

Acts 11:24

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[0 : 00] I want you to turn with me this morning to the scriptures and to the book of Acts.

And we will look together at various aspects surrounding the life of Barnabas. In Acts chapter 11, verse 24, we are told something very special about this man.

We are told he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. A good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.

So that's the reason this morning we are going to look at Barnabas. It's because the other day I had to sit down and write a reference for somebody.

And in the course of writing that reference, it struck me that the individual I was sending the reference for was one who responded well to encouragement.

[1 : 20] If encouragement was part of the person's experience, then that person was capable of doing many things.

Perhaps even things that others thought the person was not capable of. And it perhaps turned my mind to think about the importance of this whole issue of encouragement.

encouragement. How many of us in church this morning, I like to think all of us, respond to encouragement?

Perhaps going to work tomorrow is not something you look forward to with a lot of relish, because there's maybe difficulties at work. But how many times have you faced such difficulties at work and perhaps gone in, and instead of there being discouragement and negativity, there's been that affirming and that encouraging of you and your work, your gifts and so on.

And what seemed so difficult and perhaps so negative faded away into insignificance. As the years pass of life, I'm more and more convinced that the extension or the ministry of encouragement is absolutely paramount to each of us as God's people, to our congregations, to our work, to our witness and to our ministries.

[2 : 58] And I think it's more and more important for two reasons. Some time ago, I read a quote by Henry Drummond.

How many prodigals are kept out of the kingdom of God by the unlovely characters of those who profess to be inside it.

And when you think about that, how true that is in the experience of the life of the church. How we have, as it were, put people off.

Because we have not been as we should be to them. We've not exuded that warmth and that winsomeness, that Christ-likeness that we should.

And as a consequence, people view us as hypocrites, with the facade of a religiosity, with nothing that seems to have any real relevance or significance to them.

[4 : 12] And because that has been, from time to time, in all our lives a problem, where we have perhaps majored on things that we should not have majored on, we have, as it were, repelled people.

And I think the second reason that this ministry is important is because, by and large, we live in a world in which hope is still important.

By and large, people will respond and be positive people where they live with hope. And people may, spiritually speaking, live without God and without hope, yes.

But this aspiration in the human spirit is still real. We go to school and we study hard.

Why? Because we hope that through that study ultimately there will come a line of work or profession that we have longed to engage in.

[5 : 21] We go to university, perhaps. And we apply ourselves in the hope that at the end of the road we will graduate and we will move on into whatever sphere of work we're going.

We live our lives sometimes with the hope that somewhere along the line we will meet someone who will be the right person for us, with whom we will settle down, we will marry, we will have children, and so on.

We hope for all of these things. And when that reality of hope is taken away from people, there is the great danger that life becomes joyless, lackluster.

It becomes something of an endurance rather than an experience that's full of positive things. hope for all of these things. There is a proverb in the Scriptures, Proverbs 13 and 12, that says, Hope deferred does what?

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life. And as I think about this whole ministry or the importance of encouragement, I'm convinced that perhaps we're never more God-like or Christ-like than when we are exercising it as a ministry and witness in our lives.

[6 : 50] And it's because of that I want us to come to look at Barnabas this morning. Because he is a man that has much to teach us in this area.

His life is a very quiet life and yet it is a penetrating life. There's no other character, we might say, in the whole of the Bible, humanly speaking, who illustrates this gift of encouragement or this ministry of encouragement as Barnabas.

That is why, fittingly, in the Scriptures that we've read, he is referred to, in verse 36, as Barnabas, which means the son of encouragement.

His life was relatively quiet, we've said. His life was filled with material blessing. It's undoubtedly sure that was true of him. And yet he was, throughout this experience that marked his life, an incredibly generous man.

And a man that somewhere along the line as he came in touch with the Gospel, was so transformed that the apostles come to the place where they say, look, your name is no longer to be called Joseph because it doesn't, as it were, it doesn't capture all that you mean to us and all that you mean to the church.

[8 : 19] From now on, you're going to be called a Barnabas. And I think, when we study the life of Barnabas, we are given little pockets, that's all we're given, as to why the apostles saw this so true of Joseph, this Levite from Cyprus, to the point where they changed his name to Barnabas.

They saw qualities in him. They saw this ministry of encouragement, this gift of encouragement, so transparent in the man that they changed his name to Barnabas.

How did that come about? That's basically what we're looking at this morning. And I want us to notice the first reason for it. Because he was an encourager in verse 36 of chapter 4 in respect to his finances.

You may say that's surely a very boring thing to highlight. I think it's a very significant thing and something that stands out right at the outset in this man's experience.

The church here is young. It's assembled in Jerusalem. But in many respects, its back is still against the wall. And financially, it's strapped. There are many of these Christians in the church that have lost their livelihoods, who are in dire straits economically.

