

Barnabas - The Great Encourager

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn again for a little to the chapter we read in Acts chapter 11. We can read from verse 19.

Now 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 Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 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.

For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsish to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.

[1 : 1 2] For a whole year they met with the church, and taught a great many people, and in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. There were a lot of Antiochs in the ancient world, but this particular Antioch that we have here is Antioch where, as we read, that the Christians were first of all called Christians.

This Antioch that is spoken of here today is in southern Turkey, and I believe goes with the name, I'm not sure how to pronounce, Antioch.

Maybe somebody is able to correct me on that, but maybe some of you have been there, but that's where we would find it in its present state. But back in the day of Paul and Barnabas, this Antioch was a city of great renown.

It was the third greatest city in the Roman Empire. There was first, of course, Rome itself, then Alexandria, and then Antioch. It was distinguished in different ways.

If you think, when you go to Glasgow, that Socheol Street is long, or Argyll Street is long, or Edinburgh, Princess Street is long. The main street in Antioch was four miles long. Apparently, it was the only city that had the streets were lit at night.

[2 : 4 3] It was also that long street. There was kind of a marble over the street. So it was quite an extraordinary place. It was apparently very, very wealthy, and it was called the Antioch, the Golden Queen of the East, way back.

So that's just telling us a wee bit of what this city was like. But it was also a very immoral, very wicked city, a city full of idolatry.

It was a city where the Roman gods were worshipped, the Greek gods were worshipped, the Syrian gods were worshipped. And it was a city very much like Corinth, where anything went.

Whatever you wanted to do, you could do. And it was into this city, just the same as in Corinth, it was into this city that the gospel came in power.

And that's always one of the great encouraging things, because so often when we look at situations and we see particular places or communities or countries, nations, and we say, oh, there's not a chance that there could be reformation here, not a chance that the gospel could flourish here.

[3 : 57] We're always limiting the power of God because God continues to surprise us. Because this is the very thing he does. He enters into sometimes the most unlikely people and into the most unlikely places to do his great work.

So a great work was taking place in the city of Antioch. Now, many Christians had begun to arrive into Antioch because of the fires of persecution that began after Stephen's martyrdom.

Of course, the Christians were spreading all over. There were Jewish Christians who had been converted, and then they were spreading all over. And as they went, they, of course, shared in the gospel.

But as we'll see, there were initial problems. The word, of course, came back to Jerusalem of this work that was going on in Antioch.

And the church there decided to send a man named Barnabas down to help, to see what was doing there.

[5 : 08] And Barnabas, of course, was one of the great men. His original name, of course, was Joseph, but it was the apostles that called him Barnabas, the son of encouragement.

And what a great thing to be known. Can you imagine on your tombstone having Joseph, whatever, and then in brackets, Barnabas, the son of encouragement.

This was a man that he kind of devoted himself to encouraging people. You'd never find Barnabas with idle gossip but putting down on people.

You would never find him belittling people. He was the kind of person who was always stimulating, encouraging people. In fact, the dictionary tells us that to encourage somebody is to give courage, to incite, to help, to stimulate.

So that's the kind of person that Barnabas was. As we were talking to the children, the kind of person you would feel good being with. When Barnabas left, you would never say, oh, I'm glad he's gone.

[6 : 13] Because he's the kind of man who always made you feel better. Because he was always trying to encourage you and stimulate and help you. And we like these kind of people, particularly in the Christian faith.

That there are people who will encourage us and make us feel good about being a Christian. Because we ought to feel good about being a Christian. Every single one of you in here today who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, you should feel good about being a Christian.

Because sometimes we forget what Jesus has actually done for us. We've started to take it for granted. We're comfortable where we are.

We forget what it was like when we first came into the faith. We forget the wonder of what it was to know that our sins were forgiven. That we were accepted by God in and through Jesus Christ.

And so we ought always to remember this. And the more that we remember this, the more that we will feel good, which we ought to, about the fact that we are Christians.

[7 : 21] So this man, Barnabas, was an encourager. Back in chapter 4, it tells us a wee bit about him. Because it was in chapter 4, we actually find his name.

And it was interesting what the early church did. You see, at the end of chapter 4, verse 32. You see, this is social.

People talk of a social gospel. Well, this was in a sense the ultimate social gospel. Because when the Holy Spirit worked through the church and through the community, and so many people came to faith, their hearts were opened towards the needs of others.

And they began to sell what they had themselves in order to make a common pot of money to help those who didn't have. That's the work of the gospel.

When the work of the gospel is in full power, it doesn't just open your own heart towards God. It opens your heart towards others. So that's what we read.

