

## Acts 4:32-37 - Be a Barnabas

March 07, 2010

Unless otherwise stated, all scripture references are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Let's pick up the story of Acts again. We are at chapter 4 and verse 32.

Page | 1

### Acts 4:32-37

32 Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold

35 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

36 Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,

37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

An interesting thing happened to me on a number of occasions this week at work that gave me a deeper appreciation of why we study Acts and in fact why we as believers need to live very close to the Bible.

But before I get to that, one thing that I continue to notice in the Christian book scene is how much of the material is really just the opinion of others with very little detailed Bible explanation.

I have also noticed that even the Bibles themselves, including the study bibles have reams of notes and side stories that are supposed to enhance our reading and understanding of the bible but if you are like me and get distracted by these side stories you don't end up reading much of the bible at all.

So, now back to my week at work.

Any business relies on procedures to effectively run its operations and if these procedures are out of date or not used, a secondary set of "ad hoc" procedures are developed almost on the fly as people are taught new tasks.

In my department we have had a lot of new people join recently including myself and what I have noticed and it came back to haunt us this week is that when we develop

these ad hoc procedures as people are being trained, they can actually vary quite substantially from the source document.

For us we have a number of source documents on our intranet that have become out of date - through them just not being used and as a result mistakes have been made.

And I feel that it can be a bit like this with us as believers if we don't keep returning to the source document of our lives - the bible then we can simply begin making things up and end up going astray.

And that is why I am a big fan of expository preaching and expository study and in this particular study of Acts that we are in we are continually going back to our source document but also our source of prototypical Christian experience and living.

In effect we are looking at what our spiritual ancestors believed and lived.

What we have just read in this passage is and always will be the high water mark of what a Christian community should feel, smell and look like.

- If there were those who were in need within the community of believers, then the community took it upon themselves to do whatever it could to help supply these needs and in this case it involved selling of their properties so that funds could be distributed.
- The proceeds were brought to the leaders and the leaders were responsible to ensure that it was distributed fairly.
- As a result not one of them was in need.
- They were generous with their whole lives and it moved them to make for themselves as Jesus said purses or moneybags that did not wear out or grow old through the accumulation of wealth for its own sake as he mentioned in Luke 12:33-34 where he says.

#### **Luke 12:33-34**

33 Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

How many of us have think often about our treasures in heaven?

- Our first spiritual ancestors were of one heart and soul - there was a deep felt unity of belonging to each other and to the purpose of proclaiming Jesus to the world. There was no infighting as they were together on a mission.

Toward the end of that passage we see a man by the name of Joseph who was given the name Barnabas by the apostles who comes in almost at an odd moment but a moment I believe is given to us as an example of what it means to live generously.

So what did the name Barnabas actually mean?

From the text it shows that it means son of encouragement but it could also mean son of prophecy or son of consolation.

He was a generous man in both word and deed and one I believe we can learn a lot from.

Don't you just love being around people who are positive without being plastic, encouraging without simply being flattering?

In Chapter 9 of Acts we see that after Paul's amazing conversion and we also see that now not only was he feared among Christians, but now his fellow Jews wanted him killed. But it was Barnabas who took Paul to the apostles.

#### **Acts 9:26-27**

26 And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.  
27 But **Barnabas** took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

#### **Observation 1**

Barnabas recognized God's giftedness in people and worked with God to help Paul in this instance get accepted among the apostles.

He did not look to his own interests but saw prophetically what God was doing and got he got himself behind it.

#### **Question 1**

Are we seeing what God is doing in our midst with certain people and in the world at large and getting behind these things or people is our Christian experience a purely individual affair?

From here we see these two working together as Barnabas and Saul

#### **Acts 13:1-3**

1 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

### Observation 2

At this stage it was Barnabas and Saul who were working together. Barnabas taking the lead in the team as the younger Saul began to mature as an apostle.

### Question 2

Are we prepared to work together in teams of two or more and take the lead when we have the experience, background and calling to help those who are coming up behind us?

Or are we content to let someone else always do the work?

Through chapter 13 we see Saul now being called Paul and is beginning to be used by God in a greater way and toward the end of this chapter we see the leadership of the team changes in that it now becomes Paul and Barnabas.

### Acts 13:46-47

46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

47 For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

### Observation 3

This change in name priority is not a one off. From this point on Paul and Barnabas become the norm. So, what happened was Barnabas demoted? I don't believe so. I believe that God was using Barnabas in the formation of Paul's early Christian life and that this was a natural progression of leadership changing hands.

### Question 3

To me a good leader is also a good follower. Can you work equally as well when you are leading a team as well as when you are being led in a team?

So from here we see Paul and Barnabas working closely together as they preach the gospel and get churches started.

And in Acts 15 we see Paul as leader wanting to go back and visit the churches where they preached the gospel to see how they are doing, Barnabas wanted to take his cousin John Mark along with them, but Paul was not pleased with this decision based on an earlier decision of Mark's to withdraw from the work at Pamphylia.

And the scriptures say that a sharp disagreement between the two occurred:

**Acts 15:36-41**

36 And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."

37 Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark.

38 But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

39 And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus,

40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.

41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Now after this disagreement we don't hear of Barnabas any longer, but the story doesn't end here.

It's at this point that I have heard some say that because of Barnabas's decision to go with his cousin Mark and not stick with Paul that he lost some of that leadership mantle and a result slipped into the background.

But I personally don't believe this. Even though they had a disagreement it doesn't mean that they were still not brothers and did not care for God's work.

What I believe and what a number of commentators also say is that while Paul was focused on the work, Barnabas was focused on the man.

In Colossians 4:10 we see that Mark is restored to Paul.

**Colossians 4:10**

Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions-if he comes to you, welcome him),

#### **Observation 4**

While Mark was Barnabas's cousin and there would no doubt was this family connection that would have tugged on his heart strings to help him out, I believe he was true to his nickname and was wanting to be an encouragement to Mark in the same way he was a supporter and encouragement to Paul.

#### **Question 4**

Are we like Barnabas and willing to be an encouragement to people who may appear to have given up on the things of God?

#### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I want to encourage each of us to be a Barnabas. Be an encourager who gets behind what God is doing in advancing his Kingdom and developing his people.

Be a Barnabas who exemplified the passion and encouragement that made up this deep felt commitment that these early believers had toward each other and should set us apart also.

Be a Barnabas also had an eye for the prophetic to see where God was moving and to get behind what God was doing with his people.

Be a Barnabas in being prepared to lead others and to be led by others.

Be a Barnabas who was also a man that was prepared to stand by his convictions and to work in the maturing process of both Paul and his cousin John Mark.

I am convinced that this church and the church at large needs plenty of these Barnabas types who are full of encouragement and generosity both in word and deed.