

Our Beloved Barnabas: The Son of Consolation

We read in Acts 15:25-26, "...our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

What did God's people love so much about men like Barnabas and Paul? They were willing to endanger their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. They loved the Lord more than the comfort and security of this world and this was manifested in how they lived.

We know that Paul was the Great Apostle who was sent to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Barnabas is one of those minor characters of Scripture, who at once gain and lose by how close they are to a greater figure. He gains much from his relationship to the gigantic figure of Paul, for it was in his company that he did his best work.

And yet, perhaps he suffers more; for the friend with whom he walks is so colossal that we forget all when we see him.

It is like comparing The Hart Highlands to the immensity of Mt. Robeson. Or a Fraser in Prince George would be an obscure river if it poured itself into the Amazon.

So too, Barnabas has been in a measure eclipsed, or at least overshadowed, by his more prominent fellow-soldier, Paul. That is not surprising.

A Bible Commentator observes, “Paul was much the greater man of the two in intellectual power and perhaps in force of character. With Paul the fine moral and spiritual qualities were united with the gifted mind, the eloquent tongue, and the boundless energy which belong to the makers of history.”

At first in the Acts of Apostles, when the two men are spoken of together, Barnabas is placed first. That was evidently the position assigned to him by those who sent them forth.

The Church had not then discovered which was the greater man. But the course of events proved it, and Barnabas quietly fell back into the second place, and before long was allowed to drop out of the story.

We have a similar thing happening to John the Baptist when our Lord Jesus Christ began his public, earthly ministry. John said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” Barnabas took second place to Paul.

Yet, the life and work of Paul ought to have been as added light on the luster of Barnabas. The two are inseparable in some of the most important events in the history of the Church of Christ.

They were, in their union and friendship, involved in important turning-points in the gospel ministry to the Gentiles. They have been regarded almost as moving in separate circles, and as coming only for a little time into influence with each other, Barnabas being but the satellite of Paul.

However, they were, rather, for the most important part of their lives, as twin stars having, moving in different orbits and spheres, of different color and size, but therefore all the more interesting in their nearness and impact on one another.

For the time remaining, let us focus our attention on the “minor of the two,” Barnabas, or as the early Apostolic Church fondly called him, **“Our Beloved Barnabas”: The Son of Consolation.**” What made him so lovable? What was his attraction? There are two notable things from Scripture that stand out in the life of Barnabas. I would like to consider the first one this morning and the second one this evening.

Barnabas: The Son of Consolation

Turn with me to Acts 4:36, “And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,)...”

We cannot read the Bible without observing what great importance is everywhere attached to names. In the Old Testament, the name of a person, being frequently taken from some leading event in the course of his previous life, is changed.

God commanded a name already given by man to be exchanged for another, which should be a witness of God’s grace to His faithful servants. Three examples in the O.T. are Abraham, Sarah, and Jacob.

In the book of Genesis we read, “Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.”

“As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call here name Sarai, but Sarah-that is, Princess- “shall her name be.”

“Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.”

In all these cases, of Abraham, Sarah, and of Jacob, we see that the giving of a new name is made a pledge to them of mercies yet future, it might be yet distant, but secured by the Lord’s favor and gracious purposes towards them.

In the New Testament, the giving of a new name to the Apostle Simon- “I also say unto thee, that thou are Peter”- “thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone” - sets before us his office as the first and zealous preacher of Christ to the Gentiles.

The name “sons of thunder” given by our Lord to James and John, tells of their fervor, their jealousy for Christ’s honor.

Saul the persecutor becomes the Apostle Paul, the “little one,” “less than the least of all saints,” yet through the grace of Christ laboring more abundantly than all.

And here in Acts 4:36 we observe the name change in the case of Barnabas. It is not by the name Joses or Joseph, but the surname added by the Apostles, “Barnabas, the son of exhortation,” that we bring him to our remembrance.

There is a correspondence between the character and his name. The need of gentle and tenderly helpful hearts must have been very great in the young church community, if the grace of God was to be seen by men. And very deep must Joseph’s service of Christ and the Church have been for him to be known as the first believer, after the ascension of Christ, who is recorded to have had a new Christian name.

There are three occasions in the history of the Early Church we find Barnabas exhorting new converts to the faith of Christ-fulfilling his function as a son of consolation.

1. The first occasion was when he was sent by the Apostles from Jerusalem to Antioch, in Syria, to investigate the work which had been done among the Gentiles by the ministry of some of the disciples who had been scattered abroad by the persecution that had arisen about Stephen.

