

Be a 'Barnabas'  
Hebrews 3:12-15

May 4, 2014

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<sup>A</sup> Acts 4:32-37

<sup>B</sup> Acts 9:26-27, 11:22-26, 12:25, 13:2-3, 13:13, 15:36-40; 2 Timothy 4:11

<sup>C</sup> Galatians 2:11-14, 16

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<sup>D</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:2

<sup>E</sup> Romans 7:18

<sup>F</sup> Romans 15:1-2, Galatians 6:1-2

<sup>G</sup> Matthew 25:21

A. Introduction

1. Life Together

- a. in preparing my messages for you, I frequently read the sermons of others, for both my own encouragement and instruction
- b. one of the great pastor-teachers in the States over the past 35 years has been Dr John Piper, for 33 years ministering at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, and currently chancellor of Bethlehem College and Seminary; and author of over 50 books
- c. in reading his sermon this week on what is also our text, it interested me to note that he made a fair number of quotes from a book by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, especially as I had mentioned Bonhoeffer by way of illustration just a few weeks ago.
- d. Life Together, published in 1939, was the outcome of his experience in leading an underground seminary in Nazi Germany in the years preceding the war, prior to its being shut down by the Nazis. It was an exploration of faith in a Christian community of a score of students in the midst of an antagonistic world; of a society against Jesus Christ
- e. as these are very pertinent to our text today, let me repeat some of these quotations – you will note their pertinence even today ... —{2}.
- f. “The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer ... It is true, of course, that what is an unspeakable gift for the lonely individual is easily disregarded and trodden underfoot by those who have the gift every day ... Among earnest Christians in the Church today there is a growing desire to meet together with other Christians in the rest periods of their work for common life under the Word. Communal life is again being recognized by Christians today as the grace that it is, ...
- g. “If somebody asks (a Christian), Where is your salvation, your righteousness? he can never point to himself. He points to the Word of God in Jesus Christ which assures him of salvation and righteousness. He is as alert as possible to this Word. Because he daily hungers and thirsts for righteousness, he daily desires the redeeming Word ...
- h. “But God has put this Word into the mouth of men in order that it may be communicated to other men.

When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek him and find his living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of a man. Therefore, a Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. ..."

## 2. The Focus of Our Text

- a. is that as a community of believers – a local church body – we need to support and to uphold each other in order to overcome the world
- b. to that end, I would like to direct your attention for a few moments to an example in Scripture of a man who did just that ...

## B. Barnabas

### 1. Who Was He?

- a. Barnabas is introduced to us early in the book of Acts with these words: "Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet." (Acts 4:36-37)
- b. now these verses contain much more than just lies upon the surface
- c. in Acts 4:32ff, the Jerusalem church had formed a community purse so that the needs of the poorer among the congregation – and that would include a number of widows as we discover in Acts 6 – these needs could be met by the fellowship – sharing of the richer
- d. but wait; the normal Jewish practice was for the extended family and the synagogue to look after the needs of widows and poorer members – why was that not happening here?
- e. because already those who trusted in Christ – those who confessed Jesus of Nazareth to be Lord – were being excluded from family
- f. now Joseph, also called Barnabas, was a Levite of Cyprian birth
  - (A) even though he had relatives in Jerusalem, such as Mary, the mother of John Mark
  - (B) yet Judea was not his home; his home was in Cyprus

- (C) as a Levite he had no portion in the land of Canaan as it had been divided among the eleven tribes – God was to be his portion
- (D) his normal means of livelihood would be a share in the tithes that were brought into the temple and the synagogue
- (E) but he could nevertheless own land – probably land in the family around one of the Levitical cities in the land; maybe elsewhere

## 2. What Was He Like?

### a. he was faithful and generous

- (A) he sold his land, gave away the funds to support the poor
- (B) this was a greater act of faith than might at first be apparent
- (C) if Jews were being excluded from the synagogue and family, where would he make his living?

### b. the apostles had given to this Joseph, a “nickname” ... Barnabas

- (A) he is never again called Joseph in Scripture; only Barnabas
- (B) and this name was given to him because of its meaning
- (C) **'son of consolation, exhortation, encouragement, comfort'**
- (D) one of the Biblical uses of 'son' is to mean 'bearing the character'
- (E) such as Jesus, the Son of God, bears the **'character'** (Greek) of God, His **'express image'** or **'exact representation'** (Hebrews 1:3)
- (F) and Barnabas' character was that an encourager

## 3. How Was This Shown?

- a. to see how this character of Barnabas was revealed, let us recall some of the events that took place between him and Paul
- b. you will recall how that Paul was headed to Damascus to imprison Christians when the Lord appeared to him, turning his life around; after some time in Damascus, we are told, **"When he (i.e., Paul) came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he**

- had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.” (Acts 9:26-27) – Barnabas took this old enemy, now a young believer, and stood by him, introducing him into the fellowship of other Christians
- c. a few chapter later, some other Christians from Cyprus were in the city of Antioch, and began speaking the gospel to Gentiles there. “The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” (Acts 11:22-26). A new wing of the church was formed ... that of the Gentiles. Barnabas was there to encourage and exhort them in the truth, and seeing the need to be great called upon the gifts of Paul for them to work together on this. When there was a famine in Judea, it was more than natural that the Antioch church sent money with this pair to help the Judean church. “And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.” (Acts 12:25)
- d. in the next chapter, we read that the church at Antioch “While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.” (Acts 13:2-3) and thus began the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas, with John Mark. But later as they went into what is now Turkey, comes these ominous words, “Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem.” (Acts 13:13), then details the travels of Paul and Barnabas, until after some months – perhaps years – returned to Jerusalem
- e. then came a division between Paul and Barnabas: “After some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.’ Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the

brethren to the grace of the Lord.” (Acts 15:36-40)

