

Barnabas – Son of Encouragement Volume 1

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Preface

Barnabas is probably one of those Bible characters that receives too little attention. He is a lovely child of God with many gracious qualities that we all need to learn from. Like all flesh he is not without his faults, but grace triumphs in his life again and again. He was a compassionate, caring and willing servant of the Lord and portrayed many of the qualities which are seen in their perfection in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is this which makes his life such a challenge to every Christian believer. We live in a world that needs many to display the characteristics of this godly man.

This book has been written to accompany the series of Sound Words radio programmes devoted to studying the life of Barnabas. It was my privilege to work on those recordings with my friend and colleague Ron Low. Ron is now retired after serving the Lord in pastoral work. This book was written using his Bible study notes as a basis. I am indebted to him for his willingness to provide such helpful material for us from which to benefit.

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Chapter 1: An Introduction to Barnabas - Acts 4:36-37

Barnabas is first introduced to us in the New Testament in Acts 4:36-37:

“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.”

1) General Background

It will help us to see the context of these verses by summarising the details in Acts up to this point. First, in chapter 1, we read that the Lord Jesus had ascended into heaven. In Acts 2 the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost and through their preaching 3000 souls were saved, baptised and added to the Church. In Acts 3 a lame man was healed at the gate of the temple and as a result, Peter was able to proclaim the gospel to the crowd who had gathered. This resulted in the number of believers increasing to 5000 (Acts 4:4). Then Peter and John were arrested, brought before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4 and courageously they testified to the power and salvation found in the name of Jesus Christ. After their release, Peter and John returned to their own companions and a mighty prayer-meeting took place when the very building they were in was shaken. The result was that God’s Word was proclaimed with greater boldness, and practically love and concern was shown to those believers in need. It is at this point that we are introduced to Barnabas .

2) His Character

In Acts 4:32 we have described the spirit of self-sacrifice and mutual kindness pervading the whole body of believers, and to illustrate this Luke gives two examples, one favourable (Barnabas) and the other unfavourable (Ananias and Sapphira). The man we are thinking of was called Joses or Joseph. But we find he has been given another name by the apostles, namely Barnabas. Barnabas means ‘*Son of Encouragement*’ and indicates to us the lovely character which he displayed. It would have been impossible for Barnabas to bring encouragement or comfort to others, unless he was

‘strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit...living in the fear of the Lord’ (Acts 9.31)

An example of this encouragement in action in Barnabas’ life is seen in his attitude to Saul of Tarsus. You may remember that this man Saul was a fierce persecutor of the Church of Christ, and everywhere he went he caused trouble for the early believers. He tried to arrest them, and on at least one occasion was glad when a Christian was martyred for his faith. We are referring to the death of Stephen recorded in Acts 7. His name brought fear to many hearts. But in Acts 9, while he was on route to Damascus to arrest and imprison believers, the risen Lord Jesus Christ met with him on the road, and the result was that this violent persecutor became a Christian believer himself. But when he eventually returned to Jerusalem and tried to join himself with the Church, the believers were

terrified of him, not really believing he had been saved at all! Well, it was at that very instant that Barnabas comes to the fore. We read in Acts 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.”

In other words, Barnabas encouraged the believers at Jerusalem and assured them they had nothing to fear, and he comforts Saul in his feeling of rejection. So we see a man with gifts which were both great and gracious, powerful and practical. And he challenges us to ask ourselves how much desire have we to encourage and comfort those in the faith and to welcome those who have just come to faith in Christ into the family of believers? The character of Barnabas was lovely, and one which is needed very much in our Churches around the world today.

3) His Personal Background (v36b)

In Acts 4:36 we are given some further information about this man concerning what he did and where he came from. He is described as ‘a Levite’, that is, coming from the Israelite tribe of Levi. Now it is possible he may have presided in the synagogue worship, and according to the duty of that tribe taught them the Scriptures. If this is so, then it is not surprising that he had a good knowledge of the Old Testament and experience in communicating God’s

Word to others. We are also told he came from Cyprus. It is most likely that when the Jews dispersed from Judea after the Babylonian conquest, some Levites were among them. His parents or earlier ancestors must have settled in Cyprus and although a great way from Jerusalem, he was brought up in the Jewish faith and no doubt was actively involved in the synagogue. Indeed, we read in Acts 13:4-5 that Barnabas and Saul visited Cyprus and preached God’s Word in the Jewish synagogues which may well have been where he had been brought up as a Levite.

A question we need to ask ourselves is this, ‘Have I ever wondered why the Lord has led me into a particular calling in life?’ It may be, like Barnabas, that God will use your background and gifts or abilities for the furtherance of his kingdom and the glory of his name. Let us never think that our daily work is of no importance in God’s kingdom or his plan. He can use the experience, gifts, contacts and influences we may have, and even our place of birth or national identity for the furtherance of his eternal purposes.

4) His Loving Concern (v37)

We read something very instructive in verse 37, that Barnabas

“...sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.”

Barnabas possessed a field. He was the legal owner of it, and this field he sold and brought the money and laid it at

the apostles' feet. Now what was it that led him to do such a thing? We have the answer in Acts 4:31-35

- i. He was filled with the Holy Spirit (v31).
- ii. He was one with the other believers (v32).
- iii. He was filled with grace (v33).
- iv. He was willing to share with others (v34).
- v. He was concerned about the needs of others (v35).

Now we need to say that the concern which Barnabas demonstrated was not the result of a change in his social outlook, or a more generous approach to others, or something to pacify his guilty conscience. Instead it was the outworking of the Holy Spirit within him. When he and the other believers met in that prayer meeting and the Lord by his Holy Spirit came upon them in mighty power, the outcome was both spiritual and practical. They proclaimed God's Word and Christ's resurrection with great power, and their own lives reflected the grace of God in great measure because they became concerned for those who were in need. This is why we have this demonstration of concern by Barnabas in that he sold this field and gave the proceeds to the apostles to be used for the needs of others. This is immensely challenging, for we see here that when the Holy Spirit comes down upon a company of believers, or an individual believer, the outcome will surely be to demonstrate concern for others. So we must give an answer to such questions as:

- i. Have we a concern for the glory of God and the exaltation of our risen Saviour?
- ii. Have we a concern that our own lives are exhibiting the grace of God?
- iii. Have we a concern for the material needs of others who are less privileged than we are?
- iv. Have we a concern for the spiritual needs of others who are dying without Christ, without God and without hope in the world?

Surely Barnabas challenges us to long for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us, that we will be different and show forth God's grace in our lives and speech, and real concern for the material and spiritual needs of others.

Chapter 2: Barnabas Introduces Saul To The Jerusalem Church - Acts 9. 27-29

We briefly referred to this in our previous chapter. The background is that Saul met the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus when he was on route to persecute Christian believers. His life was dramatically changed, he was baptised and afterwards began to preach Christ in the synagogues of Damascus. However, the Jews plotted to kill him, so he escaped in a large basket through the city wall. You will find the details in the first part of Acts 9. We also read in Galatians 1. 15-18, that Saul – or Paul as he is better known – tells us that after his conversion he went to Arabia before returning to Damascus to preach in the synagogues. It is possible that he did this before he went to Jerusalem. In fact many scholars think that visit took place immediately after his baptism recorded in Acts 9:18. So it is after then that Saul travelled to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him and did not believe he was a disciple of Jesus.

1) His Loving Intervention

It was at this point that Barnabas comes on the scene. We read in Acts 9:26-27:

“When he – that is Saul - came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. 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.”

We should never forget that at this time Saul of Tarsus was under great suspicion, so it is against that background that Barnabas demonstrates his loving interest in Saul by bringing him to the apostles. This loving interest he showed is seen in three areas.

i. Compassion.

Saul was rejected and ignored, but Barnabas believed him to be a true brother in Christ, and therefore showed compassion to him. You may recall this is something Saul or Paul wrote about later in Ephesians 4:32,

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

ii. Courage.

Barnabas may have had to overcome natural fears to befriend Saul and accompany him to the apostles. Not fears about Saul’s genuineness but rather of what they might think of him as one who supported this former enemy of the gospel of Christ. If he had any such fears then these were overcome by his courage, for he wanted to help Saul and the apostles. Barnabas displayed the kind of courage Joshua was urged to have in Joshua 1:9:

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

iii. Commitment.

Barnabas was not just content with befriending Saul, his real desire and commitment was to bring him to the apostles. It was this company of twelve men who had both the official right and the spiritual gift to determine his true character and who, it would seem, had not been consulted about Saul up to this point in time. No doubt Barnabas had done what the Psalmist writes in Psalm 37 verse 5:

“Commit your way to the Lord, trust in him and he will do this - or - shall bring it to pass.”

Each genuine believer should cultivate these qualities. It is so easy to neglect people, especially if we think they may cause us problems or difficulties. Had Barnabas not stepped in when Saul was rejected and under great suspicion, then who knows what may have happened to him. The Lord is pleased to use weak vessels like ourselves to encourage, help and befriend others. Then we should seek to be encouragers just like Barnabas was.

2) His Truthful Testimony

We turn now to consider what Barnabas said about Saul when he came to the apostles. We read in Acts 9:27b that Barnabas

“...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.”

