

# *The Parish of Wellow*

Barnabas the Encourager: Acts 4:36-37, 9:27-28, 15:36-40 & 11:19-24

## Passage, Sermon Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these sermon notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during the next few weeks to consider the questions below.

### 1. Sermon Passage - Acts 4:36-37, 9:27-28, 15:36-40 & 11:19-24

4:36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement),<sup>37</sup> sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

9:27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

15:36 Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." <sup>37</sup> Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, <sup>38</sup> but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. <sup>39</sup> They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, <sup>40</sup> but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.

11:19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. <sup>22</sup> News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

### 2. Sermon Notes

#### 2.1 Barnabas a brief Overview

##### Strengths and accomplishments

- One of the first to sell possessions to help the Christians in Jerusalem
- First to travel with Paul as a Missionary Team
- Was an encourager, as his nickname shows, and thus one of the most quietly influential people in the early days of Christianity.
- Called an apostle, although not one of the original 12.

##### Weakness and mistake

- With Peter, temporarily stayed aloof from Gentile believers until Paul corrected him.

##### Lessons from their lives

- Encouragement is one of the most effective ways to help
- Sooner or later, true obedience to God will involve risk
- There is always someone who needs encouragement

##### Vital Statistics

- Where: Cyprus, Jerusalem, Antioch
- Occupation: Missionary, teacher
- Contemporaries: Peter, Silas, Paul, Herod Agrippa I

#### 2.2 Barnabas' three gifts

- i. Gift of Generosity
- ii. Gift of Encouragement
- iii. Gift of an open mind

#### 2.3 Gift of Generosity: Acts 4:36-37

- Barnabas a landowner from Cyprus sells his land and gives to the early church in Jerusalem.
- Out of his excess he gives to the ministry of God's people.
- And as he does so he challenges each one of us.
- Everything we have has come from God. How willing are we to give generously back to God some of the riches he has given to each one of us?

## 2.4 Gift of Encouragement: Acts 9:27-28 & 15:36-40

- Barnabas has a sixth sense when it comes to recognising people's value. He has a knack of seeing what others do not see, or perhaps what others refused to see, because of their prejudice.
- There are two particular occasions where Barnabas' people skills are noted in the development of the early church:

### 2.4.1 Acts 9:27-28: The Conversion of Saul

- The first part of Acts 9 describes the dramatic conversion of a man called Saul the hated persecutor of the early church.
- It is not hard to imagine that the early Christians would have been a little bit suspicious about the validity of Saul's conversion experience. Was it really genuine or was his conversion just a ruse so that he could get access to the in-side of the church?
- Imagine how we might respond if someone who was mercilessly criticizing us all suddenly has a change of heart and wants to join our church family. How would we respond to an obnoxious neighbour who was attempting to sue you over a boundary dispute, and then all of a sudden sends you a dinner invitation. I guess our approach in both cases would be caution.
- That's exactly what happened to Saul. When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.
- Barnabas is the one person in the Jerusalem church who sees beyond fear and scepticism and accepts and encourages Saul across the doorstep of the church for the first time
- Barnabas sees in Saul the grace of God at work. We might say that Barnabas' view of God was big enough to save or turn around the vilest of sinners, and he was willing to give Saul a second chance.

### 2.4.2 Acts 15:36-40: The disagreement over Mark

- Barnabas sees something in Mark that Paul doesn't. Yes, he has failed. He has really let them down and no doubt Paul has some justification at being angry at him. However, Barnabas also sees the potential for good.
- Barnabas sees beyond failure or mistakes to future and restoration. Barnabas is willing to give Mark another go. The conflict between Paul and Barnabas is so severe over this issue that they ended up parting company.
- So who has the right perspective? In the end I believe it is Barnabas not Paul. At some point further on in Paul's ministry Paul must have come to this conclusion himself because Mark appears again in Paul's letters as one of his trusted companions. Paul describes Mark as a faithful servant of the Lord. In other words Barnabas gives a "failure" a second chance and Mark goes on to be a powerful servant of the Lord.
- Who is the person who believed in you when others wanted to write you off? I suspect all of us can identify a Barnabas or two in our past who gave us a second chance. Maybe it was a parent or a relative or a teacher or a church leader or a close friend. Christianity means second chances.
- And secondly who are we believing in or investing in today whom others would like to write off?

## 2.5 Gift of an open mind: Acts 11:19-24

- Something new is happening in Antioch and so who does the early church send to go and check out these "new Christians". They send Barnabas.
- Barnabas was a Levite and the Levites were the priestly class within Judaism. They were thoroughly immersed and trained in the ways of the law. They were the Jews of Jews.
- As a Levite Barnabas has literally to step over generations of ingrained thinking and racial prejudice; to see what is happening in Antioch in a positive way
- On arrival Barnabas "sees the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts".
- Barnabas has an open mind for something new that God was doing.
- How often do you and I miss something new that God is doing because we wrongly assume that the things we grew up with were somehow more especially God's way than the things we do today.

## 3. Questions to consider back at home

3.1 What lessons do we learn about giving from Barnabas?

3.2 Who is the person who believed in you when others wanted to write you off? Can you think of anyone who needs your encouragement at the moment who may have been written off by others?

3.3 What ruts do you think our church is in currently? What ruts do you think you are in? Is God encouraging our church or you to change?

3.4 A close Christian friend says to you one day that she really has no time for these modern worship songs. How might Barnabas respond to her? How would you?

If you would like to discuss these questions further please feel free to call me on 01761 432293

Matthew Street 28<sup>th</sup> August 2005