[8 : 33] Verse 32. Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul. And no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own. But they had everything in common.

And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them.

What a lesson for our society today. This shows that if the gospel was flourishing, there wouldn't be the food.

It's just the gospel has a social impact that people don't understand. There wasn't a needy person among them. For as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, and he was a Levite. He was a real Jew, as Jewish as he could get.

[9 : 45] But he was a native of Cyprus. And in all probability, that's why they chose Barnabas to go because this work of the gospel, it was by people who had come from Cyprus that were in Antioch.

So this man, he sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. So you can see this is the kind of person he was. He was one of those that he had this field and he went and he sold the field and he took all the money and he gave it to the apostles and he said, spread that amongst those who have need.

Because back in chapter 11, it tells us he was a good man. And of course, this is part of that goodness where the Lord had indeed opened his heart.

So these must have been amazing and exciting days. So he was a man, we're told that he was full of faith, and he was a man who was ready to be used by the Lord wherever and whenever.

And you know, that's also very important because people will sometimes say, Lord, here I am, I'm ready to be used for you. But then they will qualify it by saying, well, I'm ready to be used for you in certain ways.

[10 : 59] I'm not ready to do anything, and I'm not ready to go anywhere. And the Lord will say, well, that's not exactly what I'm looking for. The Lord wants us to be ready for him, to be used in whatever way for him.

Because once we become Christians, a heart of service is something that is born. So Barnabas is the kind of person who was ready to go anywhere. Now in verse 19 here, we find that there was preaching going on by those who were scattered by the persecution.

But notice something very sad. Now those who were scattered, these are Jews, because of the persecution, those are Jews, people who have been converted, they traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word, but notice this part, to no one except Jews.

In other words, they had this incredible separatist philosophy. They weren't prepared to, it was a real, what you would say, a real secretarian spirit.

Nobody but a Jew. They wouldn't, they wouldn't converse with anybody. And here's people who've come to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, and they won't share the gospel with anybody except those who are Jews.

[12 : 27] And we might say to ourselves, you know, that's quite extraordinary. And it is. But you know, sometimes, even to this day, without realizing it, within the Christian church at large, there can be that kind of separatist idea.

If you don't look like me, if you don't think like me, if you don't dress like me, if you don't act like me, and yet you might be a Christian, but I don't want to have fellowship, I don't want to be part with you.

I only want to be part of and a fellowship with people who are exactly the same as me. That's wrong.

Now, at one level, you say, of course, it's much more comfortable, isn't it? When you're with people who are exactly, they think the same, they act the same, they dress the same, everything is the same.

You say to yourself, well, I can feel much more relaxed with this. That's not the way the gospel works. That's not the way Jesus worked. And that God was going to show that's not the way the gospel was going to spread out.

[13 : 37] Because, as we were reading earlier on, where Peter, Peter had that attitude. Peter wouldn't mingle, Peter wouldn't have anything to do with anybody who wasn't a Jew until the Lord gave him that vision which changed.

He was brought to realize that the Lord was reaching out because the Jews had forgotten that the great promise that had been given to Abraham was that it was to be through him and his seed that all the nations of the world were to be blessed.

And that's exactly what happened. Because Jesus, as we know, from a human point of view, he was born a Jew. But, of course, this gospel that spread out, it was, yes, it's centered in the Jewish race, but it was going to embrace the whole world.

So in those early days, these converted Jews had a problem in understanding this. And so, there was this exclusiveness about them. But some, we see, who were converted from Cyprus and so on, they came, but then, these people came and they began to teach.

That's what it tells us in verse 20. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus, and remember, that's where Barnabas had come. I also had you, who coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists.

[15 : 06] Now, these were, the Hellenists were Greek-speaking people and they were non-Jews. And the great thing is this, we're told that as they preached and as they spoke, that the hand of the Lord was on them.

Now, that's the key to everything, that the hand of the Lord was upon them. And let us be quite clear, and we know it, you don't need me to tell you, but unless the hand of the Lord is on us, then nothing that we do is going to be of any lasting benefit.

You could have people who are trained to be the greatest orators, the most eloquent people in the world speaking, but unless the hand of the Lord is on them, then it's not going to have any lasting impact or any great impression.

It is only by, by the Lord. It's not by might, and it's not by power, but it's by my spirit, saith the Lord. And that's something that we're so slow to take on board, because so often we trust in ourselves, and we say, well, we've got to do this and we've got to do that.

Don't get me wrong. We have to try many things in order to reach people with the gospel, but not independently of God, because whatever we do, we must be doing in total dependence upon Him.