We can sum this up by saying he was a truthful servant of the Lord, because he told the apostles exactly what had happened to Saul. It was not hearsay or rumour or something he invented himself, but the truth. And it is very important for us to remember we should always be truthful in whatever we say and whoever we are talking to. The testimony Barnabas gave covered three areas.

i. What Saul had seen.

Barnabas declared that Saul ‘...*had seen the Lord...*’ The risen and glorified Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ had appeared or revealed himself to Saul on the road to Damascus. Now this was an important and essential experience for anyone to be an apostle. They had to have seen the risen Lord (see Acts 1:22). Saul wrote about this years later in 1 Corinthians 15:8- 9:

“...and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles

and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God.”

ii. What Saul had heard.

The group of apostles would have recalled those meetings with Christ after his resurrection and of the words he had spoken to them. Now here was a man in their midst who claimed that the risen Christ had spoken to him. The record of what the Lord said to Saul is given in Acts 9:4-6:

“He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’”

iii. What Saul had done.

Barnabas shared how Saul had responded to his encounter with the Lord Jesus, testifying to the fact that he had obeyed the commission given to him by the risen Christ and had preached boldly at Damascus in the Lord’s name. He had spoken freely without hesitation or reserve, without timidity or cowardice, because he was preaching by the authority of Jesus Christ and as his disciple.

Applying these principles we see in Barnabas to ourselves, we see that we must always be truthful if we would help others and seek to introduce them to other believers. We also need to be simple, telling what we know of the Lord

dealings with them. We should also seek to be encouraging so that they will be welcomed warmly and lovingly by others.

3) His Powerful Influence.

This godly intervention by Barnabas on Saul’s behalf was a powerful influence for good. In Acts 9:28 we read:

“So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.”

When we read of Saul’s rejection by the Church at Jerusalem (v26) and then of his ‘oneness’ with all the believers (v28), it surely shows what a strong effect Barnabas’ testimony had on the apostles. They clearly recognised that Saul was not only truly converted to Christ, but also that he was a minister of the gospel. Therefore he continued with them, not just as a companion, but associated with them and taking part in their official labours. In addition we read concerning Saul in Acts 9:29 that he

“... talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.”

What Saul did in Jerusalem was exactly the same as he had done in Damascus. He preached freely and boldly in the name of Jesus Christ. The fact that the apostles were prepared to accept and receive Saul as part of their team was due largely to the powerful influence which Barnabas’

testimony had on them. They obviously believed what he said and were confident that Saul was ‘*a chosen instrument*’ of the Lord who would be used in Gospel ministry. The reason for the effectiveness of Barnabas’ intervention was not his self-assertiveness or boastful manner, but rather his warm, loving, caring, compassionate, gentle, friendly and Christ-like manner.

This is quite a challenge for us to behave in a similar manner. We need to ask ourselves questions such as, ‘What influence do we have on men and women who know us? Do we influence them for good or ill? Are we self-assertive, pushy, arrogant and dogmatic, or are we kind, warm, gentle, compassionate and Christ-like?’ Barnabas was prepared to ‘speak-up’ for Saul when those around did not want to know him. But he did so in such a Christ-like way that he won the hearts of the apostles and Saul was brought into the company and proved himself to be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ.

When we know the Lord as our Saviour, then we have a tremendous opportunity to wield a powerful influence for good and for God’s glory by proclaiming the gospel to those around us. This will be particularly among those who know us such as our family, friends, associates in business and neighbours. But let us not forget to support each other in the body of Christ as Barnabas did with Saul. It should be our aim to have a powerful influence for good on those who know the Lord, but are unknown by believers in the area in which they now live. We should go out-of-our-way to make them welcome and cultivate ‘oneness’

within the local Church. Remember Paul’s words in Colossians 3:17:

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Chapter 3: Barnabas Is Sent To The Believers In Antioch - Acts 11. 22-23

The early believers faced opposition for the Lord’s sake from the beginning. After the persecution and martyrdom of Stephen in Acts 7 many of the believers were scattered far and wide. But instead of hindering the work of the gospel it aided it, because wherever these believers went they kept telling people the good news about the Lord Jesus and many more became his disciples. The Lord wonderfully overruled these events to bring many more into his kingdom. Most of these limited their work to their fellow Jews, but some who went to Antioch also spoke to the Greeks and many of them believed in Jesus also. This was quite a new departure and so the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem decided they needed to investigate this through Barnabas.

1) The Privilege He Received.

We read in Acts 11:22-23:

“News of this reached the ears of the Church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 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.”

You may recall that the apostles were based in the Jerusalem Church in the early period of the New Testament, and as such its influence on Gospel work in other parts was considerable. They chose Barnabas to go to Antioch in Syria. Now there were very good reasons why he was chosen for this task. Although he was not an apostle in the sense that Peter, James, John and Paul were apostles, yet Barnabas was highly regarded by these men.

- i. He was a Greek-speaking Jew from Cyprus and since some of his fellow countrymen from Cyprus had preached the gospel in Antioch (Acts 11:20), he was ideally suited to visit and observe what had taken place.
- ii. We have already noticed in our studies that Barnabas was well known as ‘*a Son of Encouragement*’ (Acts 4.36), and therefore ably suited to engage in this work.
- iii. He was chosen, no doubt, for his moral and spiritual qualities which would be so essential during his long journey of over 500 kilometres from Jerusalem to Antioch and for his ministry while he was there.

It is clear that God had given Barnabas great spiritual gifts which had been recognised by the Church at Jerusalem and therefore he was chosen to visit Antioch to assess if what they had heard was true.

We are reminded through Barnabas that those who are truly the Lord’s by faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour have been called not only to the privilege of sonship but also the privilege of service. There is an old statement which says ‘we have been saved to serve’, and we should look upon this as the greatest privilege which man can receive. It is the responsibility of the Church to recognise those whom God has gifted for teaching, preaching or ministering in some form or other, and then to ensure their gifts are channelled into service for him. But the personal question for each follower of Christ to address is whether we are serving the Lord and giving our gifts and talents and time for the benefit of his Church and gospel in the world. Barnabas was clearly a willing servant of Christ, and it was this that made him so useful and brought much glory to God.

2) The Discernment He Exercised.

When he arrived in Antioch we are told of his perception of the situation in Acts 11:23:

“When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them.”

It is very likely that he took time to make his observations of the lives of those who claimed to be the Lord's. He would have observed them at public worship, in their conversations, in their families, and wherever else he would have had opportunity to see, hear and speak with them. And after some time of observation, he came to the conclusion that 'the grace of God' had been at work in these people's lives. Just as a tree is known and recognised by its fruit, so Barnabas saw evidence of God's grace in the lives of these people and acknowledged it to be so. This is an application of what Jesus taught in John 15:5. Jesus said:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

As a result of what Barnabas saw in the lives of these believers, we read '*he was glad*' (v23). Now it has been suggested by some Bible commentators that when Barnabas arrived at Antioch he expected to find a situation which would require correcting and controlling, rather than approving and rejoicing. But Barnabas was a man who could discern the genuine from the counterfeit, the true from the false, and as he examined the lives of these people he was convinced that the grace of God had been truly at work in their lives. The perception which he showed led him to rejoice in what the Lord had done. He did not come with inflexible, pre-conceived ideas, but with an openness to observe what had taken place. And a readiness to accept when the Lord had been at work.

We have to say that such discernment is not always displayed in the lives of believers. We can be too easily moved or influenced by what people say, when we really need to get behind the mind and motives of those before us. In these days we need to be more discerning over things which are claimed to be Christian but which are in fact not so. Ron Low suggests six things that will help us to discern a genuine work of God's grace in a person's life. They are all questions we need to ask.

- i. Is God's holiness and authority recognised and seen?
- ii. Is God's Word revered and obeyed?
- iii. Is Jesus Christ believed and honoured?
- iv. Is the Holy Spirit evidently working and glorifying Jesus Christ?
- v. Is the work unifying the believers in Christ?
- vi. Is what is being done more man-centred or God-centred?

At Antioch, Barnabas would have had no problems with these questions, for what he saw was God at work. May the Lord grant that we will see similar evidences of his work in the lives of others too.

3) The Influence He Made.

While Barnabas stayed with these new believers at Antioch he exercised a helpful ministry among them. It is summarised at the end of Acts 11:23 where it records that Barnabas

“...was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.”

Having perceived that God’s grace had worked among these people and they were true and genuine believers, Barnabas did not just leave them and return back to Jerusalem, happy that souls had been saved. Instead, he saw the situation at Antioch as the beginning of a greater work which must be done. These believers needed to be built-up, strengthened and encouraged in the Lord and his Word. Note it says he encouraged or exhorted them all, indicating he left no one out. All those who had repented of their sin and trusted in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, he urged to go on with him. Barnabas used the gifts God had given him as ‘*a Son of Encouragement*’ to encourage them, ‘*to remain true to the Lord*’ by living a life of dependence upon and devotion to Christ. This was something they had to do deliberately and individually. They had begun the Christian race, so Barnabas encouraged or urged them to continue. We might well use the words of Ruth to Naomi, her mother-in-law in Ruth 1:16:

“Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.”

