

Barnabas

PART 2

ACTS 11:19-30; 13:1-4; 15:36-41

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Madison, Wisconsin
October 9, 2016**



This morning I'd like for us to continue looking a request that came in from one of the teenagers a while back, and if you were here last week, then you might remember the question: One of our teens was looking for "ways that all people in the church (young, old, men, and women) can and should get involved." Or, if I could summarize, the question is basically: What can we do? A very encouraging question!

Last week, then, we started answering this request by looking together at a character from the Bible – Joseph – but we learned that Joseph had a nickname, "Son of Encouragement," or, as we might say today, "Mr. Encouragement." He was so encouraging that the people who knew him best basically changed his name! We know him today, therefore, not as Joseph, but as Bar-nabas, Barnabas, or literally, Son of Encouragement. And we learned last week that out of 28 references to Barnabas in the New Testament, he is described as DOING SOMETHING in nearly every one of those references. And so we looked to Barnabas for encouragement! If we are looking for something to DO, Barnabas is a great example to follow.

Last week, then, we saw from that first reference in Acts 4, that Barnabas was an encouragement to those in need. He saw a need in the early church, so he sold some property and gave the proceeds of the sale to the apostles, who were then able to distribute it to those who needed it the most. He didn't wait for somebody else to think up some program, but Barnabas saw the need and then immediately did whatever was in his power to do.

In terms of modern and practical applications of what Barnabas did there, we tried to challenge each other to simply live by the Golden Rule, to treat others just as we would like to be treated if we were in similar circumstances. We looked at Socktober, we talked about helping those in our bulletin who are going through some health and emotional struggles – sending cards, baking, helping someone set up a Facebook or email account, using your own money to purchase after school snacks for our neighborhood elementary school, getting supplies for Shults-Lewis Child and Family Services, purchasing items for the Coffee for Troops program, bringing in aluminum cans, or maybe something that nobody has ever thought about before. As Christians, our goal is to BE JESUS to those in the world around us.

Last Sunday we then went on to look at a second passage about Barnabas in the book of Acts, and we learned that Barnabas not only did something to encourage those in need, but he also did something to encourage

someone on the outside to be accepted by those on the inside. And the reference there is to what happened in Acts 9 as Barnabas put his arm around Saul, taking him to the elders of the church in Jerusalem, and encouraging the Jerusalem congregation to accept Saul as one of their own. Saul had just been a terrible persecutor of the church, so the early Christians were understandably skeptical, but it took Barnabas putting his reputation on the line to get them to see Saul as one of their own.

We applied that passage to our lives today by noting how important it is for all of us (but especially new Christians) to be accepted as part of the congregation. There is a danger that we might only associate with those we've known for years (even in the church), and so we may need to make a special effort (like Barnabas did) to carefully bring everybody from the outside to the inside. We talked about calling, emailing, or messaging, to check in with each other, we talked about sending care packages to our college students who are living hundreds of miles away from home. Even here at worship, we had a reminder from Hebrews 10 that the purpose of our time together is to encourage each other, considering how to encourage love and good deeds. We don't just show up, talk to our friends, and leave, but we are to actively encourage as many as we can while we are here. And if we see someone who needs an arm around the shoulder, then let's do it! This is something we can do, regardless of how old or young we might be. But again, it goes back to the Golden Rule, treating other people the way that we ourselves would like to be treated if we were either new or feeling somewhat excluded for whatever reason.

This morning, as we continue looking at this question, "What can we do?," I'd like for us to look at several more passages from the life of Barnabas.

- I. **And the first passage for us to look at this morning is found in Acts 11:19-30, as we find that Barnabas took some solid steps to encourage those who were BRAND NEW CHRISTIANS, those who were practically NEWBORNS INTO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH – HE STRENGTHENED THE SPIRITUALLY IMMATURE.**

And to understand what happens in Acts 11, we really need to understand what happens in Acts 10. Up until Acts 10, the gospel had really only been explained to the Jews. So up until Acts 10, all of the new converts were Jewish. In Acts 10, though, Peter is called on to preach to Cornelius, the Roman Centurion, a gentile. Cornelius is baptized, along with his entire household, and in the first part of Acts 11, Peter brings the report back to Jerusalem. If you remember the ABC's of Acts, Chapter 11 is represented by the letter K – "Kingdom Included Gentiles." This was a big deal! And right during this time of transition, we come to Acts 11:19-30. Notice, please, what happens, and specifically, notice, please, what Barnabas does about it – Acts 11:19-30,

¹⁹ So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. ²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. ²² The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. ²³ Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; ²⁴ for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. ²⁵ And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; ²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

27 Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. 29 And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. 30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