[9 : 52] And there is this great need surrounding the church in its infancy as to how it's to be met. And we're told as the Spirit of God works among them, these believers were one in heart.

No one claimed any of his possessions as his own, shared everything they had. And then introduced to us by Luke is this man, Joseph.

And we're told by Joseph, we're told by Luke what he did. He sold a field he owned and brought the money, put it at the apostle's seat in verse 37.

The experience back then is an experience we might say that is apparent even in the contemporary church. So much need so much opportunities.

How are we going to meet the need? How are we going to rise to the challenge of responsibly meeting the demands of our time? Here is part of the way that that can be met through the ministry of this encouragement.

[11 : 04] commitment. Because what this tells us about Barnabas is that he learned very early in his spiritual experience to do several things in respect to his material prosperity.

In respect to the way God had prospered him. He learned first of all to hold the material loosely. Material things are very subtle things.

Whether they're tangible or not. They're subtle in the sense that so often they can absorb our minds and our attentions and our interests. And we think of them only in respect to me and mine.

How different is the principle or the attitude that should be adopted according to God's Word to things? And here we learn from Barnabas right at the outset that he learned quickly to hold things loosely.

I think secondly he learned the principle that's taught in the Scriptures that we render to God that which is God's Jew. I think thirdly he learned quickly in his life the importance of the brethren, the importance of loving others, the importance of being kind.

[12 : 33] Maybe he learned it through the experience that was part of that church where we were told they're one in heart. No one claims that any of his possessions was his own.

And we're told that they shared amongst themselves and so on. He learned I think also the spirit of David. Because there is this occasion in David's life where he too is clearly looking at the material blessings that God has given.

And David was blessed with so many things materially. And yet in one of the Psalms there is that refrain what shall I render unto the Lord for all his gracious benefits.

And I ask you this morning by way of application do you encourage your brethren? Do you encourage your congregation? Do you encourage the denomination?

Do you encourage the church of Christ with your finances? Do you share it as it should be shared? Do you hold things loosely as they should be held?

[13 : 44] Think of the blessings that come to the giver as well as to the receiver as that ministry of sharing is a demonstration?

But then in chapter 9 you notice he was also an encourager in what we might call fellowship or friendship. In chapter 9 verses 1 and 2 we are told something of the background to the content unto the experience of Paul and subsequently the church.

We are told in verses 1 and 2 that Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest asking him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus so that if he found any there who belonged to the way whether men or women he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

Paul was at this stage in his life a real threat to the growth of the church a real threat to the stability of the church to the security of the church to the well-being of those that lifted up the name of Jesus. He was a threat because he was a violent and insolent man. He was in many respects according to his own testimony a degree of a sadist in that he almost got sadistic pleasure out of inflicting pain upon his victims.

[15 : 23] But the wonderful thing about the God that is our God and the God that we deal with is that he is a God who does not deal with us as we deserve. He is a God that came near this threat to his people who touched his life and who by his spirit transformed his life from being that threat from being that sadistic threat to becoming his son and his servant.

But you can imagine how difficult it was for Saul to endear himself to the people of God. You can imagine how every place Paul went to every community of God's people that he came near how they would have shrunk into the background because the drums would have sounded he's here he's in the street he's in the town he's coming to the synagogue they knew why he was the person he was they knew what he was about and all the rumors that were beginning to spread that Saul was now a Christian were questioned it's not possible it's not possible for such a person to experience the transforming grace of God that tells you a little about how naive they were in respect to even the grace of God and its work at this stage in their experience but along comes Barnabas and in verse 27 we're told something very very special remember Saul when he went to Damascus he tried to endear himself there they were astonished yes at what he was doing but ultimately they sought to take his life we're told he comes down to Jerusalem and perhaps the jungle drums in Jerusalem were beating louder than they were anywhere else because of his reputation they say he's a Christian it can't be yes he's preached he's preached in the name of Jesus that's an impossibility because of his track record yes it's true and then he comes to Jerusalem trying to join we're told in verse 26 the disciples and naturally what Luke tells us is that they were afraid of him not believing that he really was a disciple and then you have this beautiful cameo of

