

Place: Lurgan Baptist 23:1:2007

Reading: Acts 4:32-37

THE CHURCH ABLAZE

10. BARNABAS, THE MINISTRY OF ENCOURAGEMENT

The renowned Prime Minister Gladstone once said that one example is worth a thousand arguments. As we turn again to the Book of Acts I trust that you have begun to realise how kind God is in His Word to us. He has different ways of getting the truth across to us. In the New Testament we have history to inform us: we have doctrine to instruct us, but we have also examples to inspire us. The Lord seems to say to us, "*Through my inspired servants I give you in the Gospels a bit of My biography, and in the Epistles I take you into my classroom, but here in the Acts I want you to walk with me through my picture gallery. I want to show you how it all works out. I want to show you that this can be lived, this great teaching of Christlikeness, and witness and adequacy and usefulness.*"

So to the portrait of Barnabas we now turn. Barnabas pops in and out of the Book of Acts so we have to move around a bit to get the full portrait. Barnabas seems to have been a big man in every sense of the word. In the city of Lystra, when Paul healed a cripple man, we read "*and when the people saw what Paul had done they lifted up their voices, saying in the*

speech of Lycaonia, the gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas Jupiter." (Acts 14:12) Now Jupiter in Roman mythology is Zeus in the mythology of the Greeks and this god is the Emperor of the gods. Barnabas was evidently tall, manly, commanding and noble in appearance. And it was this big man who played an important role in the life of the Early Church. In seeking to piece together the story of this big man I want you to notice five of his characteristics. Barnabas was,

(1) A SINCERE MAN

We first meet Barnabas in the very early days of the church, when it was in the full fire and fervour of its first love for Christ. His sincerity is seen in the fact that he had:

(a) A NATURE THAT WAS SACRIFICIAL:

Barnabas, a Levite, had estates on the island of Cyprus. (4:37) That in itself is of interest because the Levites, in Gods Old Testament economy, were not supposed to own land. (Num 18:20 24, Deut 10:9 Lev 25:32-33) Why ? Because they were the priestly tribe and they were to live on the tithes of all the people of Israel.

How then was it possible for Barnabas to own land ? Was it, that with the passing of years things had changed and that this prohibition was not enforced in New Testament times ? Or was it that this particular

law applied only in Palestine and the property was in Cyprus ? In ancient times Cyprus was famous for its vineyards, wheat fields, oil and figs. It was a secular Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. Anyone who possessed land in Cyprus was rich and influential. Wherever Barnabas had this land he said, “ *I know what I can do I've got a piece of land, its a valuable piece of land I can sell it easily, and this will help the church at Jerusalem who are financially stripped.*” So Barney sold the land and brought the money and gave it to the apostles. Such was his lavish generosity towards Christ and His church. You see he had a *Stewardship rather than an Ownership* view of property. My the amount of money you have, the amount of property you possess, is not the determining thing in Christian stewardship. It is your attitude towards it. Do you really it is not yours ? Do you really believe it is God's and that you are only a trustee ? My like Barnabas, are we generous towards God and His church ?

(1 Cor 4:7) His sincerity is seen in that he had (a)

(b) A NAME THAT WAS SIGNIFICANT:

His parents called him Joses or Joseph but those who got to know him well, in Christian circles said, “ *We must give this man another name.*” So they nicknamed him Barnabas. Now different translations put this differently. Some claim Barnabas means, “ *the son of consolation.*” Others translate it as “ *Barnabas the son of encouragement.*” Still others translate it, “ *the son of refreshment.*” He was a refreshing Christian. Other believers in the fellowship looked at Barnabas and

exclaimed, “ *He's a refreshing believer.*” What's your name around the church ? There are all kinds of nicknames for folks around the church. There is *Herman the Hypocrite*. He comes to church, sings the loudest, prays the longest, and he makes sure everyone see's him. But he curses terribly at work. He's a mockery of the name of the Lord Jesus.

