

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Barnabas - a model pastor: Full of the Holy Spirit, the power of the pastor

Good morning! Today we are going to continue our study of the life of Barnabas as a model pastor. But before we read the key verses that illustrate why he is such a good example, let me ask you what motivates you in life? I was reading about Cristiano Ronaldo recently and he was saying that the key spur in his life was to be better than Lionel Messi! The fear of being second best and the rivalry between the two footballers was what drove him.

This morning we will look at what, or more correctly who, drove Barnabas. Let us begin by reading together from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 11:19-26: *“Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”*

The key thought in this passage regarding the power displayed in the life of Barnabas was that he was *“full of the Holy Spirit”* (Luke 11:24). Here we have the key to the driving force in the life of any believer. You see although in this series we are looking at the characteristics of the pastor, in one sense we all have that role to play. Without doubt, Christ has called some individuals to perform this work in a very particular way, and for them it may indeed be their whole life's work. But many, if not all of us, will in some way do the work of the pastor to a limited degree. The mum, as she cares for and nurtures her children, both physically and spiritually, is a pastor to them. Christian bosses will undertake the pastoral care of their staff. So I hope you haven't already tuned out and decided that because you are not a pastor of a particular church, then this talk is not for you - it most certainly is!

Next, before we look at the life of Barnabas to learn some important lessons, we must be clear as to what does it mean to be full of the Holy Spirit and how can I be filled with the Holy Spirit? John Piper, in *“Desiring God”* gives us a helpful, concise answer to these two vital questions:

“I think being filled with the Spirit means, basically, having great joy in God. And since the Bible teaches that *“the joy of the LORD is our strength”* (Nehemiah 8:10), it also means there will be power in this joy for overcoming besetting sins and for boldness in witness. But, basically, it means radiant joy, because the Spirit who fills us is the Spirit of joy that flows between God the Father and God the Son because of the delight they have in each other. Therefore, to be filled with the Spirit means to be caught into the joy that flows among the Holy Trinity and to love God the Father and God the Son with the very love with which they love each other. And then, in answer to the second question, the way to be filled with the Spirit is by trusting that the God of hope really reigns - that not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from His will (Matthew 10:29) - and that He runs the world for you and for all who trust His word. In believing that, you will be filled with the Holy Spirit and with joy.”

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon each believer as they met in Jerusalem. Since then, every Christian has received the Holy Spirit the moment they became a Christian. Therefore, Paul could write to the believers in Ephesus, in Ephesians 5:18: *“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation: but be filled with the Spirit.”* The clear expectation for all believers is that they will be filled with the Holy Spirit. Undoubtedly there are occasions when an individual will be particularly empowered and helped in a particular act of service, but normal Christianity exists when we are full of the Holy Spirit. Anything less is missing out on God's best for our lives.

In the upper room (see John 13:1-16:33), Jesus spoke to His disciples about the promise of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:23, we read: *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.”*

Later on, Jesus said, *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. ... However, when He, the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth: for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine, and declare it to you.”* (John 16:7, 13-14)

Our responsibility and His action are beautifully mixed here. Our responsibility is to keep Jesus' word. Obedience is the key feature of the Spirit filled believer. We can be absolutely certain that careless disobedience to the word of God will result in our not being full of the Holy Spirit. His responsibility is to give us the Holy Spirit, and there is never any shortage in His giving. If we are not filled with the Holy Spirit we can be sure that it is not His fault. So when we pray, asking God to fill us with His Spirit, if by that we mean that we would have more of the Spirit then we pray amiss, but if we mean that the Spirit may have more of us, then we have hit the nail on the head!

It is challenging then to question ourselves as to whether we have this great joy in God as we realise that He runs this world, and all that happens, for His glory, as John Piper puts it. If this is not my whole hearted experience, then I need to carefully and prayerfully look at my life and see what parts of it are not really under His authority. In telling the Ephesians not to be drunk with wine, Paul was aware that an individual who filled himself with wine would be controlled by the alcohol. His words, movement and emotions would all be affected by the drink. As Christians, our words and actions and emotions and finances and thoughts, in fact all that we are, are to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit, controlled by Him and ready for His use.