The persistence Barnabas encouraged was something which the people needed, for it is so easy, after the initial joy and thrill of knowing the Lord as Saviour, to be tempted and tested by Satan and to be drawn back to

worldly ways again. This ministry, which we see Barnabas exercising here, is essential if believers are to grow and mature in faith and holiness. That is, of course, something which we need to safeguard in our own hearts and in the hearts of other believers we know. If Barnabas was able to speak with us today he would want to urge each believer ‘*to remain true the Lord*’. You see, we dare not rest upon a past profession of faith, but upon the assurance that the Lord is with us to-day, even now, because we are cleaving to him by faith. While wonderfully Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:5 that through faith believers are

“...shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time”

we must not forget this important exhortation to remain true to the Lord. We should want to know and love him more and more as time passes and we get nearer to going to heaven. We should want to know and feel his power and presence in our lives more and more the longer we are on the Christian pathway. We should want to be obedient and live in holiness before God because he sent his Son to take our sins away and give to us eternal life. The challenge of Barnabas is this, ‘What is your purpose of heart?’ Is it to go your own sinful, disobedient, selfish way, opposed to God and his Word? Or is it to cleave to the Lord and show you really love him and his beloved Son and demonstrate this love by a life of devotion and obedience?

We close this chapter with a verse from Charles Wesley’s hymn ‘Soldiers of Christ arise’

*'From strength to strength go on; wrestle and fight and pray;
Tread all the powers of darkness down and win the well fought day.
That having all things done and all your conflicts past,
Ye may overcome through Christ alone and stand complete at last.'*

Chapter 4: Barnabas - His Qualities And Usefulness - Acts 11:24

There is a lovely description of Barnabas given while he was ministering to the believers at Antioch in Acts 11:24:

"He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord."

1) He Was A Good Man.

We note three points about Barnabas from these words.

- i. He was a godly man.
This means Barnabas was a man of high moral excellence and standing. Now we may have desires and wishes to live good, moral, upright lives, but it is only a godly person, one in whom the Lord has worked the miracle of the new birth, who can truly live a consistent and morally upright life which

pleases the Lord. Barnabas was such a man, one whom God had brought to new birth, whose sins were forgiven.

ii. He was a gracious man.

Observing his approach to the people at Antioch, we see him displaying much grace because his benevolence and gentleness shine forth. There was an evident expression of Christian love. Instead of him being critical of the people with their new found faith, or being envious of those who had seen 'success' through the preaching of God's Word, he is glad (full of rejoicing) and urged them to continue on the Christian pathway. He was a good man because God's grace had worked within him, and was seen in his graciousness. He was a man who knew in his own experience what Peter urged on his readers at the end of his second letter. We read in 2 Peter 3:18:

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

iii. He was a generous man.

You will recall when we first looked at Barnabas' life in Acts 4. 36-37, we saw how this aspect of generosity was clearly demonstrated by him selling land which he owned and bringing the proceeds to the apostles. But we also see his generosity in his 'big-heartedness' towards these new believers. He was generous in his love for them, and this

generosity urged them forward to know more of the Lord and His love. In 2 Corinthians 6:11 Paul wrote:

“We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you.”

Here Paul is expressing the generosity of his love for these converts, and Barnabas had a similar generosity. As someone has said, ‘Love, like heat, expands’ - it spreads and reaches out to others. This was certainly true as far as Barnabas is concerned.

In applying these qualities to ourselves we need to ask another question. It is easy to ask but not so easy to say that the right answer is true of us. The question is, are we like Barnabas? Do others recognise that we are ‘good men or good women’? That was certainly the case as far as Barnabas was concerned, and it can be true of us if we prayerfully seek the Lord’s help to produce those qualities of being godly, gracious and generous that were in evidence in the heart of Barnabas. When the Lord works within us, then there should be evidence of these gifts or graces in our lives. Where we find ourselves lacking we need to seek God in prayer to fill.

2) He Was Full Of The Holy Spirit.

In this phrase we see three notable qualities.

i. He was ‘self-emptied’.

Before anyone can claim to be filled by the Holy Spirit they must first be emptied of self. All self-merit, all self-dependence, all self-confidence, all self-importance, all self-righteousness. All these must go. There must be an emptying of self. This again is not a natural or human work, for by nature we put a lot of importance on ourselves and our standing before others. But when we see ourselves as God sees us, we want to be ‘self-emptied’ and all the sin and falsehood and pride and selfishness must go and we must be cleansed by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. You might like to read from Philippians 3:4-9 as a help in understanding this. Paul was self-emptied before he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and so was Barnabas.

ii. He was Spirit filled.

Self had been emptied of all that was defiled, sinful, wicked and false; and in its place God had come to dwell by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. You will note it says ‘*full*’ of the Holy Spirit. That means he was totally, completely and entirely filled with the Spirit, so that his life was controlled and motivated by the Spirit. We read in 1 Corinthians 3:16:

“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?”

Each and every believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. We read in Romans 8:9:

“... If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”

Now although we may possess the Holy Spirit as believers, we may not know him in all his fullness. Paul’s words in Ephesians 5:18 are helpful here:

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”

We need to be under his complete influence, and that is inseparably linked with our submission to the Spirit’s teaching in Scripture. Therefore this is something for which we should seek and long every day. Barnabas was truly Spirit filled.

iii. He was full of faith.

The fact he was *‘spirit-filled’* meant that he wished to please the Lord in his entire life and labours. He was also *‘full of faith’* which meant he believed in God and believed God, and was therefore *‘spiritually-active’* in his service. The old Bible Commentator Matthew Henry has written:

‘He was full of faith, full of the Christian faith himself, and therefore desirous to propagate it among others; full of the grace, and full of the fruits of that faith that works by love. He was sound in the faith and therefore pressed them to be so.’

Being full of faith is something which Jesus stressed in Mark 11:22-23:

“‘Have faith in God,’ Jesus answered. ‘I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, “Go, throw yourself into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.’”

When we exercise trust in God and believe he can do all things, then like Barnabas we may be *‘spiritually-active’* and *‘full of faith’*. So we must ask ourselves if this is a description of you and me? Are we self-emptied? Are we Spirit-filled? Are we spiritually-active? There are no *‘short-cuts’* to true, spiritual, faithful Christian living and having hearts cleansed and empty of self, hearts filled by the Holy Spirit, and hearts with faith in God’s almighty power in all service rendered for him.

3) He Was Fruitful In God’s Service.

‘...and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.’

This really brings two things to the fore, the first of which is his faithfulness. When Barnabas came to Antioch and saw what God had done (v23a), he not only encouraged the believers to continue with the Lord (v23b), but must also have preached the gospel to unbelievers. His faithfulness to the gospel, no one may doubt, for God would not have added a great many people to the Lord apart from faithful gospel preaching. Remember what we read in I Corinthians 1:21:

'God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.'

It follows that as Barnabas was *'full of the Holy Spirit and faith'*, then his great desire and aim would have been to preach Christ and him crucified to sinners at Antioch. Just as he was *'faithful'* in encouraging and exhorting believers to continue in the Christian pathway, so he was *'faithful'* in proclaiming the gospel to the lost and perishing.

The second point is his fruitfulness. Because Barnabas had *'faith'* in the almighty power and grace of God and in God's willingness to save sinners through the preaching of the gospel, he preached the Word. And what was the result ?

"...a great number of people were brought to the Lord."

It was God the Holy Spirit, working through the faithful preaching of God's Word, which brought this *'great number of people'* to the Lord. The fruitfulness of his ministry was based upon God's own sovereign will and power alone. Barnabas had a responsibility and duty to preach the gospel. He could say as did Paul in I Corinthians 9:16:

"... I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

But fruitfulness comes from God as we are taught in I Corinthians 3.6 where Paul wrote:

'I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow'.

God was pleased to bless the preaching, so that Barnabas was fruitful and

'A great number of people were brought to the Lord.'

These qualities displayed in the heart of Barnabas are like links in a chain. Surely those of us who have been saved by God's grace and are now his servants, should be faithful in proclaiming, teaching and speaking about his Word. Also we should be fervent in prayer that God would be pleased to make our witness fruitful to the ingathering of many souls into his kingdom. You may be a link in the chain which the Lord will use to bring someone to himself. Therefore let us be faithful and the Lord will bring about the fruitfulness.

But for those who do not yet know the Lord, nor the joy of sins forgiven, let me remind you that since the time of Acts, all around the world

'A great number of people were brought to the Lord.'

They are in a wonderful position because they are *'in Christ'* and they have a glorious hope, heaven itself. They

enjoy precious comfort because their sins are forgiven and they possess eternal life. What about you today, will your name be added to the great number of people who have been brought to the Lord? May it please the Lord to add very many more to himself and to his kingdom.

Chapter 5: Barnabas And Saul At Antioch Acts 11:25-30

In our previous chapter we saw how the Lord granted Barnabas a very fruitful visit to the Church at Antioch. No doubt because of his commitment to this growing Church he decided to minister there for some time. The work was obviously extensive and would have brought many demands on him, so he sought the help and fellowship of another servant of the Lord.

1) Barnabas Sought A Fellow Labourer.

This is described for us in Acts 11:25:

“Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul...”

