Antioch was simply to observe.

To observe. Verse 23, we read that he saw, when he came, he saw the grace of God and he was glad. It doesn't tell us what evidence he saw of the grace of God.

But whatever it was he saw, he knew that this was a work of God. He knew that this was genuine. And you know, sometimes we're more prone to doubt when we hear of great numbers of people being converted.

We think, aye, yeah, hmm. That's just the way we are. And you know, in the past in these very islands, there were people during revivals who didn't believe it was a work of God.

[8 : 53] Who thought this was being generated by men. And it was themselves that lost out. Even when it became clear that this was of God, they would not back down.

And they missed the blessing. They missed the blessing. while others around them were enjoying God's presence.

We must be wary. We must all be wary of a critical spirit. Because it's there. It comes naturally. It looks for the flaws.

It looks for the faults. But it can take over our lives. And it can rob us of the blessing of God that others around us are enjoying.

Barnabas didn't go to find fault. Barnabas went there to encourage. And we see that he did encourage those new converts at Antioch. In verse 23 we read that he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

[9 : 59] he was glad to be right before that. Who wouldn't be glad? Who wouldn't be glad to see large numbers of people getting saved? You know there's nothing like it. Nothing in the world like seeing God at work and sinners being transformed.

But he didn't just sit back when he saw it and revel in it. He got stuck in. He was prepared to work. He was there to help.

And like Barnabas we need to be doing the same. We need to be encouraging those who are younger in the faith than we are. Now when you read what Barnabas was doing he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

Depending on your outlook it might sound like he's more commanding them than encouraging them. Maybe you've got a picture in your head of Barnabas shaking his finger at them and saying wait guys you've got to do X, Y and Z.

I don't think that was Barnabas. And hopefully by the time we finish tonight I don't think you'll think that's Barnabas. Because what we see Barnabas doing in various scenarios what he's mentioned in the New Testament is that he comes alongside people and he teaches them by example.

[11:24] not by wagging his finger, not by telling them off, but by showing them through his own life how they can remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

Every church needs people like Barnabas who lead by example. there's nothing as powerful a Christian witness, as powerful as an exemplary life.

Actions speak louder than words. And you know as Christians and if we're mature Christians will your example tonight if you're a mature Christian will your example be an encouragement to those who are younger in the faith.

As they observe your life, as they observe your interaction with others, as they observe your interaction with them, as they study your commitment to the Lord, your commitment to the church, your attendance of the means, morning service, evening service, are you at the prayer meeting? Will that be a stumbling block or an encouragement to those who are younger in the faith?

Barnabas led by example and he encouraged these young converts in Antioch.

[13:10] The New Testament clearly teaches us that those who have been believers for longer should be teaching those who are new in the faith. The elders clearly have a responsibility.

The elders have a massive responsibility. Shepherd the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. That's a tall order.

That's a responsibility of the elders and ministers in the church. But it's not all up to them. In fact, Paul, when he writes to Titus, he tells about the mature Christian women, that they should be nurturing and teaching younger Christian women how to live a Christian life.

Barnabas, I believe, was an encourager, not just in words, but in actions. He led by example. And look at what we were told about him. Verse 24, he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

You know, the passage we read in Acts 4, when we're told, first of all, about his nickname, the apostles called him Barnabas, which means son of encouragement.

[14:30] The word used there for encouragement, the Greek word, is paraklesis. Paraklesis. paraklesis. Might sound vaguely familiar.

Because it's the same word that Jesus used when he told his disciples he was going away, but he would send them another comforter, the Holy Spirit.

The word Jesus used was parakletos. It's the same word, just slightly different form of it. And I think it's interesting that parakletos is the Holy Spirit, he's the encourager, and Barnabas was paraklesis, son of encouragement.

And when we read here, in verse 24, that he was full of the Holy Spirit, I don't think it should surprise us that the way he lives mirrors that function of the Holy Spirit, that he comes alongside to comfort and encourage.

And maybe we should be praying that we will be filled with the Holy Spirit, so that we will in some way mirror the Spirit's actions, and be a comfort and an encouragement to others.

[16:00] So, Barnabas, then, first thing tonight, he encouraged new converts to cling to the Lord, to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose. And what do we read after that?

End of verse 24, a great many people were added to the Lord. A great many people. God was blessing that church in Antioch, and as God was blessing it, Barnabas was there to encourage these young converts.

And maybe there is somebody you can encourage tonight. Maybe there's more than one person. Maybe there's a younger Christian. Maybe there's a struggling Christian. And you might be the means that God uses to encourage them in their faith.

So he encouraged new converts. Secondly, though, he encouraged a new preacher. Look at verses 25 and 26. Verse 25.

So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year, they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians.

[17 : 14] Barnabas went to Tarsus to headhunt Saul. Why? Well, I think you might find some of the answer. If you turn back one page to the end of chapter nine.