Now if we have rightly understood what it means to be full of the Holy Spirit we will see evidence of this in the life of Barnabas. There are 29 references to Barnabas in the New Testament. We are going to look at some of them this morning and see the difference it made to his life in being full of the Holy Spirit. A series of 7 words beginning with the letter “F” may help us remember the characteristics of a Spirit filled life.

Philanthropic and Fortune

Philanthropic - ok I know that begins with a “P” but I hoped that you may not have noticed if I said it quickly enough, and it describes what did not hold Barnabas' attention - fortune! We first meet Barnabas in Acts 4:36-37: *“And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.”*

It has well been said that the last thing to be converted in a man is his back pocket! Barnabas was a man who had been radically changed by the Gospel. His heart was not given to money and the status that this can bring. He was quite ready to sell what he did have and give it all away. We like money because of the security that it brings. We know we can pay the bills, or can afford to retire. But for the Christian, one whose life is to be Spirit filled, that true security can only come from knowing that nothing occurs within our lives that God has not allowed for His own purposes.

We also like money because of the satisfaction that it brings. We speak about retail therapy because when we choose to spend money it makes us feel good. But that feeling soon passes - after all I don't really need yet another shirt - there are only seven days in a week, or another model kit I will never have time to complete! Lasting satisfaction comes in knowing that I have done all that God required of me today, and this can only happen when I am wholly led by the Spirit.

Today, in the affluent West, we do need to realise that money poses a real and present danger to the Spirit filled life. It may well lead to a pleasant life but we will also miss out on the best that God has for us. It is interesting that the example that Barnabas set was copied by others. In the next chapter we read about Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). However, their actions were not motivated by the Spirit's leading and it ended in tragic judgment upon them (see Acts 5:1-11). There is a world of difference in being filled by the Spirit and allowing Him complete control over the direction of one's life, and human activity that is done for selfish self-promotion.

Fearless

We next read about Barnabas in Acts 9:26-27: *“And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.”*

Understandably, the believers in Jerusalem were nervous of Saul. His Damascene conversion was all a bit too convenient (see Acts 9:1-9) and they smelled a rat! It was Barnabas who put his life on the line and met with Saul and first found out the reality of the work of God in the life of Saul. The Spirit filled believer understands that his or her life

is totally in God's hands and that their time upon earth to the second is known and measured by God. So for Barnabas there was no danger in meeting with Saul. Now, as with our money, I am not suggesting that we behave in a stupid manner. If I am ill and there is a medicine I can take to cure my illness, then it is not a mark of spirituality to say that my life is in God's hands so I don't need to take any medicine. But I do need to understand that when He calls me to serve I must go even if it appears to be a risky undertaking. The disciples were never more safe than when they were in the boat with Jesus in the middle of that ferocious storm! (See Mark 4:35-41). Jesus' time had not yet come and so the wind and the waves could cause no lasting damage. The Spirit filled life enables us to know that our times are in His hands (see Psalm 31:15), and we can live in the certain confidence that this brings.

Fruitful

We next read about Barnabas in Acts 11:19-30. It is difficult for us, after 2,000 years of church history to understand how fragile a thing the unity of the church was in those early days. The fact that there was not a Jewish church and a Gentile church was in large measure, humanly speaking, down to the pastoral care of Barnabas. We read of this incident at the beginning of our studies this morning. Barnabas was sent by the church in Jerusalem to Antioch where some Gentiles were being saved. On establishing the facts, Barnabas was able to rejoice and give encouragement to these believers. He also sought out Saul and, with him, ensured that these new believers were properly taught. This teaching was so profitable that when the believers in Antioch heard the prophetic message of Agabus, they recognised it as the word of the Lord, and immediately made a collection for the relief of the poverty afflicting the church in Jerusalem. Now who would take this money safely to those believers? None other than Barnabas, who had so proved his ability. But unlike today, when foreign travel is seen as a pleasure, long journeys in the first century were not. They were difficult and dangerous, and yet Barnabas was ready to make that journey for the good of the church, and it should be noted that in Acts 12:25 we read: *"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark."* It is important that we finish a work that we are entrusted with. We ought not to let the difficulties, problems and sometimes the boredom of routine hinder us from completing the work to which the Spirit of God directs.