- f. in Paul’s eyes, John Mark had disgraced himself and was unfit for the ministry; Barnabas saw hope for his cousin and stood by him.
- g. who was right? who was wrong? well, Barnabas was an encourager and we find that over time that brought much blessing to John Mark, and ultimately to Paul – even as he himself tells us
- h. when Paul was in prison, and writing to the church at Colosse as well as to Philemon, who was with him? Mark, Barnabas’ cousin.
- i. later in prison, after everybody had deserted him at his first defence, Paul wrote these words to Timothy, “Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.” (2 Timothy 4:11) – Barnabas had stood by a weak Christian and ultimately that act resulted in John Mark’s becoming strong

#### 4. Was Barnabas Ever Weak?

- a. yes, we find that Paul did have an occasion to disagree with both Peter and Barnabas – it was at a meal in the church at Antioch, it may have even been at a communion service:
- b. “But when Cephas (i.e., Peter) came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? ... nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.’” (Galatians 2:11-14, 16)
- c. Barnabas’ sympathy, his desire for accommodation of others, led him in this case to forget in doing so an important aspect of the gospel

## C. Christian Communal Responsibility

### 1. Not All Christians Are Strong

- a. "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God." (Hebrews 3:12)
- b. John Mark, when he left Paul and Barnabas on entering Pamphylia was weak: whatever the obstacles were, they were too much for him
- c. it is good to remember that just as a child, learning to walk, has to fall down and cry a number of times, so the Christian walk is a growth process – there are a lot of bumps and falls along the way
- d. sometimes a church as a whole is still like a baby; as Paul had to write "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able," (1 Corinthians 3:2)

### 2. No Christian Is Always Strong

- a. "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God." (Hebrews 3:12)
- b. the character of Peter in the gospels and the book of Acts comes across as bold and strong; a leader; and yet on a number of occasions it was in this very feature that he failed: before a maid, before a delegation from Jerusalem
- c. Barnabas, that champion of the gospel, likewise failed
- d. Paul's harsh judgement of John Mark ultimately proved unfounded
- e. for every one of us carries around with us that old, fallen nature, the flesh, of which Paul confesses in Romans 7:18, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; ..." ... so we all have ...

### 3. Shared Responsibility

- a. "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (Hebrews 3:13) – that's not a suggestion; it's a command
- b. On this verse, Pastor Peter Blundell has commented, 'We're all in this together!' and Pastor John Piper has referred to eternal security being a matter of 'individual and community vigilance ... a community project' rather than a vaccination with Christ forgotten after the inoculation

- c. so we have these further commands, "Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbour for his good, to his edification." (Romans 15:1-2)
- d. and, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:1-2)

#### 4. The Purpose

- a. "For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end," (Hebrews 3:14)
- b. there is an end coming; Christ will return
- c. and may our hope for that day be that not only of ourselves, but upon those that we have upheld, we may hear our Lord pronounce these words even upon them, 'Well done, good and faithful slave ... enter into the joy of your master.' (Matthew 25:21)

#### D. Conclusion

##### 1. The Warning

- a. the concluding verse of our text – to which we have not as yet made any reference – applies the lesson of the text to our hearts
- b. "while it is said, 'Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked me.'" (Hebrews 3:15)

##### 2. A Double Application

- a. the writer of this book of Hebrew repeats this warning a number of times in the third and fourth chapters; and it is inserted here in order to emphasise what has just been said in the prior three verses
- b. of course, it is a warning to those who may be lured away from their trust in the living God – in Jesus Christ being God revealed in human form – by the deceitfulness of sin – let us take that warning to heart
- c. but is it not also a warning to us who believe we are strong in the faith not to harden our hearts against the Christian brother or sister who has fallen away from how they once walked with Jesus in His Way?
- d. "O teach us the wayward feet to stay and guide them in the homeward way!"

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

Barnes	- <i>Notes on the New Testament, et alia</i> , by Rev Albert Barnes, Gall & Inglis, Edinburgh
BM	- <i>Biblical Museum</i> , Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
EBC	- <i>The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i> , © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan <i>Hebrews</i> , by Leon Morris
EGT	- <i>The Expositor's Greek Testament</i> , Hodder & Stoughton <i>Hebrews</i> , by Marcus Dods
Gill	- <i>Exposition of the Old Testament, Exposition of the New Testament</i> , by John Gill, D.D.
Kerux	- The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, <a href="http://www.holwick.com">www.holwick.com</a> .
NICNT	- <i>The New International Commentary on the New Testament</i> <i>The Epistle to the Hebrew</i> , by F. F. Bruce
RWP	- <i>Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament</i> , by Dr. A. T. Robertson
TYN	- <i>The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries</i> <i>Hebrews</i> , by Donald Guthrie

2. Extracts from '*Life Together*' (pp. 8-12) by Dietrich Bonhoeffer have been taken from those quoted by Pastor John Piper in his sermon on Hebrews 3:12-14, '*Helping Each Other Endure to the End*' – Kerux sermon #3569