We read in Acts 11:22-23, “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. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

Barnabas came to Antioch in some doubt about the work, the tidings of which had reached Jerusalem. It was a new and unexpected occurrence, this conversion of a multitude of Gentiles. They did not know what to make of it at Jerusalem.

But when he saw the work, all doubts vanished, and he was glad; and instead of interfering in any way, he furthered the work by his exhortations. He was a large hearted man, and sympathized with every genuine spiritual movement. Wherever he saw the hand of God really at work, he was ready to cooperate and rejoice.

We read, “When he came, and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.”

Barnabas sets forth the Lord as the one object to be grasped and held.

The sum of all objective religion is Christ-the sum of all subjective religion is cleaving to Him.

From whatever point of view we approach Christianity, it all leads into the Person of Jesus Christ. Barnabas knew the most important thing the converts could do was to keep near to Christ, and that nothing else was of any use if they did not.

Barnabas also exhorted them to be resolute. It was to be the settled purpose of their heart to continue with the Lord. It was not to be an impulsive thing, like the wind; it was to be a steadfast continuance.

There might be some in Antioch who were caught up in the sweep of a great moment, and had not seriously considered what it was to be the Lord's. It required resolution and perseverance to be true to the Lord.

Those who do not purpose in their hearts to continue with the Lord are sure to drop off when the immediate impulse that moved them to associate themselves with Christ has spent its force. Some do not really purpose in their hearts to walk with Christ.

O for a closer walk with God!

2. *The second occasion* when we see Barnabas as an exhorter of young converts was at Antioch in Pisidia, in Asia Minor.

We read in Acts 13:42-44, "And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.

Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.”

Barnabas had arrived there after a dangerous journey from the sea-coast with Paul. They had attended the synagogue on the first Sabbath after their arrival.

Paul had preached to the assembled congregation, and after the service, we read, “Many of the Jews and of the devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who speaking to them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.”

This after meeting sprang from the felt and clearly expressed need of the new converts. It gave the Paul and Barnabas the opportunity of applying the Word to the needs of various single cases. They persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. They had received the forgiveness of sins that was preached to them through Jesus Christ. They were now justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses, and they were exhorted to continue in the grace of God.

Now what is to continue in the grace of God?

A Bible Commentator writes, “It is to hold fast the salvation that the grace of God brings, to practice what the grace of God teaches, to look for what the grace of God leads us to expect, to be what the grace of God would have us to be.”

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “By the grace of God I am what I am. And this grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all (the Apostles): yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

Paul wrote of his position and work as an Apostle, but in principle his words apply equally to the position and life of every Christian.

3. The third and last occasion on which we find Barnabas exercising his peculiar gift as an exhorter was on the return journey from Derbe.

We read in Acts 14:21-22, “And when they had preached the gospel to that city, 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.”

The exhortation is twofold. It is to continue in the faith and to prepare for manifold troubles.

There are many influences adverse to continuing in the belief of the gospel. They are inward and outward. They are moral and intellectual. They are different at different times, in different place and circumstances. Whatever they are to us, we must not let them rob us of our faith in the gospel. We must hold fast the faithful Word as we have been taught.

Paul and Barnabas spoke of what was before the particular disciples whose souls they confirmed by exhorting them to continue in the faith, and by telling them that through much tribulation they should enter the Kingdom of God.

Tribulation is the disciple's portion in the world. "Enter ye in at the strait," or, in more modern English, "narrow gate." Narrow is the gate, and restricted or crushed in, is the way that leadeth unto life, said our Savior in the Sermon on the Mount.

Christ, in the very terms in which He exhorted His hearers to enter by the gate, and tread along the way, taught this, and on different occasions He insisted on the necessity of cross-bearing and self-denial in order to discipleship, and fully prepared His disciples for all they were to meet with in and from the world. He would have all His disciples fully and fairly count the cost.

In the same spirit and with the same end in view- the strengthening, the confirming, the establishment of the disciples whom they were addressing, the fortifying them against the shock their faith might experience when tribulation overtook them, and preparing them for it-Paul and Barnabas told them that "through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God."

In closing, Barnabas, and Paul were the first to venture forth into the unknown wastes of the heathen to claim the whole world for Christ. The beginning of that mighty enterprise was enough to give these men names which can never be forgotten. And it is not too much to say that Barnabas led the way. The less-known man had the first vision of the thing that needed to be done. To Barnabas the light came first. He is a lovable man, lifting those around him into a higher and sunnier sphere. That is why the Early Church called him, "Our Beloved Barnabas." Let us pray.