

BELOVED BARNABAS

"For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord" (Acts 11:24).

In this lesson we are to study about one of the noblest and most lovable characters of the Bible. In the scriptures and in secular literature we find praiseful tributes paid to men and women who "served their day and generation by the will of God." It is doubtful if any tribute is greater than the one paid to Barnabas in Acts 11:24, "For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith."

I. A Generous Man. Acts 4:36-37.

Barnabas was a Jew, of the tribe of Levi, and was a native of Cyprus, a fertile island off the coast of Syria. Evidently he was a man of some means. We do not know how much property he owned, but it had a sale value, and he evidently did not experience any difficulty in disposing of it. In harmony with the decision of the early church to place all their possessions at the command of the apostles, Barnabas sold his land and brought all of the proceeds and laid them at the apostle's feet. Thus his generosity was expressed in deed, and not in pious words and promises. That was an unusually beautiful example of giving. It was a marvelous indication of his eagerness and willingness to do the will of God. Barnabas was so deeply interested in the salvation of others, which is one of the evidences that one is really saved, that he did not allow the sin of greed to grow in his life. Both his life and his possessions were fully dedicated to the Lord.

II. A Gracious Man. Acts 9:26-27.

Saul of Tarsus had been a bitter persecutor of the Christians. However, on a mission of that nature, he was brought face to face with Christ, and was gloriously saved. When, at length, he returned to Jerusalem and attempted to join the company of Christians there, they were suspicious and afraid of him. And there was a measure of justification for their attitude. It was only natural for them to think that his professed conversion was only a trick, and that he was merely gathering evidence to be used in the slaying of other Christians. They had not forgotten his former actions, which indicates the fact that an evil past record may long overshadow the pathway of a Christian. It is always difficult to live down a bad past or to erase footprints made in the service of Satan.

In the meantime, Barnabas had investigated Saul's experience on the road to Damascus, and found it to be genuine. He also discovered that he had marvelous possibilities as a witness for Christ. In a most gracious manner Barnabas vouched for Saul. Because Barnabas was willing to be a sponsor for him, the members of the church immediately admitted him to their fellowship. No doubt this kind and gracious action on the part of Barnabas was deeply appreciated by the great Apostle. How wonderful it is to have someone stand by us in a time of need!

III. A Good Man. Acts 11:22-26.

Antioch, the capital of Syria, had been famous for its commerce, art, and literature, and infamous for its worldliness, licentiousness, and wickedness. Into this populous and wicked city the gospel of Christ had been faithfully

proclaimed by those unnamed disciples, who had been forced to leave Jerusalem in order to live. As those brave and daring souls preached the gospel of Christ, the Lord placed His stamp of approval upon their work. Many believed on Christ and were saved, and the first Gentile church was established.

Tidings of these triumphs of grace soon went abroad and speedily claimed the attention of the church in Jerusalem. Greatly stirred by the news of the extraordinary happenings in Antioch, the leaders in the Jerusalem church decided to send one of their honored members, along the trail of these zealous evangelists, to inspect their work and to ascertain what should be done about it. They dispatched Barnabas thither as an official observer and a qualified investigator of this new movement. Barnabas was a man of high rank, distinguished presence, unquestioned integrity, unblemished character, open mind, broad vision, keen perception and genuine sympathy. Full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, he was known far and wide as a good man. No other word except "good" accurately describes this fine, heroic man.

When Barnabas arrived in the city and saw the wonderful manifestations of the grace of God in the chaste conversations and transformed lives of the believers, his heart was filled to overflowing with joy and thanksgiving. Being entirely free from jealousy, he was delighted to see their thriving new church, even though he had not participated in its establishment. It is commendable when one truly rejoices in the achievements of fellow believers in the work of the Lord. How we need to be like Barnabas in this regard!

Barnabas heartily approved the work as being of the Lord. He never proposed a change in it, but he did admonish the believers to live in dependence upon Christ and in devotion to Him. He was impressed so favorably with their work and its possibilities that, instead of returning to Jerusalem to make a report, he remained there and led in launching an evangelistic campaign in which many were saved and added to the church. He promoted the work in every way possible.

It was not long until the work had grown to such proportions that additional help was necessary. Barnabas was convinced that the field required the services of the ablest man who could be found. Possessing that remarkable talent for selecting the right man for an important task, he immediately went for Saul, who had been waiting and watching for an open door of service. Upon their arrival in Antioch, he introduced Saul to his great work as the apostle to the Gentiles. Immediately they plunged into the great work of teaching those who had been saved. They had remarkable success in giving instruction to the recent converts and in building them up in the most holy faith.

Presently, the nickname "Christians" was first applied by others to the children of God in Antioch. This nickname, which meant "little Christs," was occasioned by their manner of life. In their conversations, lives and work they manifested a close relationship and likeness to Christ. When those who were unsaved heard their words or saw their actions, they were reminded of Christ. What a compliment! Would that the same were true of us!

IV. A God-called Man. Acts 13:1-3.

In this first Gentile church there immediately appeared a genuine interest in the salvation of those in the regions beyond. The members realized their

responsibility for others. While in the pathway of Christian duty, the Holy Spirit commanded them saying, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." He spoke thus because He wanted them to do pioneer missionary work among the unevangelized in distant places. Without a single complaint the church promptly complied with the expressed will of the Holy Spirit. After a most impressive service, the church sent forth their most brilliant and beloved men, Barnabas and Saul, as their own foreign missionaries. They were convinced that, inasmuch as their Christian brethren had brought the glorious gospel of Christ to them, they would carry it to the unsaved elsewhere. Their best was not too good for them to give, so they sent Barnabas and Saul, whom God used in a wonderful way.

V. A Great Man. Acts 15:36-39.

All great men are hard workers. However, they also know the importance of occasional periods for rest, relaxation, fellowship with family and friends, and a renewal of life's energies. Such a period Paul enjoyed in Antioch, though for how long we are not informed. Presently he was longing to revisit, review, and revive the churches which the Lord had enabled them to establish in those regions where they had previously ministered the Word.

When Paul proposed to Barnabas that they should go again and visit the brethren in every city where they had preached the Word of God, won men to Christ and founded churches, Barnabas was quite willing to go. He suggested that they take John Mark with them. Thinking it unwise to do so, in view of his departure during the previous journey, Paul refused to take him along. The contention between them over this matter became so heated that these two ardent missionaries decided to part company and to go their separate ways. So Paul chose Silas as his companion, while Barnabas took Mark and went in another direction. Thus God overruled this difficulty between His servants for His own glory and for the furtherance of the gospel of Christ.