

As you consider Bible characters, often you associated certain characteristics with their names. For instance, when you mention Abraham, you think about his faith; when you mention Sampson you think about his strength; with Solomon you think of wisdom, etc. Let me bring up the name Barnabas. What characteristic come to mind – probably “encouragement” because Barnabas is the Bible’s encourager.

William Ward, a 19th century author and Baptist preacher once wrote, “*Flatter me and I might not believe you. Criticize me and I may not like you. Ignore me and I might not remember you. Encourage me and I will never forget you.*” There is probably someone in your past that was a great influence to you because of the encouragement they gave you. It’s this kind of people that we should strive to be; be people that look beyond ourselves and reach out to others that might need encouraging. Now let’s look at the life of Barnabas to get some idea on how to encourage others.

We find Barnabas mentioned more than the other minor characters found in the NT. Yet, he was not one of Jesus’ apostles; no NT book bears his name; he is not remembered as a great preacher/speaker like Apollos. From all that we have about Barnabas, there is not a single word recorded that Barnabas ever said. What we have is what others said about him. We know that he exhorted and encouraged others by his words, but we have no first hand quotes by him. Yet what a great example and shadow he left for us to see what a great man that he was.

First let’s walk in the steps of the encourager and notice that Barnabas encouraged others with his generosity. ***Acts 4:36-37 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, (37) Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.*** The background to this passage is that people from all parts of the world have been converted to Christianity and were staying in Jerusalem. Those that could helped in caring for those new converts. Providing for others had become a serious situation.

Look now at v 36 as we consider Barnabas. We learn that Barnabas was a nickname but he was a Levite; from the tribe of Levi. This was the priestly tribe so we can assume that he served in assisting the priest in performing the priestly services. In some capacity he was probably a teacher of the old law. Barnabas was not from around Jerusalem; instead he was from the island of Cypress out in the Med. Sea. There was a large colony of

Jews that had migrated to that island. Apparently he had sometimes in the past established a relationship with the apostles as they seemed to know something about his character since they called him Barnabas, the son of consolation.

V 37 tells us that Barnabas had some land and sold it and brought the money to the apostles. We don't know how much land it was or where it was located. We don't even know if he sold all of his land. It could have been land in Cypress but some think this property was near Jerusalem. If it was around Jerusalem, then he may have thought it was no longer needed since they would not be coming back to the city for the Passover, Pentecost, etc. anymore. So he might as well sell it. We don't know where the land was, but we do know that he some property that he sold and brought the money to the apostles. The apostles were charged with distributing this money in a fair manner.

Imagine if you will that you were in Jerusalem during this time and you became a Christian. You were away from home but wanted to stay and learn more from the apostles. You didn't think that you knew enough. You managed your finances the best you could but eventually the funds ran out and you didn't have enough to get back home. This was weighing heavy on your heart because you had a family with children and you didn't know how to care for them. Then there was Barnabas. Perhaps he saw the need and decided to do something to help. He didn't have any extra money but he had some land that he could sell.

With this story in mind, read with me 1 John 3:16-18 with a set of fresh eyes. *1 John 3:15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer* (this is really strong language because hatred in the heart could easily lead to hatred with the hand.) *and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.* You don't want to be this person because he's not going to heaven. So let us take inventory and guard the gate of our hearts. I imagine there are many in our prisons today that never intended to be murders but they gave way to bitterness in their hearts. Now by contrast, *(16) Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* (This is the opposite of being a murder. A murder is a taker; here we are instructed to be a giver. If you have developed the love for someone that you are willing to die for that person, then the rest of this passage is no big deal. *(17) But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him* (he closes his heart and looks the other way), *how dwelleth the love*

of God in him? (18) My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. If we have the means, then we too can be a Barnabas by helping someone that needs help. Maybe it's to pay a delinquent utility that they have; maybe it is to sit and visit with them when they are lonely; maybe it to drive them to the doctor when they need transportation.

This has happened here. There have been times when some members here have given me some money and asked that I give to those that needed some help. They want to remain anonymous but just wanted to help. That's being a Barnabas.

Back in 1841/2 C. Columbus began going to different kings seeking funds for a trip to the new world. He had been to Italy, Portugal and finally came to Spain and talked with King Ferdinand. The king said he didn't have the funds and refused Columbus's request so he left desponded. But soon a rider caught up with him and with the message to return back to the court. When he arrived, Queen Isabella said that she would sell her jewels and sponsor his trip to the new world and the rest is history. The point I want to make from that story is what a difference a little money made in the history of the world. And for us, a little money at the right time can make a real difference in someone's life and we may never see the potential that might be ahead.

