

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (22-10-1995 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Barnabas

Acts 11:22-30

Additional Bible Reading: Acts 15:22-26, 36-41

Introduction

Barnabas is one of those characters in the New Testament who is overshadowed by his contemporaries, like Paul and Peter. But it is rewarding and helpful to look carefully at his character. He is one of the most attractive persons in the New Testament, a real gem. Though not perfect (c.f. the time he gave way on matter of principle and did not eat with Gentiles because of pressure from the Jews, Galatians 2:11-13, which was a disappointment to Paul), we still can learn much from Barnabas. He is the sort of man we would like to have with us in trouble, to pray for us, and when his hand grasped ours we would feel better and in safe hands.

Barnabas was not very special. He was not head and shoulders above the rest. He was not an intellectual or spiritual giant. He was not in Paul's class. He was "Mr Average". But his life shows what God can do with the average person, of average ability and gifts. This is what we can be. This is how God can use us. This is the difference we can make.

Luke describes Barnabas thus: **He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith** (Acts 11:24). We are going to look at what he was (Stream), why he was what he was (Source) and how he was what he was (Secret).

Stream – what he was

Barnabas was a good man, not a great man or a clever man or an outstanding man. If we know the grace of God in our lives and we are being conformed to image of God's Son, we can be described as good men, and women.

Barnabas was humble and self-effacing. This was so evident when he arrived at Antioch. Others had been busy preaching. A great number had turned and believed. Barnabas went to investigate. When he saw God's grace at work, he was glad. Some people, even in Christian work, can be mean and not large-hearted. Unless they are in charge and in the centre, they find it hard to believe anything is good at all. They are slow and reluctant to rejoice in the blessing and successes of others. They are always suspicious and looking for the failings. Not so Barnabas.

Especially in relations with Paul, he was ever humble and self-effacing. Barnabas had been a Christian longer; indeed it was thanks to Barnabas that Paul was ever introduced to the church at Jerusalem (Acts 9:27). But later he realized he needed Paul's help to teach the converts at Antioch (Acts 11:26). Whether that was because of lack of gifts or lack of time, we do not know. The Lord set Barnabas and Paul apart for His work when he sent them on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:2). But subsequently, Barnabas faded out, and often only Paul gets mentioned, e.g. **Paul and his companions sailed to Perga** (Acts 13:13). So Barnabas went from being over

Paul, to being equal to Paul, to being under Paul. Yet he was happy to decrease to see Paul increase.

What grace to see a younger person, a person in Christian work for only a short time, surge ahead and take control. It is not easy to see others come from behind and be more effective and in charge at our expense, to get the congratulations, popular esteem and public notice.

*“It takes more grace than I can tell  
To play the second fiddle well.”*

It is so hard to accept and rejoice in the success of others when it puts us in the shade. Nowhere more difficult than in Christian ministry. Jealousy among ministers is very real, especially when congregations bemoan the “success” that is going on in other churches and not theirs. F.B.Meyer once attracted great crowds to his tent when he preached at the Northfield Convention. But when Campbell Morgan started his preaching, the crowds moved to his tent, deserting Meyer for Morgan. Meyer confessed to jealousy, and admitted, “The only way I can conquer my feeling is to pray for him daily – which I do.”

Barnabas was happy to decrease while Paul increased. Of course he gave God credit for the way He had used them on return from first missionary journey (Acts 14:27, 15:12).

Barnabas also had the gift of encouraging others. The first time Luke introduces us to Barnabas, he tells us the meaning of his name. **Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement)** (Acts 4:36). Where anybody or anything was needed to be encouraged, Barnabas was always there. To be an encourager is an outstanding characteristic. Soon after Paul was converted and went to Jerusalem, no one wanted to know him for suspicion and fear. But it was Barnabas who took him by the hand and brought him to the apostles and pleaded that they accept him (Acts 9:27). Barnabas alone stood by him and was willing to stake his reputation on him when everyone else washed their hands of him.

Then at Antioch Barnabas encouraged them to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart (Acts 11:23). And in Pisidian Antioch he and Paul **urged them to continue in the grace of God** (Acts 13:43). In Lystra, Iconium and Antioch he helped by **strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith** (Acts 14:22). Then on the occasion when Paul and Barnabas fell out over Mark coming with them on their missionary journey, Barnabas was the one who wanted to give Mark a second chance, and he encouraged Mark. Mark made good in the end – even Paul admitted to it (2 Timothy 4:11) – and it was Barnabas who had not let him go, had hung on to him.

How important is the ministry of encouragement. How easy to dismiss or condemn. How necessary to encourage and support. Barnabas had the biggest heart in the early church. Though he had no heights of greatness himself, he recognised it in others, and encouraged them. We ought to cultivate such a ministry. It does not mean closing eyes to wrong; nor does it mean empty flattery (which deceives no one but flatterer), but it requires sympathy, support, appreciation, help, and encouragement. Above all cleave to the Lord. Keep near to him above all else.