[16 : 27] Otherwise, it's doomed to failure. It won't work. But if we're relying upon the Lord, if He is the one that we're looking to, because the arm of flesh will not prevail, and there's always a worry that we look away from the Lord, look to man, look to man's ideas and methodologies and things like that, rather than looking to the Lord.

We must never replace that. And that's why the Lord was blessing these people who had a great hunger to spread the word. And the hand of the Lord was upon them, and there was a great work going on.

And of course, that's why, as we said, when the word reached Jerusalem of what was happening, they sent Barnabas. And it was a good choice, because if they had sent maybe some of the other people from Jerusalem, they would have come down and laid in to these people who were preaching to non-Jews.

But it tells us that when Barnabas came down, he was glad. He rejoiced. He was seeing people being saved. And this is the kind of man that he was.

He didn't have these barriers. He was rejoicing. People had been converted. And you know, that's the impact. Because see what it says there, that when he came down and saw the grace of God, he was glad.

[17 : 56] When he saw the grace of God, what does that mean? When he saw the impact of the grace of God in people's lives. People's lives being changed. You know, the funny thing is, when a person is converted, they can't hide it.

Even if they're saying, I'm too shy. I'm too hesitant. I can't really go out and tell anybody, I've been converted. Do you know something? They can't hide it. Because the grace of God is seen in people's lives.

And you know, sometimes when a Christian, a person who's been converted, will tell somebody, and they'll say, you know what? I've been converted. The person will tell, will say, I know.

We thought that. And they'll say, how did you think that? Because you can't hide the grace of God. When the grace of God comes into a person's heart, it changes their life.

Even though that person might not realize that the change is evident outwardly, it is. So that's what Barnabas was rejoicing about because people's lives were being changed.

[19 : 07] And this is a wonderful thing. You can't hide it. And you don't really want to hide it. And straight away, Barnabas begins to exhort the people.

And you see what it tells us there. It says in verse 23, the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

And this is what he's doing. He's encouraging them because they're living in tough times. Fires of persecution have begun. The Christian is being ostracized.

It was going to be tough. It's going to cost to be a Christian. But he's asking them, look, you have to remain faithful to the Lord. And you remember, and it's important for us to remember this, we have to remain faithful to the Lord because of God's faithfulness to us.

You think about it. From all eternity, the Lord was committed to you. He was faithful to you. And right through your life, from the moment you were born, until you came to faith in Jesus Christ, he was faithful to you.

[20 : 26] He never let you out of his sight. You could have, you know yourself, the number of times that you could have, you could have been lost, the things that could have happened to you.

You look back over your life and say, well, that was close. Think of the number of times before you became a Christian, you had a wee brush maybe with death or it was pretty close. But the Lord never let you go.

He was faithful and eventually brought you into his kingdom. And he has to this day remained faithful with you. Even although your life has had ups and downs and there's times you felt really low, he has never, ever, ever lost his commitment, his love, and his faithfulness to you.

And he loves you more than all the wealth of this world put together. Take all the gold, the silver, the natural resources, and all the money of this world.

Put it all together and the Lord loves you far more than all of that. Because all of that's going to be burnt up. But you won't. Because he loves you. And because of that commitment and faithfulness that he has to us, he's asking us to be committed and faithful to him.

[21 : 39] And of course, it's there so often we feel, oh, that we let the Lord down. But you know, when we do let the Lord down, we come back to him. And we mourn and lament because of our lack of faithfulness.

And so, Barnabas is saying, you have to remain faithful. In fact, this word, that's what we have here, is in the, what you'd have in the AV, the word cleave.

You know, like in marriage, for this cause, it says in the AV, for this cause, shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they too shall become one flesh.

This idea, there's no intruders. There's nobody, nobody else. This is an exclusive relationship. This is the two of you.

And that's the idea we have here with this cleaving to the Lord, to remain faithful to him. So this is what, what Barnabas was doing.

[22 : 40] He was exhorting them so that we remain faithful to the Lord. He's our teacher, our redeemer, our master, our comforter, our guide, our lover, our shepherd, our friend.

He's all these different things to us. And Barnabas, of course, was encouraging them, not only by what he was saying, but also by his life.

Because as we said here, the word tells us that he was a good man. That is, he had a, he had a good heart. Part of the fruit of the Spirit is goodness.

Every Christian should be a good person. We often use the expression, he was a good man, good woman. And sometimes we can use that expression even of people who aren't Christians. But it should be said of every single Christian.

Oh, he's a good man, a good woman. Because goodness should be evident within their lives. Well, it was really evident within the life of Barnabas.

[23 : 39] He was a man and he was always looking for the betterment of others and trying to promote the kingdom of God. And a great many people were added to the Lord and Barnabas realized he needed help.

