

# Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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## Barnabas - a model pastor: Full of faith, the life of the pastor

### Introduction

This is the third of three talks about Barnabas. The first concentrated on the goodness of Barnabas; his moral character. The second focussed on the fact that he was full of the Holy Spirit. That gave us the source of his power. Today, we are looking at the personal faith of Barnabas. That was exhibited both in his personal life and also in his work for the Lord. This will teach us much about Barnabas himself. It will certainly provide a wonderful example for other believers to follow, especially you and me.

Our source of information shall be various chapters of the Book of Acts.

### Acts 4

The first time we hear about Barnabas is in Acts 4:32-37. Barnabas was a Levite, and therefore a Jew. He was born in Cyprus (Acts 4:36). His parents gave him the name of Joseph (Acts 4:36). The apostles gave him the additional name of Barnabas, meaning Son of Encouragement (Acts 4:36). The scriptures clearly describe Barnabas as providing help, comfort, and wisdom, in a practical way, to those round about him. All was motivated by his own personal faith, his total trust in God. Barnabas was clearly someone who gave encouragement to others by his very bearing, a clear willingness to help. That was as well as and altogether apart from anything he said or did. All this was actuated by his personal faith. It is certainly true that what we "are" in person can encourage others who also wish to serve the Lord.

The first action we read about Barnabas, in Acts 4:36-37, was that he followed the example of the apostles, and many other Christians of that time. *"Having land, he sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet."* Indeed, Barnabas gave all his time, indeed all of himself, to God's work.

This was evidently a matter of personal faith. He had trusted the Lord Jesus as his Saviour, confessed Him as his Lord, and was anxious to serve Him as His Master. He had the personal faith to accept that by making his personal assets available for the work of the Lord, he would personally be available to the Lord to go wherever the Lord chose to send Him. He would be unencumbered by the commitments that would be involved in having business interests in his own home sphere. Clearly, it is not given to every Christian to do this. Nevertheless, particularly in the early days of Christianity, it was the calling of those with sufficient faith to make themselves fully available to carry out the work of the Lord. They trusted the Lord in heaven to provide whatever resources on earth would be necessary along the way. In showing his personal faith in his Master in that way, Barnabas demonstrated to those who knew him that he was willing to trust the Lord fully for anything he needed. He led others by the example of his own personal faith.

### Acts 9

In Acts chapter 9 we read of Saul of Tarsus, a major persecutor of Christians, who had just got saved (Acts 9:1-25). Justifiably, and understandably, Christians who knew his background and history were sceptical of Saul's true purpose in coming into their ranks (Acts 9:26). Barnabas had evidently already met Saul. He was willing to stand up and vouch for Saul's authenticity as a Christian (Acts 9:27). Indeed, Saul was already a fervent servant of the Lord Jesus, preaching boldly at Damascus in the Name of Jesus (Acts 9:29).

Here, Barnabas again demonstrated his personal faith; that is, his total, absolute trust in God, in every part of his life and every aspect of his Christian service. Courageously, he supported the recently converted Saul of Tarsus. By this time, Barnabas had enough of a reputation among the Christians at Jerusalem, built on his personal faith, to be trusted by them. He, in turn, had faith in the validity of the Lord's work in others, including Saul of Tarsus. Barnabas was a man who was instrumental in the spread of the gospel in the early days of the Christian church. Yet, generally, he is not as well known as Saul, whom we probably rightly consider to be the greatest missionary in church history. Of course, God could have used someone else to facilitate Saul's introduction to the Christian church and to launch his missionary career. That He chose to use Barnabas is a tribute to his faith and faithfulness.

It could not have been easy to stand up and try to convince his co-workers in Christ, that the man who shortly before was threatening to imprison or even murder Christians (see Acts 9:1-2), was now a staunch believer. But Barnabas had enough of a reputation in the Jerusalem church by this time to be trusted by the congregation. On the basis of the reliable word of Barnabas they allowed their former enemy to become known as one of them.