You will recall how observations proved that God had truly done a work of grace in many lives, so he encouraged the believers to continue in the faith (v23). He also preached the gospel to unbelievers, so that many more were brought to the Lord (v24b). As this ministry developed Barnabas

went to Tarsus to seek for Saul. Many reasons have been suggested as to why he did this but because Barnabas was called ‘The Son of Encouragement’ in Acts 4:36 he undoubtedly wished to encourage his brother in the faith, Saul of Tarsus, and to see God using the gifts he had given to Saul for the furtherance of his kingdom. So really Barnabas was seeking a companion or fellow worker in the cause of the gospel.

What is delightful about this is that there was no arrogance in the heart of Barnabas that made him think he could do all of this himself and did not need the help of anyone else. He was prepared to go out of his way to encourage another brother or sister in the Lord. The question this poses for us is - Are we prepared to have someone work alongside us in God’s service who may be more gifted than we are and who may become a better and more fruitful servant than we will ever be? Are we prepared to seek the good and usefulness of others before our own good or popularity? Barnabas did and in so doing we see his humility shining through again. We read in Philippians 2:4:

“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Humility must be more important than popularity. The best possible example of this attitude is so clearly seen in the life, ministry and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. A few verses later in Philippians 2 Paul wrote that Jesus:

'Humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross.'

2) Barnabas Shared A Faithful Ministry

We read in Acts 11:26:

"...and when he – that is Barnabas - found him – that is Saul -, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the Church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch."

That Saul was willing to join Barnabas must be viewed that he saw it as God's will. The ministry which Barnabas and Saul exercised at Antioch lasted for a year as they met with the Church and taught considerable numbers of people there. It is worth pointing out that in the Bible the term Church is never used for a building or meeting place, but only to describe Christian believers. Barnabas and Saul did not give careful instruction to a building, but to the company of believers at Antioch.

Their purpose in this ministry was to teach or communicate knowledge concerning the only true and living God, and of his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. No doubt this ministry also included preaching the gospel, so they would have ministered to the Lord's own people and to unbelievers. It is during this period of faithful ministry by Barnabas and

Saul that the believers began to be called 'Christians'. It has been suggested that this name may have been given initially by enemies or opponents of the gospel to call these people after the name of their ringleader Christ. But however it came into being, it had great benefits for the followers of Jesus Christ. Previously they had been called 'the Nazarenes' or 'the men of that way', but now the name 'Christians' denoted their true allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. This new name also unified converted 'Jews' and 'Greeks'. Instead of them saying 'I was a Jew' or 'I was a Gentile', they could now say 'I am a Christian'.

It is clear from these details that the Church frequently assembled for worship and instruction. This is the privilege and responsibility of every believer which we must not neglect. The book of Hebrews gives us direct teaching on this in Hebrews 10:25:

"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

So the ministry of Barnabas and Saul shows us the importance of meeting with the rest of the Church in a regular consistent way. And then of course we see that the ministers who preached and taught the assembled Church had been put there by God and were responsible to God. Later on in his life, Saul who accompanied Barnabas at Antioch wrote about this very thing in 1 Timothy 1:12. By that time his name was changed to the more familiar Paul and he wrote:

“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.”

It is a great responsibility for any of us to be entrusted with such a calling and ministry. And that emphasises the need for faithfulness to God in the task he has given us to perform. Which leads on to the next lesson, namely, that the work of the ministry involved both teaching the people of God, and preaching the gospel to the unsaved. We have got to instruct and edify those that are within (believers), and through preaching, seek for conviction and conversion of those that are without (unbelievers). This will demand great care from all the servants of the Lord. Indeed Paul instructed Timothy about this in 2 Timothy 4:5:

“But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.”

Barnabas was a man who certainly did this.

4) Barnabas Serving With Famine Relief.

It was while Barnabas and Saul were serving the Lord at Antioch that a number of prophets arrived from Jerusalem (v27). One of these prophets, named Agabus, predicted that there would be a great famine throughout the then known world (the Roman Empire). History records that this took place during the reign of Claudius Caesar and may have lasted for three or more years (v28). As a result

of this prophecy, the believers at Antioch decided to act and as they were able, they brought gifts for the brethren at Jerusalem. It would appear that the Churches of Judea were always poor, probably because they were made up of a humbler class. But this need, brought before the Church at Antioch, was rather special and urgent. When all the gifts had been received, we read that the Church sent these gifts by the hands of Barnabas and Saul to the elders at Jerusalem (v 30).

This surely shows to us the high esteem in which Barnabas and Saul were held by the believers at Antioch. They were happy to entrust them with the task of bringing famine relief to those in need. We can add that this was also an occasion for Barnabas and Saul to visit Jerusalem and inform the apostles of what had been happening in Antioch. But let us not overlook the primary matter which we see in these verses that Barnabas was serving in famine relief. For him, it mattered not whether he was speaking to a large assembly of believers, or preaching the gospel to the unsaved or encouraging Saul, or bringing famine relief to those in need. He viewed it all as service for the Lord. Earlier on we saw that Barnabas was prepared to take the humble place and bring Saul from Tarsus to labour with him at Antioch. Now here again we see him fulfilling a humble but important role, along with Saul, to bring famine relief to those in Jerusalem. Work of this nature has always been dear to the heart of God, as we read in Psalm 41:1-2:

“Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble. The LORD will protect him and preserve his life; he will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes.”

Another example is Galatians 6 verse 10:

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

You see, we do have a responsibility to help those who are in need, whether the need is material or spiritual, whether they are believers or unbelievers. The believers at Antioch, along with Barnabas and Saul, believed the message given by Agabus, and moved swiftly to meet that need. This is something we should be involved with whenever we are able to be.

In closing we need to consider another kind of famine that can afflict our world. Amos speaks of a famine which is greater and more devastating than that which happened at Jerusalem. In Amos 8:11 we read:

“‘The days are coming,’ declares the Sovereign Lord, ‘when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.’”

Such a famine could come on any country in the world. Let us therefore, while we have opportunity, ensure that God’s good Word, his food for our hungry souls, is distributed and preached to those starving and dying without Christ, that they may be saved and satisfied.

Chapter 6: Barnabas And Saul Appointed As Missionaries Acts 13:1-3

In our previous chapter we have learned from Acts 11: 25-30 that Barnabas travelled to Tarsus to find Saul. They both returned to Antioch and for a year ministered among the people. They then journeyed to Jerusalem to bring gifts to the believers there, to assist them through the famine which was about to affect the land of Judea. When we come to the end of Acts 12, we read in v25:

“When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.”

The spotlight then falls on the Church at Antioch in Syria at the beginning of Acts 13.

1) The Role Of Barnabas In The Church

In the first three verses of that Bible chapter we discover a number of things about Barnabas, the first of which was his role in the Church. This is what we read:

“In the Church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with 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.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”

You will observe that Barnabas is named first in the list of prophets and teachers at Antioch, with Saul being named last. That Barnabas was named first probably indicated either he was the oldest man or oldest minister, or as the one sent down from the Church at Jerusalem, or perhaps as being really the pastor or presiding elder of the Church at Antioch. The most likely reason why Saul is last on the list is that his apostolic commission had not yet been made known and until it was disclosed, he was to remain undistinguished from his fellow labourers and even take the lowest place among them, as on this occasion.

For Barnabas his role of being a prophet and a teacher was very important. The role of the Biblical prophet was to receive divinely inspired messages and instructions from the Lord for special occasions and to declare them to the people. We saw an example of this in our previous chapter with the prophecy given by Agabus about the coming famine in Judea recorded in Acts 11:27-28. He had received a divine message from the Lord and by the aid of the Holy Spirit was enabled to declare this message to the people. Barnabas also fulfilled this role. Now there were

prophets like Agabus, who appear not to have been teachers, and there were many teachers who were not prophets. But in Barnabas, we see someone who was both a prophet and a teacher. As a teacher, Barnabas would have been gifted by the Lord to expound the Scriptures, to open up the doctrines of Christ and to instruct those truths relating to faith and practice. He would have been an able communicator of divine truth. It has been suggested that when the roles of prophet and teacher are applied to Barnabas, they suggest the following: the title ‘prophet’ speaks of his divine authority, and ‘teacher’ speaks of the way in which this authority was exercised. We should not forget what Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:11-12 concerning the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ:

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

Now this Church at Antioch was greatly blessed in having such men who were both prophets and teachers, including Barnabas.

As we consider Barnabas’ role in the Church, let us ask ourselves what role or task do we have in our local Church? Remember it is the Lord who gives gifts to men, and by giving these men to the local Church, it is built up and edified. But a question that needs to be answered is, should we expect prophets to be functioning in the local

Church to-day, as there are great differences of opinion on this even amongst the godliest of believers? Now this is a contentious issue, but God's Word shows us the truth. We read in Ephesians 2:20 that the Church was:

"...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as the chief corner-stone."

Once a foundation is laid, the building rises above the foundation. We believe that God has given us the complete revelation of his mind and will in his Word, the Holy Scriptures; therefore we do not require prophets to-day, since God has spoken, is speaking and will speak through his Word. It is his final revelation and we have no need to add to it nor should we.

2) The Call Of Barnabas To Missionary Service.