Going back up to verse 19, we find that a number of people had traveled north to Antioch of Syria to escape the persecution of the church that took place after the murder of Stephen. And while they're up there, knowing what had happened with Cornelius, some of them started actively preaching to the Gentiles. Well, that was quite successful, and once the elders down in Jerusalem hear about it, they send Barnabas! Again, Barnabas was Mr. Encouragement to these people, and that group up in Antioch needed some special encouragement! And just as expected (starting in verse 23), when Barnabas arrives, ***"...he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and considerable numbers were brought to the Lord."*** At that point though (in verse 26), Barnabas leaves. And reading through this, we might think, "Oh no! These people need Barnabas!" But we quickly find that Barnabas was simply getting help! Barnabas left, only to get the apostle Paul! I believe Barnabas knew, 1.) That these people needed what Paul had to offer in terms of knowledge and encouragement, and I believe Barnabas also knew, 2.) That Paul needed to be doing something like this himself! And so, for the next year, Barnabas and Saul work together, meeting with the church and teaching ***"considerable numbers."***

I would make just a passing reference here to a brief comment Luke (the author) makes at the end of verse 26, ***"...and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."*** Up until this point, most people in the Roman world looked at these people believing in Jesus as just some sect or splinter group off of the Jewish faith. But now that so many Gentiles are obeying the gospel and joining the faith, they were starting to understand that this was something much larger than Judaism. These people are Christians, or literally, "little Christs." They are followers of Jesus Christ. And that, of course, is what we are trying to be today. We are not members of any man-made denomination or religious movement, we are not part of a particular movement or tradition, but we are simply Christians, followers of Jesus Christ.

But getting back to Barnabas here, we find in verse 23 that he was encouraging these people with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord. So, it's not like when he encouraged the poor by helping financially (as he did in last week's passage), it's not like when he encouraged Saul (the outsider) to be accepted by those on the inside (as he did in the second passage we looked at last week), but the idea here is that Barnabas encouraged those who were new or weak in the faith to be stronger now than they were yesterday. He was encouraging personal and spiritual growth. Did the church in Antioch grow stronger spiritually? Yes, they did! We see it right here in this passage, and we'll also see it in the next passage we'll get to in a minute, as this congregation actually sponsors and sends out Barnabas and Saul on what we now know as Paul's First Missionary Journey. And so, they grew in faith to the point where they actually sent out some of the first missionaries in the First Century. All of this goes back, I believe, to the encouragement provided by Barnabas.

So the question for us today is: How can we, like Barnabas, encourage those who are young and immature in the faith? How can we encourage growth? How can we encourage the development of spiritual strength? And as we did last week, I want to focus in especially on our teens. What can you do to encourage spiritual growth in the church? Probably one of the easiest ways to do this is to start by simply attending every single worship service and every class. You might think that I have this the other way around, that we come to class and

worship to grow ourselves, and that is obviously part of it. But what some of us may forget from time to time is that when we come together, we also encourage the people we see. We touched on this just a little bit last week, but it applies this week as well – we come to worship, we come to class, not just to learn ourselves, not just to be encouraged, but we come together to teach and encourage others as well. And no matter where you are in terms of your own spiritual strength, even for those who might see themselves as being rather weak or immature themselves, chances are, just by being here, with just a little effort, even you can do something to teach or encourage at least one of your Christian brothers or sisters. And again, thinking about age: With one exception, everybody here this morning has someone older than you in this room, and with one exception, everybody in this room has somebody younger than you in this room. The same is true in terms of spiritual maturity.

And this applies to something as simple as the singing we do together. Perhaps we look at Barnabas. Barnabas traveled to this new congregation. Barnabas taught people and encouraged people. And maybe we're tempted to think, "Oh, I could never do that!" But don't we teach each other just by singing together? Remember, please, what Paul said in Colossians 3:16, where he commanded the whole church, ***"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God."*** When we sing, therefore, we are teaching each other. Yes, we personally learn when we hear other people singing, but we also teach when we sing out to others. And that right there is why we will never have a choir here. This is why we don't have a praise team. This is why we don't have people coming up here and singing solos. What Paul commands here is that all of us sing to each other, that we teach and admonish each other as we sing. This isn't something one person does while another person listens, but this is something that we do together. And I would note: There is no clause here indicating that we must rise to some level of musical perfection! Obviously, it sounds better when everything is pitched and led properly and when we sing at the proper rate and volume, and all that, but even in the absence of musical perfection, teaching and learning can be accomplished. My encouragement to all of you, then, would be to sing out, to pay attention to the words, to look up words you don't know, to pay attention to each song as a whole. Notice the author, the date, the history, and so on. And again, like Barnabas did with Saul, we can call in help as needed.

This, obviously, applies to when we are together. This applies to us as we teach and encourage each other.