### Acts 11

In Acts 11:19-26, the Gospel was being preached at Antioch to the Gentiles as well as to Jews. Many Gentiles began to believe on the Lord Jesus as their Saviour. However, many members of the Christian church at Jerusalem were not sure that this was permissible. They were either unaware, or had no confidence in, the vision Peter was given in Acts 10:9-16. The Lord gave him there the mandate to take the Christian gospel to the Gentiles. The local brethren discussed the matter and decided that Barnabas was the most appropriate person to go to investigate and establish the facts at Antioch. Barnabas had the faith and humility to accept the judgment of the elder brethren that he was the right man to do this on their behalf. Through all this, the faith of Barnabas kept the right balance in his activities. He exhorted those amongst whom he worked to cleave to the Lord above all else. He already realised that you can freely recommend to others what you have already applied wholeheartedly, in faith, to yourself.

Barnabas quickly assessed the work going on at Antioch. It was the work of God. Barnabas stimulated those involved to be encouraged to carry on this good work. Acts 11:23 tells us, *"... when he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and exhorted them all to remain faithful [that is, full of faith, faithful] to the Lord with steadfast purpose."*

Barnabas was so encouraged in his own soul that he went on to Tarsus, Saul's home city, and brought him back to Antioch, to help in the work there. Acts 11:26 tells us, *"And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that [for] a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."*

The mutual faith and love between the Christians at Jerusalem and Antioch resulting from the faith and service of Barnabas was quickly demonstrated and sealed. Barnabas and Saul took back to Jerusalem with them parcels of famine relief from Antioch for Judea (Acts 11:27-30).

Again, the church at Jerusalem trusted the character and decision-making of their friend Barnabas. They readily accepted his report that God was truly doing a mighty work among the Gentiles in Antioch, strengthening the fellowship between the two cities.

### Acts 12

We learn from Acts 12:25 that, after they had completed their commitments at Jerusalem, Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch. They took with them the nephew of Barnabas, John Mark, and continued their missionary activities, resulting in more souls being saved. Acts 12:24 tells us, *"The word of God increased and spread."* Barnabas was able to rejoice that his faith in the Christ he preached as Saviour was being rewarded.

### Acts 13

Acts 13 starts in a dramatic way. *"Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then, after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off"* (Acts 13:1-3).

We see here the record of the first time Barnabas and Saul were sent out as missionaries from the Christian assembly at Antioch, guided by The Holy Spirit.

It is interesting to note that for a while Barnabas is listed before Saul in references to their missionary team. Barnabas seems to have been recognised by the church at Antioch as the leader of the team. At some point in their work together the leadership switched. Saul, from Acts 13:9 called Paul, took over as the leader of the team. It would require gentle, submissive faith in Barnabas for him to yield to Paul in this way. It is quite clear that there was no resistance from Barnabas about this subtle change of responsibility.

This gives further witness to who and what Barnabas was. He did not insist on retaining his previous authority. He was happy to help others fulfil their ministry. God used Barnabas to bring others to their full capacity in serving the Lord. Note also that their faith and dependence in their service for the Lord were demonstrated by their fasting and praying (Acts 13:2-3).

Acts 13:7 tells us they had an early encouraging result of their work at Antioch. The Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus, summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

Acts 13:43 gives us another happy result. *"...Many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God."*

Acts 13:46 adds a reminder. In those days it was necessary for the word of God to be presented to the Jews first. Then, when they resisted it, it could be made accessible to willing Gentiles. The climax of that encounter was the dramatic statement, *"Lo, we turn to the Gentiles."*

Their Gentile listeners immediately began to rejoice and glorify the word of God (Acts 13:48). Paul and Barnabas, and the disciples with them, were thoroughly filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost. What an answer to the faith and commitment of Barnabas!

## Acts 14

Acts 14 tells us that Paul and Barnabas continued their missionary work in Iconium. They began as usual by preaching the Christian gospel in the Jewish synagogue. The result was that a great multitude of both Jews and Greeks believed (Acts 14:1).

Inevitably, after such wonderful results at Antioch, Satan marshalled his forces to resist the gospel message at Iconium. The unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and did their utmost to make their minds resist the gospel message (Acts 14:2).