What about *Moaning Mervyn* ? It does not matter what the choir sings he's always moaning. If the choir sings a slow song, he says “ *I wish they'd sing a fast one.*” If they sing a fast number its, “ *I tell you, I'm tired of those fast pieces. I wish they would sing a slow one.*” Then there's *Prideful Patricia*. She's Miss Big Shot around the church. “ *Look at me ! My husband's important to this church. I'm Prideful Patricia.*” Tell me what is your church nickname ? Do you not wish to be known as an encourager ? The interesting thing about this word “ *consolation,*” is this. Its the word “ *Paracletos.*” Its the same word that Christ called the Holy Spirit, “ *The Comforter, the One called alongside to help.*” (Jn 14:16) Now we're getting to the bottom line. What was so great about Barnabas ? He was the Encourager ! My everywhere Barnabas went he had a genius for lifting the mood and spirit of people.

Here in (Acts Ch 4) Barnabas saw a need and he rose to meet that need. He saw a burden and he decided to lift it. Paul later wrote, “ *Bear ye one another's burdens.*” (Gal 5:2) This is what an Encourager does. He lifts burdens for people. Perhaps you're saying, “ *Well I don't have any land to sell, or property to part with.*” My you don't need to have money to lift a

load. Perhaps you have love, wisdom, time, counsel that you can give.

Is there a elderly neighbour that you can help ? Is there someone within this church to whom you can say, “ *Look you have got a need I believe I can help you.* ” Now that's what Barnabas did. He was (1)

(2) A SYMPATHETIC MAN

For it was Barnabas who introduced Saul of Tarsus to the apostles. Look at (9:23-28) Now three years had passed since Saul's conversion (Gal 1:18) nobody knew where he had gone. The church had heard rumours that he was saved, but he had vanished. God's saints had enjoyed a blessed rest from persecution. But now Saul was back. Worse yet, he was back in Jerusalem. Worse still, he was seeking to join the fellowship of the church. Notice that,

(a) SAUL WAS REJECTED:

Look at (9:26) The Greek conveys the idea that Saul “ *kept trying,* ” to get into their fellowship, but they would not accept him. Join the church indeed ! Worm out its secrets ! Compile lists of its members ! Saul of Tarsus was the most dangerous man of the age. Nobody would speak to him. In Jerusalem he was the most hated, most feared, and most friendless man of all. With the blood of so many Christians still red on his hands its no wonder that every door in Jerusalem was bolted and barred against him. The believers considered him to be a sinister, Sanhedrin spy. (a) But

then,

(b) SAUL WAS ACCEPTED:

Look at (9:27) “ *But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way,* ” the Greek implies that Barnabas took Saul by the hand and led him among the apostles. James, the brother of our Lord, chief elder of the church at Jerusalem, wanted nothing to do with Saul. Peter, with the keys of the kingdom in his hands wanted nothing to do with Saul. John the beloved, the apostle of love wanted nothing to do with Saul. Andrew, who always introduced people to Christ and had a rare gift for seeking those who needed to know the Saviour, wanted nothing to do with Saul. Thomas, unless he could have tangible proofs of Saul's salvation, wanted nothing to do with Saul. “ *But Barnabas took him* ” He opened his door to Saul. He took him in, sat him at his table, and listened to his story. And he believed Saul. We can picture Barnabas taking him around to Peter's place and saying, “ *Peter, I want you to meet brother Saul.* ” And Peter became so convinced that he entertained Saul in his home for two whole weeks. (Gal 1:18)

“ *Hey men, he's for real. Its all right, you can come out from hiding.* ” you see Barnabas realised that here was a man who needed a friend and Barnabas went out and became a friend to a very lonely disciple. My there are a lot of new believers who need someone to befriend them. Do you know what the new Christian

needs ? If any one needs encouragement its a brand new believer. So often they find it difficult to break into our churches, especially if they come from a different culture and don't have the same background. “*Oh, I would love to part of that church group,. go with them to the Bible class and prayer meeting, but how can I get in ?*” Oh, God gave us some Barnabas's in this church who will reach out and find these people and bring them in.

What a terrible indictment it is to this church if genuine people have left us because they could not fit in !

John Stossel on ABC American Television did a programme and in that programme he talked about little babies who need psycho-analysis therapy, little babies not twelve months who have been warped. These were little ones who were psychologically harmed, living in homes where there no eye contact, no laughter, no cuddling and no touching. These little babies who had been deprived of these things were warped. Then this is what the programme went on to say, “*Its impossible to spoil a baby the first year of his life.*” And those babies who receive that eye contact, cuddling, loving, the first year of their lives grow up to be well-adjusted, balanced individuals, who have love to give and demand less than other babies who didn't receive it.