Chapter nine, as you probably know, recounts the conversion of Saul. Whilst he was on his way to Damascus, he was going there to persecute Christians, to imprison Christians, and Jesus met him, and his life was changed.

And immediately after that, Saul stayed in Damascus, and he began almost immediately preaching God's word. But when he first came back to Jerusalem, he didn't get a very good welcome.

You can see it at verse 26. So we're in Acts 9, verse 26, just where the heading says Saul in Jerusalem. Verse 26, And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples, and they were afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.

And when you read there that he attempted to join them, the tense of the Greek means he repeatedly attempted. So this new convert, Saul, who had already begun preaching in Damascus, when he comes to Jerusalem, he's trying and trying and trying to get accepted by the Christians there.

[18 : 35] And they wouldn't have him. They would not have him. They were skeptical of him. The Lord's disciples shunned him. They shunned him.

And who came alongside him and believed and introduced him to the church? Well, carry on reading verse 27.

But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord who spoke to him and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

Barnabas took this lonely, excluded Christian under his wing and introduced him to the church, commended him to the church. What an encouragement that must have been for Saul.

He was on the fringes, who was left outside, whom nobody believed and nobody trusted. But as soon as Barnabas spoke up for him and brought him into the fold, he was then preaching, verse 28, he began preaching boldly in Jerusalem as well.

[19 : 45] But then fast forward back to where we were in chapter 11. There's this great work of God going on in Antioch and who does Barnabas bring in but Saul, in fact he goes looking for Saul.

He wants Saul to be the teacher, he wants Saul to be the preacher in Antioch. You know you can't help but wonder would Saul ever have developed into the great man of God that he became who wrote so much of our New Testament had this man Barnabas not taken him under his wing and introduced him to the church.

And you know Barnabas took a risk here in bringing Saul to Antioch because Saul was still young in the faith and Saul was a novice in preaching terms.

And the need was massive in Antioch. There was this great revival, huge numbers were being converted. Now conversion is just the start, they needed to be taught, they were coming from nowhere, they were Greeks.

They needed to be discipled, they needed to be mentored, they needed to be taught the truths of God's word. And Barnabas might have thought well I need to send words back to headquarters in Jerusalem and ask them to send me their most experienced guy.

[21 : 07] But he doesn't do that. He encourages a new preacher and he brings Saul into the fold with great results.

And you know as churches and congregations and Christians we should be looking to encourage people into the service of God. We should be looking for and praying that the Lord will lead us to those whom he would have to serve him.

And when he does that we should be nurturing them and encouraging them to use their God-given talents for his glory.

Notice also that Barnabas having taken Saul to Antioch he didn't just leave him to his own devices. And you'll see that in verse 26 again he brought him to Antioch for a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people.

He didn't leave him to himself he worked alongside him. He nurtured this new preacher. He was there beside him for a whole year. A whole year.

[22 : 30] But then after Antioch they go from there to Cyprus Barnabas and Saul. And things change in Cyprus.

Because in Cyprus Saul all of a sudden becomes the main man. And Barnabas is no longer in the spot. You see right up till then every time they're mentioned together it's always Barnabas first and then Saul.

For instance look at the very last words of chapter 11. They did so sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. Barnabas first. And then turn over to verse chapter 13.

So this is them going to Cyprus. Verse 2 of chapter 13. Set apart from me Barnabas and Saul. And then cast your eye down to verse 7 of chapter 13.

Sergius Paulus a man of intelligence who summoned Barnabas and Saul. But at some point during chapter 13 while they're in Cyprus things change.

[23 : 37] And from then on Saul is referred to by his other name Paul. It's not a new name. Verse 9 tells us Saul who was also called Paul. He had both names. But somewhere during chapter 13 Saul becomes Paul and he takes over as the main man.

So we look at verse 43 for instance. of chapter 13. After the meeting of the synagogue broke up many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas.

And then down to verse 50. Middle of the verse turning up persecution against Paul and Barnabas. Paul is now the one who's in the limelight.

Paul is now the one getting the attention and yet Barnabas he doesn't complain. he is happy to play second fiddle to the novice whom he encouraged as a new preacher.

That's grace. That's grace. That brings us to our final point which is very important also because in any church there will be those who fall by the wayside.

[24 : 55] there will be those who struggle there will be those who may not be doing so well spiritually. And maybe that's you tonight.

Maybe things are not all that healthy in your spiritual life. Maybe your soul ain't great tonight. And I want us to see that these people too were on Barnabas' radar.

So let's move on. We've seen that he encouraged a new convert. Or new converts. He encouraged a new preacher. I want to see that he encouraged a deserter. He encouraged a deserter. Now this happens a little bit later on.

So we're going to refer to a couple of chapters later. We've seen Barnabas and Saul. They're in Cyprus. Chapter 13. And something happens in Cyprus which doesn't seem all that significant at the time.