Happily, this only drove the preachers to continue to speak boldly about the Lord and His great salvation. They bore witness to the word of His grace, and the Lord granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. So much so that many who heard them began to speak of the preachers as being on a level with their own pagan, mythical gods.

At once Paul and Barnabas ran among the people, protesting, and crying out, "No! No! It's not us you should be praising. We are just ordinary human beings, like yourselves. It's God Himself, the living God, who made all creation, that you need to trust, and then worship" (see Acts 14:15).

By now, we should be able to realise that Barnabas, full of faith in the living God, would be absolutely horrified to be made an object of worship. He knew he was merely a pointer to the living God Who sent His Son into the world to be our Saviour.

Notwithstanding all the opposition, including even the stoning of Paul till he seemed dead, we read from Acts 14:21-23: *"And when they had preached the gospel to the city of Derbe, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed."*

## Acts 15

In Acts 15 we read that Barnabas returned to Antioch. He faced an attempt to put Antioch Gentiles under Jewish Law. This was a further test for his personal faith. After discussion, the Antioch brethren asked Paul and Barnabas to go to Jerusalem with other Antioch brethren about this matter. At the Council of Jerusalem (see Acts 15:16-31), James gave a definitive, positive judgment, happily accepted by all there (See Acts 15:23-29). This enabled Barnabas and Paul to return to Antioch, and continue the work there. During the discussions, it was pointed out that Barnabas and Paul were men who had hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 15:25-26). What an honour! What a commendation! What a consolation for Barnabas for the faith he had placed in His Lord and Saviour.

How happy it is for us to read in Acts 14:35 that after such a climax, *"Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also."*

Sadly, not long after this, a difficulty arose between Paul and Barnabas over the reliability of John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41). Acts 13:13 tells us that John Mark had abandoned Barnabas and Paul during their first missionary journey. Obviously Paul was not happy with that. He and Barnabas ended up going different ways on their next journeys.

There are different opinions as to who was right and who was wrong in this matter. My personal thought is that God used this parting of their ways between these two great men in order to multiply the effectiveness of their ministries. Paul took Silas with him and so trained another man in his Christian service (see Acts 15:40). Barnabas set out on his

travels with John Mark and guided him into being a profitable servant of God (Acts 15:37). Even Paul acknowledged this fact years later in 2 Timothy 4:11 when he asked that John Mark be sent to him because he now found him to be useful in ministry after Barnabas had invested so much time training him.

We do also hear of Mark again, in a positive and favourable way, in Colossians 4:10 and Philemon 24. Whatever the difficulty was that appeared to stumble Mark early on seems to have been happily resolved.

Personally, I am sure that the personal faith of his uncle Barnabas would have had a most beneficial long term effect on John Mark.

### **Summing up**

There is, and only ever has been, or ever will be, One Perfect Servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Refresh your memory by reading Isaiah 42:1, Isaiah 52:13 and Philipians 2:5-11.

However, over these last three talks, we have been reminded that, even with their undoubted limitations, men and women in the Bible like Barnabas have left us sterling examples to follow.

Let me ask you. Do you know someone like Barnabas; a man of compassion, encouragement, and who could befriend just about anyone? We need men and women just like this early Christian. He took young, immature Christians, even those whom others did not trust, and turned them into strong leaders for the ministry of the Lord.

If you or I would like to follow the same path to useful service for our Lord and Master, we must follow the path that Barnabas took. Read your Bible. Pray every day. Meditate upon it. Build up your moral character by applying the teaching of Scripture to every aspect of your life. Realise that the only power to help you to serve the Lord without distraction is the power of the Holy Spirit. Remain committed to pleasing the Lord in all your decisions and activities.

Exercise the same personal faith and trust in Christ that made Barnabas the man that he was. Follow that wonderful advice from Proverbs 3:5-6: *“Trust [i.e. have faith] in the LORD with all your heart. Don’t lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and He will make your paths straight.”* That was certainly true of Barnabas. How about you and me?

May the Lord help us to follow his excellent example. Amen.

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