Barnabas you have it in chapter 4 in respect to his attitude to his material possessions you have it here in respect to his humanity you have it here recorded by Luke that Barnabas takes him and he brings him to the apostles and he speaks on behalf of Saul to the apostles telling them how on his journey he had seen the Lord and the Lord had spoken to him and how in Damascus he had

preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus now I don't know that I sometimes in my mind picture Barnabas here and I picture Barnabas maybe as a quiet man yes but yet very much a man and certainly when I think of Paul I think of Paul perhaps not the biggest of men but nevertheless very much a man and standing before this church in all his vulnerability along comes this quiet man I don't know whether he took his hand or not I don't know whether he put his arm around his shoulder and ushered him into the gathering it's a picture you can encourage this reported or believed persecutor of the church who is now a Christian encouraging him and exhorting him and endearing him to the wider church that is some ministry an encourager in fellowship and friendship how can you apply that to yourself this morning I think in various ways anybody at home that could do with just a little bit of your time not from a distance but closer anyone in your family circle who could do with that little bit of encouragement through hearing your voice through deceiving your letter how about in church this morning you know yourselves much better than I know you who's lonely who's trying out for someone just to befriend them who's new to Aberdeen who's coming to Aberdeen to study perhaps here for the first time away from home for the first time many of you have perhaps been here for years you know so many people it's so easy to forget the one or the two the isolated individual the lonely person the person who's far from home be a

[21 : 04] Barnabas my friend come alongside them and engage them an encourager in finance an encourager in fellowship or friendship but also notice in chapter 11 how we encouraged in respect to what we might call faith gifts the church is growing the word of God is spreading great things are happening in the church and in many respects the spirit of God is so developing the work of the kingdom of God on earth that it's outstripping the capabilities of the leadership at this time assistance is needed gifts are required and it is again a wonderful cameo of Barnabas because following the persecution surrounding

Stephen's death many spread and as they spread the word of God spread and it spread down in Antioch in a very dramatic way and so the church sent down to Antioch Barnabas he arrives and when he arrives we're told in verse 23 he sees the evidence of the grace of God and as an encourager again it's a magnificent picture as an encourager he doesn't come from Jerusalem with a wet blanket because back in Jerusalem they were skeptical that what they were hearing down happening in Antioch could be possible you better get down there Barnabas you better get down there and see that they're doing things correctly decently and in order you better get down there and check out the theology you better get down there and see that what what's been reported back up here is all true and Barnabas goes down but I pick up from verse 23 that Barnabas when he arrives seeing the evidence of the grace of God is just what

Barnabas is instinctively and transparently as a Christian man someone who's seeing the good always not the bad someone who is seeing what he should be seeing not all the other things that in many respects are not important he sees the evidence of the grace of God and he is glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts that's what a good man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith does but such a man does something else such a man sees the limitations he sees the weak spots he sees the needs and the needs are transparent here this church these people they need help they need instruction they need develop they need finding in their newfound faith and so he goes off to

Tarsus remember Saul had been sent off to Tarsus for his own good for his safety even and Barnabas never forgot where Saul went and he goes off down to Tarsus for Saul why did he go to Tarsus for Saul because he remembered the qualities of the man he had befriended the man he had introduced to the church in Jerusalem he remembered the fearlessness and the ability the eloquence of the man to preach in the name of Jesus and he detected he remembered in that man the gifts and he perceived that these gifts were gifts now that were needed down here in Antioch and he goes down and he finds him brings him back to Antioch we're told and for a whole year Barnabas and Saul for a whole year Barnabas and Saul a minister to the church there and great blessings resulted two things that I think are worth highlighting about

Barnabas there he clearly brings Saul into a situation in which he himself worked had known much blessing because we're told as a result of Barnabas ministry in Antioch and his exhortation to them to remain true to the Lord with their hearts that a great number of people were brought to the Lord in verse 24 what does that tell you about the servant's heart of Barnabas it tells you that he wasn't someone who who as it were held his position to himself I'm the main man here in Antioch Saul never forget that no it tells you something very special about the heart of Barnabas and secondly

what it tells you is that without hesitation he lets Saul take over the leadership here and I want you to notice that because in verse 11

[26 : 32] Luke's pattern of recording the interactions that take place between Barnabas and Saul is that it is always Barnabas and Saul Barnabas and Saul Barnabas and Saul but by the time you get to chapter 13 and verse 42 that pattern has changed it is Paul and Barnabas Paul and Barnabas and so on and that's the way it will remain it tells us a great deal about this man Barnabas not just about the way he encouraged through his financial capabilities not just through the way he encouraged in fellowship and in friendship but now through the way he encouraged the faith gifts of others in the church he saw the need recognizing the reality saw the gifts in this younger man and exhorted him to exercise them and use them in the church how many here need that kind of encouragement how many sit around with many gifts in

Aberdeen and they're not utilized the way they should they're perhaps not used the way they should how many of these gifts if they were if they were encouraged to be used could so add to the work and to the ministry here in this congregation you see gifts in people make sure you encourage these gifts can we look at the final one and that is found in chapter 15 where we see Barnabas as an encourager in the midst of failure Acts 15 36 to 39 the problem the problem that arises is that the second missionary journey is about to begin so many incredible things have taken place planning now is in place for the next push and Paul and Barnabas are here discussing