So what did he do? He didn't send back to Jerusalem. He went across to Tarshish and he went looking for Saul. Why looking for Saul who was, remember Saul was, if ever there was a separatist Jew, if ever there was a secretarian Jew, if ever there was a man full of bigotry, it was Saul of Tarshish.

Do you remember when Saul was converted? The Lord told Saul that he was going to be the great apostle of the Gentiles, the non-Jews.

His great mission was to go out into the world and to reach all these different nations. And that's why Barnabas went for Saul or the apostle Paul.

This is a man who's dedicated to reaching the non-Jew. and so they came back and they worked tirelessly for a whole year in the city.

[24 : 57] And there was so many people converted. You say to yourself, I would love to see that. Well, you know, God doesn't change. And you know, the only thing that we can do is to plead to the God of heaven to come and revival.

Because there's nothing else. we can do loads and loads of things. But it's only God who will truly save and truly work.

And that's what we must plead for. Lord, open the windows of heaven and come down in power. Open people's hearts. Bring many people into faith. Now, of course, we thank the Lord for all the efforts that are done within this congregation from the very youngest to the oldest.

and that is important and it is through these things God works. But we must never lose sight while we're involved in that that our prayer must still always be that God will work powerfully.

And sometimes, you know, sometimes we can pray and say, oh, well, I feel I better pray that but we don't really believe. Do you sometimes pray and you say, but I don't really believe. Well, we must ask the Lord for a believing heart.

[26 : 11] Ask for the faith to really, really believe. And you notice that the Christians were first of all, now, I don't know, maybe it was a derogatory term that was given to them, but they were first of all in Antioch called Christians.

Now, the I-A-N here in Latin, the suffix that you would add on, means very simply belonging to. It was back in the day where we sometimes used to belonging to a particular party, belonging to a particular whatever.

And so, it might have been those who mocked the Christian faith, they called those who were following Christ Christians.

They belonged to. And as we're approaching an election and all the parties are looking for different people and saying, oh, you've got to support my party.

At the end of the day, as long as you're belonging to Christ Jesus, that's what matters. Because, yes, political systems are important. And political systems rule the world at many levels.

[27 : 23] And political systems can change the world. But there is only one who can really change the world. And that is the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. And it is to Him that we must plead and say, Lord, please, be merciful to us, our nation.

Come in power. Today is a dark day. And you say to yourself, oh, it will never happen. Well, before the great revivals happened way, way back in our country, the nation was just as dark as it is today.

And who would have believed the sweeping impact of the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the land? And what the Lord did before, He can do again. We're not to just say, oh, well, we live in a different day.

There's no point. We must go to the Lord and say, Lord, bring reviving power. And if you're without Christ today, ask to begin with me.

Lord, in fact, all of us need to say, Lord, begin with me. Bring revival into my soul. Give me once again just the sheer joy of the Lord.

[28 : 33] And if I've never come to know Jesus, come into my heart even today. Let us pray. Lord, we pray that you will bless us and bless your word to us.

And we give thanks that we are under the word of God. And we pray that the hand of the Lord may be upon that word. And that you will bless us richly. Our eyes are fixed upon you because we ourselves can do nothing.

Watch over us, we pray, and cleanse us from our every sin. And take us to our home safely and bless a cup of tea, coffee in the hall. Forgiving sin in Jesus' name. Amen. Let us conclude singing to God's praise in Psalm 126, Psalm 126, and the tune is Denfield, Psalm 126, page 419.

Psalm 126, Psalm 126, Psalm 126, Psalm 136, Psalm 136, Psalm 136, Psalm 136, Psalm 136, Psalm 136, When Zion's bondage God turned back as men that dreamed were we, then filled with laughter was our mouth, our tongue with melody.

They among the heathens said, the Lord great things for them hath wrought. The Lord hath done great things for us, whence joy to us is brought. The streams of water in the south out bondage, Lord recall, who sow in tears a reaping time of joy and joy they shall.

[30 : 03] That man who bearing precious seed and going forth doth mourn, he doubtless bringing back his sheaves rejoicing shall return. 126, the tune is Denfield with Zion's bondage.

When Zion's bondage God turned back as men that dreamed were we, then filled with laughter was our mouth, our tongue with melody.

They among the heathens said the Lord, great things for them hath wrought.

The Lord hath done great things for us, whence joy to us is brought.

As streams of water in the south, our bondage, Lord recall, whose soul in tears is the reaping time of joy and joy they shall.

[31 : 30] That man who bearing precious seed and going forth doth mourn, he doubtless bringing back his sheaves rejoicing shall return.

Now may the grace, mercy and peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.