Do you know something ? That's not only true in the physical world but in the spiritual world ! The most important year is that first year when they come to know the Saviour. When they are babes in Christ, and

this church needs Barnabas's who find a friend and befriend them and bring them into the fellowship.

(1) (2)

(3) A SPIRITUAL MAN

The scene now shifts from Jerusalem to Antioch. Look at (11:19-21) Now Antioch was wealthy and magnificent, the third greatest city of the world of that time after Rome and Alexandria. It was the home of a Rome prefect and his court. It was a thoroughly Greek city, but also had a large Jewish colony. It was a centre of idolatry. Here in the world famous grove of Daphne, heathenism flaunted itself in its most alluring and filthy forms. And here at Antioch, quite apart from the officialdom of Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit began a new work. Here in sumptuous, sinful, sensual Antioch began a work of evangelism among the Gentiles.

Now this work had no apostolic support or authority, but the preaching of the gospel was an instant success and large numbers of Gentiles were saved. Reports of what was happening filtered down to Jerusalem and the apostles said, “*Look a lot of Greeks are getting saved in Antioch we wonder is this true fire or wild fire ? Is this of God ?*” You see the apostles had not initiated it or approved it and they were wondering, “*Should we approve it ? We had better send someone to investigate this new and startling development.*” And who do you think they sent ? You guessed it. Barnabas ! It was a wise choice because Cypriots and Cyrenians were spearheading the work in Antioch and Barnabas was a Cypriot Jew. My ... Barnabas was **a spiritual**

man ! Why ? Well he,

(a) RECOGNISES THE GRACE OF GOD:

Look at (11:23) He could easily have seen the situation in a different light. My these people were new, untaught, Christians. They still carried the mire of Antioch with them. Some of them had miles to go in their language, and relationships, and ethics. But Barnabas saw evidence of the grace of God.

Alexander Maclaren says, “ *It was a triumph of Christian principle to recognise the grace of God under new forms and in so strange a place. It was a greater triumph to hail it with rejoicing.* ” Barnabas did not say, “ *We need a manual of theology so that these new believers can be systematically trained in sound doctrine.* ” He did not say, “ *There is too much emotionalism in this work. This work needs a stronger emphasis on the moral side of the Christian faith, especially in such a vile city as Antioch.* ” No, (a) Do you do that ? Especially in places where they don't do everything the way you like ? Oh, sometimes we think that God's grace and blessing is tied to our little circle, don't we ? Do you know something ? God blesses people whom you disagree with ! (a) And then he,

(b) REFRESHES THE PEOPLE OF GOD:

“ *And exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.* ” (11:23) That is he encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. In (13:43) Paul and Barnabas exhorted new believers to “ *continue in the grace of God.* ”

In (14:22) they exhorted the Christians of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to “ *continue in the faith.* ” You see the only way to remain true to the Lord is to continue in His Word, where He reveals Himself to the believer. (Jn 8:31 1 Jn 2:24) Barnabas saw God's grace, rejoiced, and then tenderly encouraged God's people. How was he able to do this ? Luke says, “ *For he was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.* ” (11:24) You see the refreshing water of the Holy Spirit flowed from Barnabas's innermost being ! Can you think of anyone like that ? Are you like that ? Have you discovered that some people, when they come around and talk with you, they depress you. And when they're gone you say, “ *Well, thank goodness for that.* ” They are fault-finding, critical, hard, and gloomy. Then there are others and you're not in their company five minutes till a shot of sunshine has permeated your whole being. Your hopes have been down, they've lifted them: your courage has gone but they've put new heart into you ! My this was Barnabas, forever the one to encourage, to refresh, to strengthen ! Is this you ? Do you know what it is to recognise the grace of God ? Do you encourage those who are young in the faith ? Do you possess the gift of helps ? (1 Cor 12:28) But lets continue in (Ch 11) and notice that Barnabas was,

(4) A SENSIBLE MAN

Look at (11:24-26) Do you see what Barnabas does ?