John Mark John Mark has been with them on the first journey but part of the way through that first missionary journey John Mark went back home to mum chapter 13 and verse 13 from Paphos Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia where John John Mark left them to return to Jerusalem it's almost like a summit missionary summit meeting Paul and Barnabas are together they're looking back over what's been the experience on the first journey what might be anticipated as they press out and onward with the gospel personnel gifts strengths weaknesses and into the frame comes John

Mark because on that first journey for whatever reason John Mark went back home you know sometimes when we read Luke's record of that we can stand very judgmental in respect to John Mark we can surmise that he was a very weak character we can surmise that well maybe what can you expect he was immature we can find a whole lot of reasons that make John Mark not a very suitable candidate to now go on a second journey whatever reason don't be too hard on John Mark Paul was Barnabas wasn't to be part of a missionary team in these early days of the church's advance was no easy mission or no easy task the days were long they were dangerous days they were hot days they were lonely days there were days when hunger was times a reality there were days when disappointment was often known

John Mark was a young man on that first journey think about how you might cope with these kind of rigors without mobile phones without internet without nice mattresses to sleep on without Mark's and Spencer's ready meals think what it would have been like and then in the light of that don't be so hard on John Mark but Paul and Barnabas are here locking horns he's not coming he is coming he's not coming he is coming and these are the reasons why he's coming and they disagreed strongly concerning John Mark because Paul saw John Mark as a failure Barnabas wanted to take John also called Mark with them but Paul did not think it wise to take him because he had deserted them in

[32 : 20] Pamphylia and not continued with them in the work so the disagreement we're told in verse 39 was sharp so sharp that this quiet almost unassuming gentleman who is so gifted and so used and so respected by the wider church parts company Barnabas we're told then very beautifully takes Mark and sails off for Cyprus I've often wondered why why did he take him to Cyprus while Cyprus was his home and I'm convinced more and more as I think about it that what was in the mind of Barnabas was that despite what might have been the impressions that Mark gave to Paul and to the others by going back home to mummy during that first journey were not the real qualities that Mark had for whatever reason he went he went failure it might have seemed and might have been deemed but the reality in Barnabas his mind was that

John Mark was a much bigger greater character than Paul was allowing him to be at the stage so he takes him home back to Cyprus sun's in the sky the sea's beautiful it's peaceful what's Barnabas doing he's allowing surely Mark at this stage time to rest time to recuperate perhaps specifically but he's also taking the time to spend with him in order to bring about a refocusing of vision in John Mark because whatever took place in Cyprus did the trick this perceived failure later by the apostle

Paul is a claim someone useful to him in the ministry even Paul who at the stage is saying no he's not coming later acknowledges that Mark is useful to him in the ministry that's a lovely cameo of someone encouraging a failure or a perceived failure my friends time's gone our churches are full of failures we ourselves in our lives are so often failures failures the

Bible is littered with failures with loss with samsons with jonahs with demases with john marks all types of characters who in one way or another from some for some reason or another blew it have you not been there yourselves where you've blown it big style how important when we blow it how important in our churches when we find them find the failures that we extend this ministry of support and encouragement that we lift them up not put them further down I want to close by reminding you of the greatest model of encouragement of all and that is the Lord himself time doesn't allow us to extend it but take your minds back into this wonderful book the

Bible that reveals to us the God who is the maker of heaven and earth this awesome God this awesome God is a God who models encouragement because he is a God that from the beginning has sought to endear us to himself in so many different ways comfort ye comfort ye my people don't scold them all the time I am a God that loves them you remember after Babylon how the spirit of the people of God were and yet Jeremiah says to them the plan of God is what for you it is to prosper you and not to harm you to give you hope and a future you think of the ministry of God through Isaiah to his people come let us reason together for your sins be as scarlet they can be as white as snow or you think of the heart of Jesus in the upper room don't let your hearts be troubled peace I leave with you my peace

I give to you I do not give it to you as the world gives it don't let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid I said at the beginning perhaps when we exercise this ministry of encouragement we are no more God like than men our God is an encouraging God let's be like him let's be like Barnabas this good man full of God's spirit and if we don't know that God this morning may you come to know him as that God who doesn't deal with you as a failure the way you deserve nor me but who is slow to anger and so rich in mercy let us pray our gracious God and loving heavenly father we bow in your precious we acknowledge that perhaps all too many times in our lives we have not demonstrated this ministry in our lives we we have not encouraged as we should help us to learn from

[38 : 29] Barnabas the place that it has in our lives supremely help us to learn from the greatest model of encouraging or of encouragement our God himself and may such a ministry as we exercise it in our congregations and community and family and wider circle be something that draws men to the Savior lifts people up and affirms them we ask it in Jesus name Amen