- II. **Just briefly, I would point out a second big lesson from Barnabas this morning, and that is: Barnabas also TAUGHT THE WORD OF GOD TO THOSE OUTSIDE THE CHRISTIAN FAITH. Barnabas took this teaching to the WORLD, to the LOST.**

I referred to it just a moment ago, but the series of references begin in Acts 13:2, where the Holy Spirit has the church set apart Barnabas and Saul for the purpose of sending them on a special mission, what will later be known as Paul's First Missionary Journey. And starting in verse 4, they go out preaching and teaching in some places where the gospel had not yet traveled in the south-central part of the nation we know today as Turkey. This mission is described in Acts 13-14. And many of the lessons we can learn from Barnabas here are similar to those we just learned from Acts 11, only now, his efforts are directed primarily toward those on the outside.

So, how can we be like Barnabas here? Obviously, all of us have the ability to teach about Jesus to somebody who doesn't really know Jesus and to those who might have been taught incorrectly in the past. We can invite a friend to worship with us. We can invite a friend to study with us. We can volunteer to teach a Bible class – talk to Rob (our deacon responsible for the education program here) if you are interested. We can prepare to

study with others one-on-one. I don't know whether you've thought about this, but just learning the books of the Bible is good preparation. If you haven't yet memorized the books of the Bible, that right there would be a good start. Be familiar with God's plan of salvation and where we can find each step in the Bible. All of these things can prepare us for teaching the word of God to those who've never heard it, and this is a lesson we can learn from Barnabas. Before he could teach it, he had to know it, and that goes for us as well.

III. There is a third and final big idea I'd like us to get from Barnabas this morning, and that is: Barnabas ENCOURAGED THE QUITTER.

And for this, we turn to Acts 15:36-41. We just looked at this a couple of years ago and also in the Sunday morning adult class rather recently, but I'd like for us to touch on it at least briefly. Partway into that First Missionary Journey, Barnabas' young cousin, John Mark, for some reason quit and went home. And as they were preparing to go on a Second Missionary Journey, that incident caused some level of conflict between Paul and Barnabas. Notice, please, Acts 15:36-41,

³⁶ After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. ³⁸ But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. ⁴⁰ But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

I would just emphasize here that when Paul objected to taking John Mark, Barnabas could have just given in. He could have said, "Fine, let's go." But he did not. Barnabas (and I think we've seen this in his character by now), but Barnabas holds firm and insists that John Mark go on this journey. Just as Barnabas had done for Paul a number of years earlier, Barnabas was now also giving John Mark a second chance! He was encouraging the quitter. And this disagreement got so heated that Barnabas and Paul split up. They were still Christian brothers, this was not a disagreement over some doctrine, but it was a disagreement over a matter of opinion, it was the question of whether John Mark was to go on this second journey. At the time, that must have been quite a traumatic decision, but over time, we find that it actually works out for the best. We find in verse 39 that Barnabas and John Mark head on over to Cyprus. And in verse 40, we find that Paul chooses Silas, and they head on up to some of those churches that Paul and Barnabas had established earlier. In fact, if we continue on over into Chapter 16, we notice that Paul and Silas find a young man by the name of Timothy on that trip. Paul then takes Timothy under his wing, and Timothy (in a sense) becomes the new John Mark, and this new team goes on to cover some ground that Paul and Barnabas and John Mark probably could have never covered on their own. In effect, then, even more territory is covered because of this disagreement. Again, a disagreement caused by Barnabas doing what Barnabas does, encouraging – encouraging the quitter!

The verse that comes to mind was our scripture reading this morning, Hebrews 12:12-13, where the author addresses a group of people who were seriously thinking about turning away from the Christian faith, and he says, ***"Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed."*** That is what Barnabas did for John Mark – he gave that young man a second chance, and that is what we can do for others. Maybe somebody let you down, or said something stupid, or whatever – Barnabas, I believe, would give that person another chance. And even if it seems that the person is so far gone that there is no hope, it

seems that our job is to (in a sense) leave the door open. And that is something that all of us can do. For those we have not seen in a while, we can do something to get in touch; we can do something to encourage.

Conclusion:

This morning, then, we have looked at some more that we can actually do, and I hope that these two lessons have been ENCOURAGING to you. We learn from Barnabas that we can encourage those in need, we can encourage the outcast, we can encourage new Christians as well as those who are lost, and we can also encourage the quitter. I am thankful for your attention to these two lessons, and I am especially thankful to one of our teens who requested these lessons.

As we close, we want to invite everyone here to respond publicly to the word of God if you need to, whether you need the prayers of the church or whether you are ready to become a Christian. Jesus came to this earth to die on the cross, he was buried, and he was then raised up on the third day. We respond to what he did by repenting of sin, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with Jesus in baptism. If we can help you do this, we hope you will let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com