There's a guy with them called John. John decides he's going home. You'll see it in chapter 13 verse 13. Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia.

[26 : 07] And John left them and returned to Jerusalem. Not a big deal. Doesn't seem very significant when you read it there. But clearly it was hugely significant.

because in chapter 15 when Paul and Barnabas are going on one of their next missions, Paul point blank refuses to take this man, John, with them because he had let them down.

He had deserted them in Cyprus. So I want to read this. This is my last reference tonight. Chapter 15 and at verse 36. So the last section of that chapter.

Acts 15 and verse 36. After some days Paul said to Barnabas, let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are.

Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. So he had two names, John Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia.

[27 : 17] and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement so they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him, that's John Mark, and sailed away to Cyprus.

But Paul chose Silas and departed and so on. Paul refuses to take a risk by having this deserter on his mission team.

But Barnabas very, very differently has prepared to give John Mark a second chance. Now, we don't know why John Mark went home from Cyprus.

It may have just been that he was homesick. It may have been that he was backslidden. Maybe he was afraid of the work. Maybe he felt that he wasn't up to it in the presence of these two giants, Paul and Barnabas.

We just don't know. But we do know that he let them down. He let the team down. But Barnabas gives him a second chance when Paul wouldn't have him.

[28 : 25] And it's almost as if Barnabas saw potential in John Mark, just as he had previously seen potential in Paul.

And he took a risk. And you know that risk paid off. Because John Mark is the man who wrote for us Mark's gospel.

Barnabas encouraged this deserter. And you know friends, in every church there will be deserters. In every church there will be those for many different reasons who fall away, who maybe even go AWOL from the fellowship.

How important it is that we come alongside them to encourage them. To seek to bring them back into the fellowship. To bring them back among the people of God.

You know it never happens like that. You can almost always see it coming. They miss a Sunday evening. They miss several Sunday evenings.

[29 : 33] They miss a Sunday morning. They're not at the prayer meeting. They don't want to talk about the Lord. You can see it coming. And that's when we need to be there to encourage and just ask them are you doing okay?

Is there anything I can do to help you? Barnabas encouraged this deserter back into the fold and back into the service of the Lord.

You know there's a beautiful sequel to this event that we read of right at the very end of Paul's life. 2 Timothy chapter 4. Well 2 Timothy is the last letter Paul wrote.

Chapter 4 is the last chapter. So it's the very last words we have from the pen of the great apostle Paul. He writes to Timothy and he says this.

he says get Mark get Mark and bring him with you for he is very useful to me in my ministry.

[30 : 46] Who does Paul ask for right at the very end of his life? He asks for John Mark. The guy he wouldn't trust many years earlier.

The guy he thought was a risk too big to take. But whom Barnabas encouraged. Whom Barnabas took with him.

And now at the very end of his life he's the man that Paul wants with him as he awaits execution. What a great debt we owe to Barnabas who nurtured first of all the great apostle Paul.

from whose hand we have so much of our New Testament. Who then encouraged this deserter John Mark who wrote for us Mark's Gospel.

But who also encouraged who knows how many new converts in Antioch and in various other places. God alone knows what fruit that bore.

[31 : 51] Tonight friends we need people like Barnabas. Even one person like that in a congregation can make such a difference but how much more if we all sought to encourage one another.

And that's what scripture tells us to do. Encourage one another. But I can't finish tonight without telling you this.

Barnabas great man as he was was just a man. He was a mere man. And he wasn't perfect. And Barnabas messed up just like you and I will mess up.

We find out about that in Galatians chapter 2. Where there had been more and more Greeks outsiders being brought into the church. And some of the Jews some of the folk had always been in the church.

They were a wee bit wary of this. Things were changing. They didn't like that. And so they started to shun the Greeks and to sisters in Christ.

[33 : 38] It's hard to believe. And yet it reminds us that he was just a man. So while we can learn tonight from Barnabas we need a greater than Barnabas to emulate.

We need Jesus Christ and none other will do. Because yes we can learn from Barnabas but he can't save us.

He can't save us. We need Jesus of whom we read in scripture that he went about doing good just like Barnabas did. But of whom we never read that he let anyone down.

so let us friends learn from Barnabas but follow Jesus. Barnabas can teach us but only Jesus can save us.

But tonight we shouldn't just learn from Barnabas we should act on what we learn. but I would like you tonight as you leave this place I would like you to pray that the Lord would lay someone on your heart that you need to encourage.

[35 : 13] And if the Lord places someone on your heart you get on with it. Get on with it immediately because who knows how desperately that person needs that encouragement.

And who knows as well how the Lord might yet use the person whom you encourage just as he used Paul and as he used John Mark and who knows how many others whom Barnabas encouraged in the service of God.

1 Thessalonians 5 says this therefore encourage one another and build each other up. May God bless these thoughts to us.

Let's pray.