

BARNABAS: A GOOD MAN

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In Acts 13, two men prepared for a journey that would change the world. One was known and respected throughout the church, the other was a newcomer with a tainted past—Barnabas and Saul of Tarsus. However, 2,000 years later, the lesser known is now considered one of the pivotal people in the history of the early church (if not history itself), and the one well-known at the time?

Little more than a footnote in the history of the New Testament.
But what a footnote he was!

If there is one passage that sums Barnabas up, it is Acts 11:24, “For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” While many would wince at what the world views as a rather drab description (“good”), his goodness made him distinct and worthy of imitation. “Goodness” is a character trait that ought to be found in all disciples of Christ (Galatians 5:22). What made Barnabas “good”?

BARNABAS THOUGHT OF OTHERS. The first time we are introduced to him he is seen as a giver (Acts 4:36-37). In the early church, many of the pilgrims to Jerusalem at Pentecost stayed behind to learn and were in deep need of care. A spirit of generosity arose (4:34), with Barnabas being specifically mentioned. We don’t know how much he gave, but we can be certain it wasn’t pocket change! How many of us would have done the same for people we barely knew? You can answer this question today by looking at how you spend your money, time, and energies in helping others. What the church needs today are more people who take their faith seriously like Barnabas (James 1:22; 2:13-14; 1 John 3:14-19). “Good” people look for ways to help others and earnestly try to make a difference in their lives.

BARNABAS ENCOURAGED OTHERS. His name was actually Joseph. Acts 4:36 reveals that the apostles called him “Barnabas,” which meant “Son of Encouragement.” The nickname came as a result of his actions. “Encouragement” didn’t mean simply patting people on the back and telling them to “hang in there!” Barnabas was a comforter, a consoler, and a counselor. He noticed people and wanted to bring out the best in them. He pulled for the underdog. This can be seen in his standing next to Saul when Saul attempted to join himself to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-27). We need more people like Barnabas—Christians who are willing to work with the weak and lift them up, giving them time, attention, and encouragement. This demands we look outside of our own world and into the world of others—to those who have fallen (Galatians 6:1-2), to those who are sorrowful (Romans 12:15), to those who could be more in the Lord’s service if helped.

BARNABAS INCLUDED OTHERS. His reputation was so good among the saints in Jerusalem, when an incredible preaching opportunity arose in Antioch, Barnabas was the one the church sent to encourage and exhort, and he lived up to his nickname (Acts 11:23). However, the work was greater than one man could accomplish on his own. Lesser men

may have desired to keep all of the glory for themselves, but not this good man. He wasn't threatened by including others. He sought out Saul of Tarsus to help. For a whole year they assembled with the church and taught, accomplishing together a great deal. Leonard Bernstein once said that the hardest instrument to play is the second violin; no one wants to play second fiddle. Barnabas didn't seem to mind as long as he could play in the band. There is always a temptation, unfortunately, to be more like Diotrephes (3 John 9)—excluding others in order to gain more glory and importance, not wanting to share the responsibility because we don't want to share the glory. To Barnabas, a good man, the work was more important than the personal accolades.

BARNABAS STOOD FOR THE TRUTH. (Acts 13:46 and Acts 15). He wasn't afraid to speak out boldly and say what needed to be said. He had a deep love for the Lord. We learn from Barnabas that compassion and strength are not mutually exclusive. He embodied the call of 2 Timothy 2:24-25— “the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.” Strength in the Lord and compassion for people—that was Barnabas. He allowed himself to be used by God and God, in turn, worked through him.

“He was a good man”—a simple description, but how significant! May we follow in his footsteps this week.