



## **A Spiritual Encouragement Message September 1, 2020**

### **Barnabas**

**by Randall Jarrell**

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

The vast majority of great men and women have been utterly forgotten. Hundreds of God's great and faithful servants have vanished from history. They are remembered by no one but God. But not all the great men and women of God have been forgotten. God intends for their lives to give us inspiration and guidance. God intends for memory to be a great means of grace. Hebrews 13:7 says, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life and imitate their faith." Hebrews 6:12 says, "Do not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." And of course, Hebrews 11 is a collection of excerpts from the lives of great men and women of faith. The author of Hebrews was convinced that the dead can and will go on speaking for our encouragement if someone will take the trouble to preserve their memory. Proverbs 13:20 says, "He who walks with wise men becomes wise. While it is good to walk among the living, it is good also to live with the wise, great, and good dead. It keeps out of life the dreadful feeling of extemporaneousness, with its conceit and its despair. It makes us always know that God made other men before He made us. It furnishes a

constant background for our living. It provides us with perpetual humility and inspiration. The lives or memoirs of persons of piety, well written, have been of infinite and unspeakable advantage to the disciples and professors of Christianity, and have given us admirable instances and rules how to resist every temptation of a soothing or a frowning world, how to practice important and difficult duties, how to love God above all, and to love our neighbors as ourselves, to live by the faith of the Son of God, and to die in the same faith, in sure and certain hope of a resurrection to eternal life. There are two ways of representing and recommending true religion and virtue to the world; the one, by doctrine and precept; the other, by instance and example. Our text this morning is Acts 11:22–24. Disciples had been scattered all over the Mediterranean coastlands after the persecution of Stephen. Some went about 400 miles north to Antioch and preached to Gentiles. A great number believed (according to verse 21) and this news reached the church in Jerusalem. This is where verse 22 picks up:

News 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 large company was added to the Lord. What we want to try to see today is what makes this man tick. It is obvious that Luke admires Barnabas. After he describes his ministry in verse 23, he says, “For he was a good man.” I want to focus on the root of that goodness. Where does it come from? And how does this particular root produce the fruit of goodness we see in this text? How might it produce the same goodness in us? Verse 24 has two assertions: Barnabas was a good man, and Barnabas was full of the Holy Spirit and faith. How do they relate to each other? Fullness of the Holy Spirit and faith is the root or source of Barnabas’ goodness. Paul unpacks this relationship in Galatians. He says in Galatians 5:22 that goodness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. You don’t get the Holy Spirit because you are good. The Holy Spirit starts to make you good. But what do we do in that process? We are not passive in this affair of becoming good. That’s why Luke doesn’t just say that Barnabas was full of the Holy Spirit. He is full of the Holy Spirit and faith. Faith is what we do. Now what does faith have to do with the work of the Holy Spirit? Galatians 3:2 tells us: “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?” The assumed answer is that we received the Spirit by faith in the Word of God. Then verse 5 says, “Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?” And again the assumed answer is FAITH! The Spirit is received by faith and goes on being supplied through faith. At the very beginning of the Christian life we receive the Holy Spirit by trusting in the truth of the gospel (Galatians 3:2). Then as the Christian life goes on and there is need again and again to be strengthened and filled with the Spirit, this too happens by faith in the word of God’s promise (Galatians 3:5). One of the practical fruits or products of this Spirit-filled faith is goodness (Galatians 5:22). So when Luke says that Barnabas was “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith,” my understanding is that Barnabas had a great faith in God, and that by this faith the Holy Spirit became powerful in his heart, and that the result was a lot of practical goodness in Barnabas’ life. So if you asked Luke what made Barnabas tick, what was the key to his life as a Christian leader, I think Luke could have said two things. If he wanted to focus on the divine enabling of Barnabas’s life, he could have said, “The key to his life was that he was full of the Holy Spirit.” Or if Luke wanted to focus on the human side, he could have said, “The key to his life was that he was full of faith.”

How can the life of Barnabas become living and effective for us at this point? How can we get encouragement and guidance from Luke's portrait? What will be most helpful to us will be to point out the specific ways that Barnabas' goodness showed itself and how faith made that possible. I have seen at least six demonstrations of Barnabas' goodness in today's text. 1. His Empathy to Outsiders

Barnabas is known for his empathy to outsiders. Notice from verse 22 that of all the apostles and elders and deacons that the church in Jerusalem could have sent to help the Gentile believers in Antioch, the church chose Barnabas. Why? Because he had earned a reputation for caring for the underdog. For example, in Acts 9:26–27 after the conversion of Saul—the former persecutor, and Pharisee—the whole church was so afraid of him that he couldn't even join their fellowship as a new Christian. Only Barnabas was willing to stand by him and be his advocate. In fact, according to Acts 4:36 Barnabas' real name was Joseph and the apostles called him "Barnabas" because it means "son of encouragement." It's obvious that Luke wants us to see Barnabas' goodness in his remarkable gift for encouraging others, especially underdogs or outsiders. So the church in Jerusalem chooses Barnabas to go to Antioch to encourage and establish the new Gentile church. Now how does faith produce this kind of goodness? Surely part of the answer is this: faith feels the wonder of being accepted as an outsider to God's blessing. Faith is the apprehension that we were once cut off from the heavenly Jerusalem and willfully locked in the Antioch of sin. And faith is the apprehension that God built a bridge between Jerusalem and Antioch, constructed with the cross of his own Son. And therefore, faith has a kind of built-in empathy for outsiders. This was very strong in Barnabas' life for some reason. So, of all the apostles and elders who could have gone to encourage the Gentile converts in Antioch, the church chose Barnabas. He had the goodness of empathy with outsiders because faith still feels the wonder of being accepted by God.