No 2. Let's see Barnabas encouraging with his acceptance. The setting here is right after the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Let's pick up the story in Acts 9. *Act 9:23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:* Saul went from being the Jews hero to their hated enemy. *(24) But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. (25) Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket. (26) And when Saul was come to Jerusalem.* Now he's coming back home, but he's not going back to the Jewish leaders, instead he plans to go to the Christians. But the Christians don't trust him because of his past reputation. This was a dangerous time to be a Christian and they were skittish of Saul. *He assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.* But what takes place is that Barnabas steps up into that gap and defends Saul. The word "consolation" or "encourager" means "to come along side." And that's exactly what we see happen right here. *(27) But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached*

boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. Apparently the apostles were some place different than the disciples so Barnabas took Saul to them and spoke on his behalf. We do not know how Barnabas knew that Saul had boldly defended the truth in Damascus. Perhaps he was there and was a witness; it may be that he got his information from talking with reliable source that saw and heard what happened; maybe he had received letters from trusted friends in Damascus; or maybe he and Saul had a previous friendship and possibly studied Judaism together at the feet of Gamaliel. Regardless of how he knew, what he said was accurate and he stood by the side of Saul and he defended him.

Let's think about how this applies to the church today. Many of you, in fact probably the majority of you here today are members of this congregation but did not grow up here; instead you moved here. When you first visited here, do you remember how you felt? Did you feel welcomed; did people speak to you and greet you warmly or did you feel ignored. After being here a while, did you feel included or did you feel alienated and not a part of the family? Well, this is where Saul was. He was trying to become a part of the congregation and they didn't want him. He was being shunned. If you have felt that way here or someplace else, remember how that felt and make an effort to not let it happen to our guest that visit our services or a new member that really doesn't know anyone. Have you every once asked a visitor to come and sit with you and introduce them to the people around you. Have you ever tried to make a new person feel comfortable? When you do, you become a Barnabas.

A few years ago I went to see the movie 42. It was about Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier in major league baseball and was playing 2nd base for the Brooklyn Dodgers. He received a lot of criticism and jeers from the fans, especially on the road. But one time he was at home before the home fans and he made an error at second base and all the fans began to boo him. Pee Wee Reese, the shortstop went over to Robinson and put his arms around his shoulder and looked up to the crowd as if to say, "I'm with him." Robertson would later say that one act of support saved his career. He said he was about ready to quit. Pee Wee Reese was a Barnabas.

I know there are people like Jackie Robertson in the church and need someone to step up and stand by them and encourage them and by doing so just might save (not their career) their soul. Not only is this the right thing to do, it is a direct commandment from

God. *Rom 15:7 Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.*

No. 3. Go to Acts 11. Here we find Barnabas encouraging others by his exhortation, his kind words. Many of you are good at saying the right thing at the right time. Barnabas was that kind of person and the church in Jerusalem heard about the church in Antioch and of all the people they could have sent they sent Barnabas. *Act 11:22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.* Antioch was almost 300 miles from Jerusalem. That's a long way even today. It's like going from here to Galveston. How many of you know what's going on in the church in Galveston? But somehow, Jerusalem was plugged into the church in Antioch and decided to send someone up there to check on and encourage them, and Barnabas was the man of choice.

(23) *Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, (positive, good words) that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.* His exhortation was to greater faith and commitment. Now notice the results of this encouragement. (24) *For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.*

The church was doing well and many people were being added unto the Lord. Then Barnabas thought about Saul. *Act 11:25-26 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: (26) And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.* We too can be a Barnabas toward others by exhortation.

Final observation is seen in chapter 15. Paul and Barnabas were sent by the church at Antioch on the first missionary journey. They returned and spent some time back in Antioch working with the church there. *Act 15:35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.* While on that missionary journey, Paul thought they should go back and check on those new churches. (36) *And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how*

they do. Let's go back to the same cities and same churches not to evangelize but to edify. As they were making plans to go, Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them which cause quite a stir. John Mark was a nephew to Barnabas and had traveled with them on their first journey as far as Pamphylia where he left and returned home. (37) *And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. (38) But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. (39) And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus.* These two great soldiers of the cross had sharp contention between them. They were really mad over this matter. Neither would compromise so they departed and went their separate ways.

What we see here is Barnabas wanted to give John Mark a second chance and was forgiving. Now don't we all from time to time need a second chance; and don't we all need forgiveness. Isn't that what happens when we obey the gospel? We come forth from the watery grave of baptism to walk in newness of life – that's a second chance.

When a person comes forward and ask for the forgiveness of the church – what ought our attitude to be toward that person. I would hope we would have the attitude of Barnabas and come along beside you and put my arm around you and encourage you to do better. Forgiveness is hard when we don't want to.

1 Cor. 13:7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Barnabas is the epitome of a loving Christian and we see these four traits in his life from the four chapters that we have just covered together. Love beareth all things - that's Barnabas selling his land and giving to others. Love believeth all things – that's believing in Saul when no one else did. Love hopeth all things - that is seen by his exhorting the church in Antioch. Finally love endureth all things – that was his argument with Paul over John Mark.

Invitation.