Following

Acts 13:13-52 gives us details of Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey. After their visit to Pisidian Antioch, we read in the very last verse of the chapter, *"And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 13:52). In just the same way that Barnabas was living his life, so these new converts would also live their lives. In this, there is a sobering and challenging lesson for us today.

On 29 May 1953 Edmund Hillary was the first person ever to climb Mount Everest. Almost a year later, on the 6 May 1954 Roger Bannister was the first man to run a mile under four minutes. Since then, Everest has been climbed countless times and men routinely run the mile much more quickly than four minutes. Why is this? Were there really no good climbers before 1953 or fast runners before 1954? Part of the answer lies in the fact that now it is known that these things are possible, psychologically it is much easier to repeat them. It is far easier to copy someone than to be a pioneer. The believers had a ready example of what a Spirit filled Christian was - how they spoke, how they thought and how they behaved. For them it was obvious that being full of the Holy Spirit was normal because of the example that Barnabas set them. It does make me wonder whether the fact that there are so few Spirit filled Christians today is that we do not have the example of a modern day Barnabas in every church in the country! For sure there are many fine Christians, but that is not quite the same. In the 19th Century there was a real missionary pioneering spirit that led to the Gospel being spread across great stretches of the world. Perhaps today we need to rediscover the pioneering spirit of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Fame

The missionary journey of Barnabas and Paul continues in Acts 14. Eventually they arrive at a place called Lystra where, through God's help they were able to heal a lame man (Acts 14:8-10), much to the amazement of the crowds. We can read a part of the story in Acts 14:11-15: *"Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, 'The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!' And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, 'Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God.'"*

Barnabas could have made a fortune, earning for himself a reputation amongst the church as a real "big beast". Instead, being full of the Holy Spirit, he actively avoids the cult of celebrity and directs all attention to God. In a few weeks time, I am going to a Bible teaching week. I have already been told by several sources who is going to be speaking, and how fortunate I am! It really ought not to matter who is speaking so long as I hear the voice of God

speaking to me. We have chosen to follow the world's path in making much of a man's name rather than seeking the Spirit filled life.

Fervent and Friendly

In Acts 15 we read about the Jerusalem council that was convened to determine how Gentile believers were to behave. To some extent the validity of the ministry of Barnabas and Paul was on the line. But rather than become defensive and indignant, Barnabas spoke with real passion of the work that he had seen God do amongst the Gentiles and *"Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul"* (Acts 15:12). There is simply no substitute for spiritual reality in the things of God. This Spirit filled saint held the attention of all those in the room, many of whom would have had radically different views to him. In concluding the meeting, the church in Jerusalem send Barnabas and Paul back to the Gentile churches with the commendation *"...our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* or as another translation puts it *"our dear friends."* Christians who could so easily have fallen out were bound steadfast in the true unity of the Spirit. As I look at the church today and see such divisions, and attempted fudges to hold things together, I can only hang my head in shame that I am not a Barnabas, able to accomplish what he did by being like him.

Conclusion

In closing, we have seen this morning real spiritual power in the life of this model pastor. But there are a few references to Barnabas outside of the book of Acts. In Galatians 2:13 we read about him, and in this there is a warning and perhaps an encouragement: *"And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with [Peter], so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy."* Being full of the Holy Spirit is a part of normal Christianity but it may so easily be lost. There are no guarantees that having allowed the Holy Spirit full control of my life I will be immune to the problems and difficulties of life, and outright failure may result from that. Barnabas was an excellent role model for all of us but he did make mistakes. We need to remember that with God we may fail, but we are never finished. There is always the opportunity for full restoration, as once more we allow the Holy Spirit of God to take control of our lives, for the glory of the Lord Jesus.

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