(a) HE RECOGNISES HIS LIMITATIONS:

Barnabas has got a situation on his hands which thrills him on the one hand and awes him on the other and so he says, “ *This job is too big for me. I'm perfectly willing to put my oar in and do what I can, but I need help. I know where there's a man who has got what this situation needs. I am going to go and get Paul.*”

Perhaps Barnabas lay awake one night, burdened, tired, exploring his options. In the last three days, he had led ten Bible studies, conducted five baptisms, and preached the gospel countless times. “ *I need some help, I cannot keep this up.*” “ *Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul.*” (11:25) Do you know something ? A smaller man, a meaner man, would not have done that. Have you met a preachers who have said, “ *I am going to be a big duck in the puddle. I have got all this to myself.*” But not Barnabas ! He wanted to take a man who he knew was a first class scholar, steeped in the Old Testament, well read in philosophy, and now above all, a disciple of the Lord Jesus. My Barnabas must have know that by bringing in Saul of Tarsus, he was bringing in a bigger man than he was bigger in talent and genius, bigger in his grasp of truth, bigger in breadth of vision and boldness of action. But, as Alexander Whyte said, “ *To have the heart to discover a more talented man than yourself, and then to have the heart to go to Tarsus for him, and to make way for him in Antioch, is far better than to have all Saul's talents to yourself Speaking for myself said the Scottish fiery preacher, I would rather have a little of Barnabas' grace than have all of Saul's genius.*”

Or, to quote Spurgeon's unforgettable verse, “ *It takes*

more grace than I can tell, To play the second fiddle well.” Is it not rare to find an older man, held high in the opinions of his brethren, who will allow himself to be eclipsed by a younger man ? But Barnabas was sensible enough to (a) and then he,

(b) UTILISES HIS RESOURCES:

The word for “ *seek,*” in (11:25) suggests a laborious search on Barnabas's part. He did not really know where to find Saul. He went to “ *hunt him up.*” Now keep in mind that Saul has been converted about 10 years when Barnabas brings him to Antioch. And for a least a year they worked together to enlarge the church, to encourage the believers, and to evangelise the city ! Now what did Barnabas do ? He enlisted and encouraged Saul in the service of the Lord ! Now in every church there are folk like Paul. People who need to be found, encouraged, developed. Sure they have gifts, abilities, talents, but it takes a Barnabas to find and foster them. I thank God for those who encouraged me when I started to preach. My do you know someone who needs to be fostered and developed ? Do you know someone who could be and should be promoted to a place of greater usefulness ? But right now they stand in need of your friendship ? How about someone who is better qualified than yourself, are you ready to step aside and play second fiddle ?

I heard about a 16 year boy who dropped out of school because his teacher said he was mentally deficient. He could not learn anymore. They told him the best thing

for him to do was to get manual labour. So he got manual labour and from the age of 16 until he was 32 he had 67 jobs and 67 times he failed and they said, “ *He’s just too dumb.*” Then someone looked at him and said, “ *That boy is different, he’s got talent and latent ability. I believe we ought to give him an I.Q test.*” Do you know what his I.Q was ? 161. He was a genius and they said, “ *Son you are brilliant.*” He began to study. At 32 he’s a dunce. At 33, he’s a genius, do you know what he’s doing now ? He is a scientist working with laser technology with a respected position and a high salary. All because someone looked at him and said, “ *There’s something in that boy, let’s get it out of him.*” My is it not the same in the spiritual realm ? Are there not some who could teach, preach, sing, do all kinds of things ? You see an Encourager is not necessarily the man who does it himself but God gave us some Barnabas’s, some who will say, “ *There’s a fellow named Saul down there, Saul here’s a job you can do I see it in you.*” Are you beginning to see why the apostles nicknamed Barnabas ? (1) (2) (3) (4) but notice he was,

(5) A STEADFAST MAN

In (Ch 15) the curtain comes down on Barnabas's life. Missionary journey number 2 is about to begin. Look at (15:36-40) My the unthinkable happened. Paul and Barnabas disagreed. Sometimes good Christians intensely disagree. I’m sure at that moment there were no two unhappier brothers in all of Antioch. The Greek

word translated *contention* in (15:39) indicates that this was not a small disagreement. Its thunder reverberated throughout the whole church. The problem was John Mark. Barnabas wanted to take his young relative along again (Col 4:10). Paul however, adamantly refused even to consider this option.