In Acts 13:2 we discover what Barnabas and the other prophets and teachers did at Antioch:

"...they were worshipping the Lord and fasting..."

That is, they ministered to the people and Barnabas diligently and faithfully communicated God's Word and will to them. He with the rest of the Church also fasted. In Biblical terms fasting was a sign of humiliation before God, and we must always remember that it had a specific purpose. It was a means of denying oneself, in order to give time for special prayer, to calling upon the Lord for guidance or help at specific times or in difficult situations.

It is important to note that it is not meritorious so as to make oneself more acceptable to God. That would make salvation something we could achieve by our efforts. Instead it was an indication of complete abandonment of any confidence in self and being totally dependent on the Lord. It expressed a real earnestness in the heart of the one fasting. It was at such a time that the Holy Spirit revealed his will for Barnabas and Saul. Now whether there was an audible voice which spoke, or a special revelation given to one of them, we do not know; but one thing is clear: the Lord was redirecting Barnabas to a new field of ministry, and the whole Church was involved in recognising the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We read in verse 2:

"...the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'"

There are many lessons here for us.

- i. All our service in the Church should be primarily for 'the Lord', and not men.
- ii. We should consider setting aside special times for prayer and fasting, when we can call on the Lord.
- iii. Any redirection from one area of service for the Lord to another should only be undertaken if the Holy Spirit leads us and not simply because we are weary or finding what we are already doing as difficult. We must be Spirit led.
- iv. All servants of Christ are separated by him and for him to the work to which he has called them.

Therefore there are to be no idle servants in the service of the Lord.

- v. Those who are called to a specific work (e.g. pastoral ministry or missionary enterprise) have been called to a work already determined by the Lord and in which the Lord will build his Church.

We also need to note that the Antioch Church play a very important role, because these two men were really among their best leaders. It was to the Church that the Holy Spirit gave the instruction to set apart these two men, and not simply something they felt themselves. This the Church gladly did as they submitted to the guidance the Holy Spirit had given them.

When the Holy Spirit revealed his will to the Church, verse 3 tells us that again they fasted and prayed. Here was an occasion when those at Antioch needed to bring Barnabas and Saul before the Lord in prayer. It was the Lord who had called and chosen them for this special work, but they needed the prayerful support of their brethren in the Church. That is why they not only prayed but also fasted. They abstained from food, and possibly sleep and contact with the outside world in order to lay hold upon the Lord for these two servants. So they really recognised and accepted the Holy Spirit's redirection for Barnabas and Saul without question or arguing, which is really quite remarkable when we consider the vital part they were already playing in the Church and which would be lost once they had been sent off to this new field of work. Here was a Church prepared to sacrifice their best men so they

could engage in this special ministry of taking the gospel to other places. We are told that after praying and fasting for them they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The 'laying on of their hands' was a sign that they recognised these two brethren had been called to an extraordinary task or mission. It was not that they were being called to a new rank or office, but to a new work, namely, that of missionary or Church planting. It is interesting that when these two men completed the work they had been called to do they came back to their sending Church in Antioch. We read in Acts 14:26:

“From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.”

When Barnabas and Saul met with the Church before being sent off, it was the Church who committed them to the grace of God. By laying hands on Barnabas and Saul before they were sent off, the leaders at Antioch were identifying themselves and the Church at Antioch with the work in which they would be engaged. This meant Barnabas and Saul were '*sent off*' with the Church's prayers, recognition and support.

We see through this the importance of belonging to a local Church. Sadly today some Christian believers do not see the need to belong to a local Church which Barnabas contradicts because he was totally committed to the Church at Antioch. Also there are other believers who think that missionary work is not very important and have been heard

to say that a pastor is much more important than a missionary. This passage of Scripture contradicts such views.

Let us consider first the importance of belonging to a local Church. The life of Barnabas clearly shows us that New Testament believers saw the importance of belonging to and being committed to a local Church. When we first met him in Acts 4 he belonged to the Church in Jerusalem, and readily submitted to the Church's request to travel to Antioch to see the work the Lord was doing there. And here in Acts 13 he belongs to the Antioch Church and submitted to their direction as the Holy Spirit said to the Church that Saul and he were to become missionaries. The fact that they also returned to that Church at the end of their journey shows how important they felt the bond that existed with that Church: something we have seen by their prayer support. So all believers wherever possible should belong to a local Church where the Bible is taught faithfully as it is the Word of God.

Now let us turn to those who do not accept the importance of missionary work. Again the Antioch Church teaches us how wrong such a view is. It is a work of the highest importance and one which this Church supported wholeheartedly. After all it was the Holy Spirit himself who initiated this first missionary journey so we dare not say that missionary work is of little importance. It is vital. Not only that, but we have seen that this Church was so committed to the work of the gospel in other parts of the world that they willingly set apart their best men to do this

work. Also the influence of these men on the spiritual lives of those to whom they took the gospel of Christ was enormous. Indeed, it had eternal consequences. The planting of Churches is a work of the greatest importance so we should never ever underestimate missionaries or the work they do. Indeed to do so would be to commit a great sin.

These opening verses of Acts 13 teach us a number of things. It ought to be our constant prayer, that the Lord of the harvest will send forth labourers into his harvest, and especially from the Church to which we belong. If it pleases the Lord to answer our prayers, then we will need to give recognition to the one called and identify with him or her before they are sent out. The work of mission is a spiritual work. It is serving the Lord in his vineyard. It is also a special work: it is only for those chosen and called by the Lord. And it is a serious work. It is to bring the message of the gospel to those who are dying and perishing without Christ. May it please the Lord to raise up and call out many like Barnabas from our Churches to serve him in the fields white and ready for harvest.

Chapter 7: Barnabas and Saul at Cyprus: Acts 13: 4-12

In this chapter we begin following Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary journey. We read that in Acts 13:4 that their first destination was the island of Cyprus. You will recall that when we thought of Barnabas and Saul

being set apart for the work of the gospel, it was the Holy Spirit who set them apart. Now, as they departed from the Church at Antioch, they were sent on their way not just by the leaders and members of that Church, but primarily ‘by the Holy Spirit’. He chose them, called them, commissioned them and sent them off into the work he had appointed for them. They left Antioch and travelled down to the Syrian port of Selucia and from there they sailed to the island of Cyprus and landed at Salamis (near modern Famagusta).

1) Their First Destination.

Cyprus was a Roman province, ruled by a Proconsul, and may have been chosen because of its close proximity to Syria, a sea journey of about 220km. And of course it was the native land of Barnabas. It is quite possible that as Barnabas was still the prominent one between himself and Saul he would have naturally wanted to evangelise his own land and his own people, and this would fit in the pattern Jesus gave his disciples before he ascended into heaven in Acts 1:8 where Jesus said:

“And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Before we consider taking the gospel to other lands and people, we must begin at home, at ‘our Jerusalem’ or our home. And Barnabas, understandably would have wanted those in his home region to know about the love of Christ. In many ways this is the most difficult place to begin our witness, but it is what the Lord has commanded, and we

must obey his Word. Begin in our home, then in our neighbourhood, then in our village or town, then in our country, and so on. You can think of the spread of the gospel being like the ripples which come when you throw a stone into the middle of a lake. They spread wider and wider until they reach the very edge, and we should have that kind of vision for the spread of the gospel, starting where we are and then spreading out.

We are also introduced to an individual in verse 5, namely, John Mark, who is described as their helper. According to Colossians 4:10 John Mark was a cousin of Barnabas. He was with them, either as an attendant or servant, or perhaps as one who was learning and preparing for more important duties in the future.

2) Their Message.

Having arrived in Salamis in the East side of Cyprus, Barnabas and Saul went to the synagogues where the Jews met together. It is uncertain if there was more than one synagogue in Salamis, but we know that since Barnabas and Saul were Jews by birth and education, they obtained access through the synagogues not only to their fellow countrymen, but also to the serious and devoutly disposed Gentiles who attended Jewish worship. It was by far the best place from which to launch their gospel thrust to those living in Salamis. We are informed in the same verse that:

“...they proclaimed the Word of God...”

Now undoubtedly Jews would have heard God's Word read in the synagogues each week as the Old Testament Scriptures were brought out, but this proclaiming of God's Word by Barnabas and Saul was different for it proclaimed the new or Christian revelation. The message was Christ centred for it concerned the gospel of God's grace which Christ had told his disciples to proclaim. And the lesson for us is that the message they proclaimed is the message we must proclaim. We have no right whatever to preach or proclaim any other message than God's precious and infallible Word. We have an excellent summary of the gospel message which they proclaimed in words Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4:

“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the Word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”

This must be the substance of the message we proclaim, Jesus Christ and him crucified. We must be Biblically based as Paul urged young Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2:

“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season.”

And as he did himself, as he reminded the Corinthian Church in 1 Corinthians 2:2-5:

“I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified... My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.”

3) The Response They Received.

The first details that Luke gives us in Acts was a little way into their time on Cyprus. He tells us (v6) that Barnabas, Saul and John Mark left Salamis and travelled to the west of the island and finally arrived at Paphos. Paphos was the seat of Roman government on the island of Cyprus, and where the proconsul resided. Then we are informed about two entirely different men they encountered at Paphos. The first was a man we might call a seeker and you will see why in a moment or two. His name was Sergius Paulus and was in fact the proconsul who governed the Island. He is described in verse 7 as an intelligent man, meaning he was a thoughtful and discerning man. He sent for Barnabas and Saul because:

“He wanted to hear the Word of God”.