Barnabas was also a man of practical righteousness. We are called to be doers as well as hearers of the Word. Barnabas exhorted others, but he also practiced what he preached. He was a Levite from Cyprus, and he would have consecrated himself and then his possessions to the Lord, selling his land, and giving the money to the apostles. He had been a man of means, wealth and influence, possibly owned a farm producing wheat, oil, grapes figs and honey – things for which Cyprus was famous. For him consecration to the Lord (applied in New Testament to some but not all Christians – as today) meant selling it all up. **Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the first-fruits of all your crops** (Proverbs 3:9). But before he gave his possessions he first gave himself to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5).

In consecrating himself to the Lord, Barnabas gave the Lord his time and his talents, not just his money. He was sent out on missionary service, he preached the Word of God to Cyprus's proconsul, Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7); he endured persecution and was driven out of Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:50). With Paul he risked his life for the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 15:26). Even after his disagreement with Paul over Mark, he did not give up his Christian work with injured pride and murmuring grievance.

"I would far rather have a little of Barnabas's grace than all of Paul's genius" (Alexander Whyte). This is a comment to make us think. How many Christian leaders, preachers and scholars could honestly echo that? Grace made Barnabas the way he was, and grace can make us all like that.

#### The source of the stream – why he was what he was

Barnabas was full of the Holy Spirit. He was under the control of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit manifested through this ordinary man His fruit. **The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control** (Galatians 5:22,23). These things were clearly manifested in Barnabas. He was not perfect, or sinless, but his life was open to the Holy Spirit, at the disposal of the Holy Spirit. He had handed himself over to the Holy Spirit, and God had taken possession of all that had been handed over.

How often we associate the Holy Spirit with miracles and marvels. But we forget His place and activity in the lives of ordinary people like Barnabas. Here He is entering and controlling this ordinary life, making him humble, encouraging, helpful, reliable and practical.

This was the mark of the early church. One of its distinguishing features was that it was "filled with the Spirit". They brought to every situation the spiritual power and blessing of Another. It was not a once for all experience, or a second blessing, but something which happened continually. It was their growing experience, for the Spirit is capable of expansion. They were filled – not just a little drop in the bottom of a cup and the rest gapping emptiness – but rivers of living water flowing through them.

It is impossible to be a Christian and not to have the Holy Spirit. **If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ** (Romans 8:9). But that is not the same as being filled with the Spirit. We have as much of the Spirit as we claim by faith. It is possible to be indwelt, but not controlled; born again, but not under the

authority of the Spirit; possessing the Spirit, but not possessed by the Spirit. We have the Spirit, but does He have us? We can be very orthodox about His person and deity, but that is not the same as personally submitting to His divine person.

Here is God's norm for service, character, home, workplace and daily routine. We need to possess our possessions, appropriate what is ours, for **He has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ** (Ephesians 1:3). We need to remind ourselves constantly of "One baptism, many fillings". D.L.Moody confessed, "I believe in the filling of the Holy Spirit, but the problem with me is that I leak!"

#### Secret – how he was what he was

What is the secret whereby we make what God has for us our own? We need a right attitude to the Lord and His will and His authority. We need to take our hands off our own life and yield without reserve to Him. In faith we must desire Him, long for Him, trust our self to Him, and expect Him to fill us with the Holy Spirit. We confess our spiritual bankruptcy and poverty and need and desperation. There needs to be longing, craving and hunger for God.

We need to be prepared to yield self up to Him and to remove clutter out of life which prevents Him from filling us with Himself. Remove all that quenches and grieves the Spirit, and be prepared to remove all that is contrary to His will. Clear out every rival allegiance and everything which challenges His claim over life.

Then step forward in faith and obedience, constantly appropriating a supply of His grace for daily living. Keep in touch with the source of power and ensure nothing hinders that contact. God does not give out a great store of grace to last us for months and months – we have to keep in touch with the source of all fullness. As long as I keep believing, so long shall I keep receiving.

#### Conclusion

Barnabas was a good man, a humble encourager and practical in his godliness. He was consecrated to the Lord, and trustworthy at the Lord's disposal. He was prepared to suffer for the Lord. The Holy Spirit had taken his ordinary life and filled it with His power and brought forth fruit. He was full of and controlled by the Holy Spirit, because he was full of faith.

There are different levels and degrees of the Holy Spirit working in Christian's lives. All who are born of Him are indwelt by the Spirit – that is a permanent fact of life. But some have a minimal experience and others have an abundant life. Some have a bare spiritual life, and others are full of spiritual health. It all depends on our response to the Lord and obedience to Him. We have a clear responsibility here.

We need to admit we have not obeyed this command or done so as regularly and earnestly as we should, therefore we are living below our spiritual possibilities. If we are trying to live life at a distance from God, we are in a mess. We need to abandon our selves to God, and give Him full possession. A definite yielding of life and relinquishing of control is necessary. He wants us, and not just our service. Ask Him

to take possession. **If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink** (John 7:37).  
Then abide in Him. Daily yield self. Keep in closest contact. Daily wait on Him as we  
constantly submit.