(a) THE PROBLEM PAUL SAW WITH MARK:

Was this. He had failed the first time. He could fail again. The ministry was too important, and the work too demanding, to enlist someone who might prove unreliable. Look at (15:38 13:13) Why did Mark leave them in Pamphylia ? Probably it was a combination of things. The realities of missionary life with its ongoing conflicts and discomforts, perhaps sickness, a pampered upbringing, homesickness ! Whatever the reason, Paul considered it desertion. But Barnabas saw the situation differently. There was:

(b) THE POTENTIAL BARNABAS SAW IN MARK:

“ *Paul he can and will succeed with encouragement.*”
 “ *We’re not taking Mark, he’s a failure and a quitter.*”
 “ *But Paul, there’s some good in that boy, let’s give him another chance.*” Who was right ? Well, in so many quarrels, both men were right and both were wrong. Our judgment goes with Paul, but our hearts go with Barnabas. Paul looked at people and asked, “ *What can they do for God’s work ?*” But Barnabas looked at people and asked, “ *What can God’s work do for them ?*” Well, we all know the outcome ! Paul and

Silas go there way and Barnabas and Mark go there way !

But my its Barnabas that takes the quitter, the failure, the coward and reaches down and lifts him up and puts his arms around him and says, “ ***Come on John Mark, you've got good stuff in you, you can do it.***”

Do you know something ? This was the same John Mark who wrote the Gospel. This was the same man of whom we read in (2 Tim 4:11) when Paul was in a dark, dirty damp prison he said to Timothy, “ *Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.*” Think of it: the one man in all the world that Paul wanted. **Mark !**

John Mark ! But aren't you glad that there was someone who found a failure, and fixed him and salvaged him. My there are the failures, the Lots, the Samsons, the Jonahs, the John Marks are you big enough to extend a hand of encouragement to them ? My what a man Barnabas was !

A young of 5 years of age lost his Daddy. The same boy dropped out of school when he was sixteen. He had already lost two jobs when he was seventeen. When he was eighteen he got married. By nineteen he had a little baby. By the age of twenty he and his wife were separated. From that time on he tried to make a living on the railroad, in the army, in farming, in insurance, finally he became a dishwasher there was nothing else he could do. He persuaded his wife to come back to him and together they ran a little a café,

they cooked and washed. When he got to sixty five years of age he got his first social security cheque for 105 dollars. On the day the cheque came he looked at it and it really discouraged him. He said, “ *Now I have been a failure all my life I can't do anything and now the government is going to have take care of me.*”

He decided to commit suicide. He went into his backyard and began to write out his will. Then he said, “ *why should I be such a failure ? Isn't there anything I can do ? One thing I can do better than most is cook.*” As he sat an idea began to formulate in his mind. He went to the local bank and he borrowed 87 dollars against his next cheque. He went down to the supermarket and bought some chicken and he began to fry that chicken the only way he could fry it and he went from door to door in Corban, Kentucky selling that chicken ? Have you guessed it ? Colonel Harland Sanders. Kentucky fried chicken finger licking good. At 65 years of age a failure ready to commit suicide, now known the world over. After this he was speaking some time and a little boy asked him, “ *Sir, how much money do you have ?*” He said, “ *Son, I don't know, but if I want it, I can have it.*”

Now I am not interested in selling chicken, the point is that this man was not a failure when he decided he was not. Have you decided that you are a failure ? What you probably need is some Barnabas to tell you that you're not. Thank God, for a Barnabas who found a John Mark, a man that Paul did not want anything to do with and he said, “ *Come on, son, we love you in the Lord, we are going to gave you another chance.*”

Barnabas, the Ministry of Encouragement ! He was truly a Christian gentleman. What made him so ? Well, Luke says “ *He was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.* ” (11:24) My ... the Barnabas fraternity is desperately in need of enlargement. Will you join ? Will you say, “ *Lord, make me a Barnabas, help me to be an encourager.* ”