That is always a good sign to see in any man or woman and must have encouraged the Lord's servants.

The second was quite different and was what we might call a scorner. His name was Bar-Jesus and he was a Jewish false prophet, one who falsely claimed to have inspiration. He is also described as a sorcerer. We read he was an attendant of the proconsul, and so was in his service or company. Now this man called Bar-Jesus (v6) is also called Elymas (v8) which means ‘wise or learned’ and he was strongly opposed to Sergius Paulus being interested in the *“the Word of God”*. The result was (v8) he:

“Opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.”

He actively tried to persuade the mind and heart of the proconsul away from believing in Jesus Christ and indicated what a wicked man he was.

There is an important lesson in this for us today. Whenever people hear the Word of God their response will be like one of these two men. They will either desire to hear and understand it, so that they might be obedient to the Lord, and believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord. Or they will scorn God’s Word, not believing or obeying it, and opposing any who show interest in it. The question each of us must ask ourselves is, “Am I like Sergius Paulus – a seeker, or like Elymas or Bar-Jesus – a scorner?”

It has been suggested that Acts 13:9 is the turning point in Saul’s position, not only with respect to Barnabas, but also

to the conduct of the whole mission, and the course of the history of the New Testament Church.

“Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas...”

From this verse we see how Saul, whose name is now changed to Paul – and we shall call him Paul from now on in this book - takes the initiative and authority, leaving Barnabas to fulfil a supporting role. Paul challenged Elymas the sorcerer, not just with human words, but being *“filled with the Holy Spirit”* he spoke the Lord’s Word directly to his heart. He told Elymas that he was a child of the devil; he was an enemy of everything that is right and that he was full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. He would never stop perverting or turning away from the right ways of the Lord (v10.) Paul then informed him that the Lord would send judgement upon him in the form of blindness for a period of time; and immediately what he said happened (see v11). This solemn miracle of judgement was followed (v12) by a miracle of mercy or grace; for the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, when he saw what had happened to Elymas in response to Paul’s words, believed. This can only mean that he believed in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, not only because of what he had seen, but also because of *“...the teaching about the Lord.”*

There were two miracles that day: a miracle of judgement and a miracle of mercy. Today our attitude to the Word of God and to the person and redeeming work of the Lord

Jesus Christ can result in either of these miracles taking place in our lives. If we are seekers like Sergius Paulus and believe the Word of God, then we will experience the miracle of mercy, when God forgives our sin and bestows upon us eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. Isaiah put it like this in Isaiah 55:6-7:

“Seek the Lord while he may be found, call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”

By contrast and solemnly, if we are scorers (like Elymas), then we may experience a miracle of God’s judgement. Our prayer should be that the Lord will deal with us in such a way that we will have to acknowledge he is the Lord, and in God’s goodness and grace, be led to repentance and faith in his beloved Son.

Chapter 8: Barnabas And Paul At Pisidian Antioch (Part 1): Acts 13: 13-41

1) Facing Disappointment.

Sometimes in our service for the Lord we meet with disappointments which can bring sadness to our lives. In our studies in the life of Barnabas, he and Paul had an encouragement and a discouragement because of the

completely opposite response they met with. The encouragement was that the governor of Cyprus himself was brought to faith in Jesus Christ. But you will remember they were opposed by a sorcerer named Elymas which inevitably brought them sadness. In this chapter we will find them facing an entirely different kind of incident that brought them sadness and which we will see later became the cause for a major division. However, to begin with we need to note an important change which took place at this point in their ministry. Paul became the predominant leader of the group. We read in Acts 13:13:

“From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.”

This change was not what caused Barnabas and Paul any sadness but something else, or rather, someone else. Having left Cyprus and arriving in Perga, a town in the south of Asia Minor which is modern day Turkey which was situated in Pamphylia, we simply read in v13:

“... John left them to return to Jerusalem.”

John, or John Mark as he is also known (Acts 12:25) had been their helper or assistant (v5) and had travelled to Cyprus with Barnabas and Paul. But now as they travel into Asia Minor he departed from them and returned home. The word ‘left’ means he actually deserted them. It is a very strong term, and really is saying that John let

Barnabas and Paul down. A number of suggestions have been made for the reason for this. Some have thought he deserted them because of weariness, homesickness, poor health, and even important business at Jerusalem. Whilst these are possibilities they are hardly reasons that would warrant the term ‘deserted’. Others feel the most likely cause would seem to be his discontentment with the unexpected transfer of authority from Barnabas (his cousin, Colossians 4:10) to one who had occupied a lower place, namely Paul. This feeling, though wrong and carnal, is perfectly natural when we consider that Barnabas was not only older as a Christian and a minister (Acts 4:36) but had been the means of introducing Paul to active Christian service, both in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27) and Antioch (Acts 11:26). What we have to say is that the book of Acts does not give us the reason.

2) Responding To Disappointment.

What is important to note is that Barnabas certainly did not react adversely to Paul’s new prominence. He was quite happy with it for there is no record of him expressing any bitterness or jealousy at all. And that fact alone shows that Barnabas was a man of piety and wisdom and grace and humility and love. Nevertheless, for Barnabas and for Saul, the departure of John Mark from the work of mission brought unexpected sadness as they served the Lord. And here is one of the most grievous experiences which anyone faces in the ministry, namely to see someone abandoning, or deserting the work of the Lord. It might be a pastor or elder, or a Sunday School teacher, or young people’s

worker, or even a Church member or a believer with no church affiliation. But to see someone desert or abandon the work of the Lord for reasons other than health, or urgent family commitments, is sad indeed. I wonder, reader, is this the situation you find yourself in today? You were once keen and zealous and diligent in serving the Lord, but now you have sadly gone back and deserted or abandoned service for the Lord. If so, then what is required is for you to come back to the Lord, to seek his forgiveness again and to cry to him for mercy. As an encouragement let me remind you what Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 55:7:

“Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”

Do not delay, but put this matter right today. You will find the Lord far more willing to forgive you than you ever thought possible.

What is amazing and challenging is that Barnabas and Paul did not let this disappointment hinder them at all in fulfilling their commission to preach the gospel of Christ. We simply read:

“From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch.”

This was a journey almost due north of about 150 kilometres. The word translated ‘went on’ has the literal meaning ‘having passed through’. It conveys the meaning that Barnabas and Paul would not be deflected in their

purpose to take the gospel to those in Pisidian Antioch (a different Antioch from where they started their journey), even though their helper had deserted them and the work of mission. When they reached this Antioch we read in v14:

“On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down.”

The synagogue was the meeting or assembly of the Jews for worship. Barnabas and Paul knew that the best place from which to launch their gospel ministry in this city was where the Jews met for worship. Remember what Paul wrote in Romans 1:16:

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

It is worth just pausing at this point to apply this incident to ourselves. The simple lesson is that it is so easy to be discouraged and become faint-hearted in the work of the Lord, especially if those around us have gone back or departed from serving the Lord. If we keep looking at men and women, we will always become very discouraged because at our best we are weak and frail, but our primary objective must be to look to the Lord and press on in obeying his call. Paul wrote this in Colossians 3:23-24, and it is excellent advice for times when we may be tempted to give up serving the Lord.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

The secret in ministry is to have our thoughts, desires, aims, and objectives focused on ‘serving the Lord’, and not seeking to please men or to copy men. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:58:

“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.”

3) The Message They Proclaimed.

Returning to Pisidian Antioch, Barnabas and Paul sat in the synagogue. After the reading of the law (from the books of Moses) and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers or elders sent word to Barnabas and Paul (v15):

“Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.”

These elders must have recognised in Barnabas and Paul, whether by their dress or some other feature that they were teachers, and hence they were asked to speak. The long and detailed message recorded as having been spoken by Paul, is outlined for us in verses 16 – 41 which we will simply summarise here but which we commend you to read

in full in your Bible. It is really a digest of the history of the people of Israel and the Lord's dealings with them.

There are nine points to note:

- i. They spoke of God's choice of Israel v17.
- ii. They described their deliverance from Egypt v17.
- iii. They pointed out their inheritance in Canaan v18-19.
- iv. They referred to their being ruled by Judges v20.
- v. They spoke of them being ruled by King Saul and David v21-22.
- vi. They reminded them of the fulfilment of the promise made to David concerning his seed, namely the Lord Jesus Christ v23.
- vii. They outlined the life of Jesus Christ v24-37.
- viii. They proclaimed forgiveness and justification through Christ's work v38-39.
- ix. They gave a warning not to despise this message v40-41.

Here, within these verses, we see their faithfulness in the ministry. Paul, speaking on behalf of Barnabas and himself, outlined to the Jews the history of God's dealings with them, culminating in the birth, life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah. They then applied the message to the people in the synagogue by declaring in v38-39:

"...through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified

from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses."

Their Jewish history was useful to trace God's dealings with his chosen people, but the application given was all important, namely, keeping the law could never merit their forgiveness. Forgiveness could only ever be obtained through faith in God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for sinners and was raised for their justification. And as if to re-emphasise the importance of what he has just said, Paul gave a warning (v40-41) lest they despise God's Word spoken by him.

"Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: 'Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.'"

Now we need to make careful application of this to our own lives.

- i. If you are a Christian believer who is seeking to bring the Word of God to others we need to outline the Biblical facts in such a way that those listening can trace God's mighty purposes being worked out and fulfilled in the record of both the Old and New Testaments. This message preached by Paul in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch is proof, if proof were needed, that Jesus Christ is the key to Scripture. He is the focal point. All the promises in the Old

Testament relating to a coming Messiah, Redeemer and Deliverer have their fulfilment in him.

- ii. If we you are not yet a Christian believer the ministry given by Paul points to how you may obtain forgiveness. We read in v38-39:

“Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.”

Reader, do you know the forgiveness of your own sins? ‘How can I know this?’ you may ask. The answer is in verse 39:

“Everyone who believes is justified.”

You are then made righteous, just as if you had never sinned. This is how God looks upon all those who come to him; through Jesus Christ. Through repentance toward God and having faith in Jesus as your Saviour and Lord, you too can be forgiven and justified.

Chapter 9: Barnabas And Paul At Pisidian Antioch (Part 2): Acts 13: 42-44

We come in this chapter to consider the response Barnabas and Paul and their message about Jesus created in the people in Pisidian Antioch. We need to remember that when any message is preached from the Word of God, there is always an effect or result on the part of those who listen.

1) A Desire To Know More.

Initially the response was very encouraging. We read in verses 42-43:

“As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.”

They wanted to know more. From verse 43 it is clear that the people were a combination of Jews and devout converts to Judaism who would have been Gentiles. The significance of that is that if Jews could not be justified by keeping the law of Moses, but had to seek forgiveness through the sacrifice and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, then there was hope too for Gentiles who did not have the law, but who could believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and

receive forgiveness of sins through faith in him. It is not surprising, therefore, to see in these people an earnestness to have more of God's Word. What we need to do is to simply ask if this is true of us? Is there a genuine, earnest desire in our hearts to hear the Word of God? How eager are we really to take note of what the Lord is saying to us? Could you say these words about yourself which David wrote concerning his own response to the Word of God? They are found in Psalm 119:127:

"...I love your commands more than gold, more than pure gold."

Is there within us an earnestness, a sincerity, a desire to have God's Word so that we can know it, believe it, obey it and depend upon it?

2) An Exhortation Given.

When the meeting in the synagogue ended we read in verse 43:

"When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God."

These Jews and devout converts to Judaism were so keen to know more about the Lord, that they followed Barnabas and Paul who pleaded with them to continue in the grace of God. This has been understood in two ways. First, that

these Jews and devout Jewish converts had already become believers in the Lord Jesus, and therefore these words were spoken in order that they might be encouraged to persevere in the grace of God, to continue to hold fast what they had received. Second and alternatively, others think that these Jews and devout proselytes were seeking after saving truth, here called "*the grace of God*", and therefore Barnabas and Paul were urging and persuading them to keep on with their asking, seeking and knocking, for by so doing they would find Christ, or rather be found of him. Whichever interpretation is correct, and both appear to be feasible, one thing is certain, that Barnabas and Paul gave an exhortation to heed God's Word. It is worth repeating time and time again, that it is through God's Word and God's Word alone, preached or taught, that the Lord is pleased to bless to the saving of souls. In Romans 10:17 Paul wrote:

"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."

This is really a challenge to both Christian believers and unbelievers. If we are already followers of Jesus then we must give serious consideration to the Word of God and cultivate an eagerness to apply it to our lives. There are so many passages of Scripture which apply to true disciples of Christ but let me remind you of three, and ask yourself if they describe what you are doing.

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."(2 Peter 3:18)

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.”
(Colossians 3:16)

“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.” (1 Peter 1:15)

And if you do not follow Christ yet or want to know him in your life, here are three more Bible verses.

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:13

“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.” Isaiah 55: 6

“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.”
Luke 13:24

3) An Eagerness To Hear God’s Word.

Returning to Acts 13, on the next Sabbath day after, we read in verse 44:

“...almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.”

We must not lose sight of the fact that Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, is not given to exaggeration, for he uses the word ‘almost’. It would have been so easy to write ‘the whole city came together’ but that would not have been

true. This shows to us the importance of speaking and writing the truth, and not what we might like others to think took place.

The reason for this large gathering was they wanted to hear what God’s Word had to say. Commenting on this the Bible commentator J.A. Alexander wrote:

“It is worthy of remark that nothing is here said of miracles, so that the desire of instruction and salvation would appear to be the only cause of this great gathering.”

It is very probable that during the week from the first Sabbath when they met in the synagogue until this second Sabbath, Barnabas and Paul would have appealed to the people in Pisidian Antioch to gather so that they might hear the glorious message of the gospel. This message Paul had preached to the Jews on the previous Sabbath, and which the Gentiles now wished to hear for themselves. It was a very encouraging response to receive.

In our next chapter we will see what the outcome of all this was, but before closing this one there are a number of lessons that we need to note from what we have considered so far.

- i. Let us not exaggerate when speaking or writing, but give the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

- ii. If we want to see many people gathering to hear God's Word about his redeeming love in Christ then we must seek to reach them, and invite them in.
- iii. We need to ask ourselves if we have an enthusiasm to hear God's Word? Are we prepared to put aside other interests and pastimes in order that we do not miss hearing God's Word?
- iv. Is it really God's Word that we are enthusiastic to hear, or are we more interested in miracles, in the dramatic, in externals? These people who gathered in Pisidian Antioch had an enthusiasm to hear God's Word, without any miracles or signs. Nor had they any desire to hear words from men only because it was the Word of God they wished to hear. There is a lovely testimony recorded in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 about the Thessalonians and their response to the gospel when they heard it.

“When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.”

May God grant that we will all be like them.

Chapter 10: Barnabas And Paul At Pisidian Antioch (Part 3): Acts 13: 45-48

Our previous chapter ended with the encouraging report of the enthusiasm in the people to hear God's Word (v44). However, that initial heartening response was not true of everyone in Antioch that day.

1) Confrontation Experienced (v45).

Barnabas and Paul proclaimed God's message, with Paul again taking the lead. Now the reaction which we find from the Jews is to say the least tragic. We read in verse 45:

“When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.”

These Jews were fearful that they would lose their influence on the Gentiles so they spoke against what Paul was preaching. The term translated 'abusively' or 'contradicting' as some translations use, is the word meaning blaspheming. They were really claiming Barnabas and Paul were heretics and false teachers. It was a very sad response. Indeed, we have to add this was no mild disagreement or a cool reception to their message; rather it was a vehement and provocative attack on Paul's preaching, and his message of salvation of sins forgiven through the finished work of Christ on the cross. Instead of

being glad that the people wanted to know what God had to say to them, they were opposed.

The lesson from this harsh reaction is that often God's people have to face opposition and persecution from those who are opposed to the gospel. If you are a born again believer, and are seeking to live for the Lord and witness for him day by day, then be assured you will experience this sooner or later. It may come from your home, from unbelieving loved ones, from those amongst whom you work day by day, from those at school or college if you are a young person, from neighbours and even close friends. We should not be surprised by such a reaction to our living and witnessing. In fact Jesus spoke about this in John 15:18-21.

“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.’”

Barnabas and Paul experienced confrontation for the sake of the gospel, and if you are a Christian believer you must be prepared to face the same treatment.

2) Condemnation Expressed (v46).

We are told in verse 46 how Barnabas and Paul responded to this attack. We read:

“Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: ‘We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.’”

This was no time to be faint-hearted or apologetic in the manner or content of their answer, so they reply in a bold, free and plain manner. They explained how this was a necessary part of the divine plan and purpose that the gospel should be preached to the Jews before it was preached to Gentiles. Barnabas and Paul had done this, but the Jews had rejected it. Barnabas and Paul therefore turned to the Gentiles. It is very clear from what Barnabas and Paul said that those Jews had, in effect, condemned themselves by refusing and rejecting the message of forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus Christ. There are some solemn words about this in John 3:18:

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”

These Jews had been given the privilege of hearing the gospel of the grace of God, but they had rejected it, therefore they had brought about self-condemnation. If

these Jews did not wish to hear the gospel, then Barnabas and Paul would turn to the Gentiles and let them hear God's good news.

We have to say this negative response from the Jews is both solemn and tragic. To think that anyone who refuses and rejects the gospel message, preached from God's Word, is in effect condemning themselves, is terrifying. Those who do so are in great danger of eternal punishment. The privilege which the Jews had at Pisidian Antioch, we now have. The Lord says to us today when the gospel is preached that we are to turn from our sin and turn to God for pardon, cleansing and eternal life, through the blood of Jesus Christ, shed on the cross. It is the same message Barnabas and Paul brought to these people. I wonder, could it be said of you that you stand 'condemned already because you have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son?' Why remain condemned when you could be delivered from the wrath to come by trusting in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord?

3) Conversion Enjoyed (v47-49).

Though the Jews mostly rejected the good news about Jesus this was not true of everyone in Antioch. Barnabas and Paul explained in verse 47 that the Lord had given them a command. They quoted from Isaiah 49:6 where the Messiah is described as a source of light, not merely to the Jews, but to the nations, not merely in the land of Israel, but to the ends of the earth. We read:

"I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

This command which Barnabas and Paul had received, was from the Lord, the head of the Church. That Church would be composed of believers in Jesus Christ who had been either Jews or Gentiles by birth, but who would be 'all one in Christ Jesus' when born again by the Holy Spirit and brought into the body of Christ. On hearing such good news we read the Gentiles:

"Were glad and honoured the word of the Lord."

This expression means that they praised and honoured the doctrine of Christ, the new revelation which had been preached to them by Paul and Barnabas. And this new message did not just set before them truth, but a clear and decisive method of salvation. Earlier in Acts 4:12 we are told concerning the Lord Jesus Christ that:

"Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

The outcome of hearing the Word of the Lord was that many believed in Jesus Christ as the only Saviour and Lord. That was a truly wonderful response when contrasted with the Jews' reaction and we need to enquire why they received Christ when others had rejected him. We are given the answer in verse 48:

“...all who were appointed for eternal life believed.”

Here we have a clear and unmistakable verse which teaches us the doctrine of election or predestination. You will note that in the verse the ‘appointment’ to eternal life came before they ‘believed’. Now how can we reconcile this doctrine of election or predestination with that of preaching the gospel freely to sinners? We can answer this by considering a number of questions.

- i. Who is it elects or predestines? It is God.
- ii. Who is it who preaches the gospel? It is us.
- iii. Who is it who is called upon to believe? It is the sinner.
- iv. Who is it who saves? It is God.

The saving of a soul from beginning to end is God’s sovereign work. Many centuries ago the prophet Jonah declared in Jonah 2:9:

“Salvation comes from the Lord.”

But God has made man responsible: the one who preaches has a responsibility to proclaim God’s Word and to warn sinners to repent and believe the gospel, or else be condemned. The sinner who listens to the gospel has a responsibility to hear God’s Word, to heed God’s Word and to receive the gift of eternal life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the response at Pisidian Antioch by the Gentiles, the result being they entered into the joy of God’s forgiveness by being converted to Christ.

As we draw this chapter to a close there are a number of important lessons for us to consider. First, if you are truly the Lord’s and have been saved by his wondrous grace, then rejoice because that means that God has chosen you to be his child. In Ephesians 1:4 Paul tells us that God:

“...chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”

Then let us be glad, and praise and glorify the Lord and the gospel which has reached and saved us, and let us enjoy our conversion. Second, if you have not yet trusted in Jesus Christ, God calls to you through the gospel to admit to your sin, to repent of that sin and to plead with him to save you from that sin, and to receive by faith his gifts of forgiveness and eternal life through his beloved Son. Another Bible verse, Ephesians 1:7 tells us this:

“In him - that is Jesus - we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.”

When you have received Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, then you can rejoice in the assurance that God has pardoned you.

Chapter 11: Barnabas and Paul at Pisidian Antioch (Part 4): Acts 13: 49-52

We come now to consider the record of the final days of Barnabas and Paul in Antioch in Pisidia. We read in Acts 13:49:

“The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.”

And the word “*spread*” means the Word of God ‘circulated’ or ‘diffused’ throughout that whole region, wider than Antioch itself. We are not told precisely how this came about and it was probably a combination of the preaching of Barnabas and Paul and also the many new believers amongst the Gentiles sharing with their relatives and neighbours their testimony of what Christ had done for them and how through faith in him they had peace with God. We have an example of this principle in the Old Testament book of 2 Kings. In chapter 7 we read of four men with leprosy who left the besieged city of Samaria to go to the camp of the Syrian army who were attacking it. When they arrived at the camp they discovered it deserted and the Syrian army had left huge supplies of food, clothing and riches. The leprosy sufferers quickly started eating and drinking and collected some of the articles and hid them. Then come these remarkable words from these four men in 2 Kings 7:9:

“We’re not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves.”

The result was that they went back to the city of Samaria and shared what they had found with the whole city, who subsequently shared in the joy of these men. If the Lord Jesus Christ has saved us and we know our sins are forgiven and we believe the gospel to be the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, then we have the great responsibility to take this “good news” to those around us who need it. We need to spread the Word of the Lord. Since we claim to be on the Lord’s side then we are in the service of the King of kings, so let us take his Word to others.

This remarkable spread of the gospel brought a strong reaction from the unbelieving Jews who had earlier criticised and opposed Barnabas and Paul. It is an amazing fact, often recorded in God’s Word and experienced throughout the history of the Christian church, that when God is blessing his work, then we may be sure that Satan will stir up hostility and opposition against the work of the Lord. This is what we see in verse 50. It would appear from the writings of Josephus, the Jewish historian, that the number of female converts to Judaism at that time was very great. Hence, we read (v 50) that the raising up of persecution against Barnabas and Paul came from:

“...the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city.”

These men may have been the husbands or near relatives of these women; or they may have been the magistrates and rulers who had power in their hands. What we know for

certain is that these women and men brought such persecution against Barnabas and Paul that they:

“Expelled them from their region.”

So yet again the Lord’s servants were persecuted for their faith in Christ and the word ‘expelled’ means they were cast out, and probably violently. We need to remember that when the Lord Jesus was here upon earth, he warned his disciples of the suffering and persecution which they would have to endure for his name’s sake. We read in Matthew 10:21-23:

“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”

Here in our story, we see Barnabas and Paul suffering for the cause of the Lord. And there is an important lesson for us to take note from all this. While open hostility and persecution of the Lord’s people is not present everywhere in the world, if we are going to be true disciples of Jesus then we must be prepared that persecution may come to us. Indeed, many believers around the world today will be facing this same kind of hostility that Barnabas and Paul experienced. We have to ask ourselves how we would respond if such persecution came to us. And we need to

pray both for those already facing persecution today and for ourselves that should it come to us the Lord will strengthen us to remain faithful to him whatever may happen to us. There are many reasons why God’s people suffer in this way, but one of them is that trials are beneficial to believers because they distinguish between the false and the true.

Having been thrown out of the region we read in verse 51 that Barnabas and Paul

“...shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.”

The reason for this unusual action was symbolic or expressive of an unwillingness to have the least communication or connection with the people who had rejected the gospel of Christ. Shaking the dust from their feet was a testimony against the people for their rejection and fierce opposition to the Lord’s gracious offer in the gospel of Christ. What Barnabas and Paul did was in obedience to the express command of the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 10:14-15.

“If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth; it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgement than for that town.”

These words of the Saviour are very strong and serious. We know that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. And yet Jesus says that in the day of judgement the punishment awaiting the land of Sodom and Gomorrah (classical examples of wickedness) will be lighter than that which is in store for the city or people which rejects the gospel. Who can tell what punishment awaited those “*God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city*” of Antioch for their rejection of the gospel?

As we think of Barnabas and Paul “*shaking off the dust from their feet*”, symbolizing the rejection of the Lord by these people in Antioch, we need to ask ourselves if this symbolic act would also be appropriate for us? We need to be sure that we do not reject the gospel of Christ. You see, if anyone remains a ‘Christ rejecter’, their punishment at the judgement will be worse than that which befell the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Therefore if you are in that condition then we urge you to turn to the Lord, seek his mercy, forgiveness and pardon before it is too late. Seek his salvation because failure here is too terrible to contemplate!

Before we end this chapter we need to note that not everybody in the region rejected the gospel because many of the people did receive Christ as their Saviour. In spite of this opposition these early followers of the Lord rejoiced in circumstances which we would have thought were more likely to produce the opposite effect. Clearly they were being wonderfully upheld by the grace of God. This is something we find on a number of similar occasions in the

early Church. For example in Acts chapter 5:40-41 when Peter and John were arrested after the healing of a lame man in the name of Jesus, a Jewish scholar named Gamaliel persuaded the authorities not to pursue these two disciples any further. We read:

“His speech (that is Gamaliel) persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”

Just as the apostles ‘rejoiced’ after they had been beaten, so here in Pisidian Antioch, these followers of the Lord who might well have to face the same persecution as Barnabas and Paul faced were:

“... filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

Paul uses a similar expression when writing to the church at Rome where he teaches us in Romans 14:17 and 15:13:

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.....May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

What those disciples did in showing the joy of the Lord was not some humanly devised or man-made attempt to

‘put a brave face’ on a desperate situation. Remember they had just witnessed Barnabas and Paul being persecuted and expelled. Since they had been born again themselves, they were indwelt by the Holy Spirit’ and since a fruit of the Spirit is ‘joy’, it was his ministry in their hearts which was the reason why they rejoiced. You see, it is easy to be ‘joyful’ and ‘happy’ when things are going well for us, but it is only the true believer, indwelt and filled with the Holy Spirit, who can according to Philippians 4:4:

“Rejoice in the Lord always”

If our joy is in the Lord, and not in our circumstances, then we will be able like these new disciples to be filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. May God grant us to be such!

From Pisidian Antioch Barnabas and Saul travelled around 100 km to the city of Iconium, and we shall discover what happened there in volume 2 of the Life of Barnabas.

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