

Minor Festivals: St. Barnabas, Apostle, June 11

The Son of Encouragement

There was a Jew who lived on the island of Cyprus. His name was Joseph. He was from the tribe of Levi. The Levites were set apart by God to teach the people God's Word and to assist in the worship and sacrifices that were offered up at the Temple. After Jesus had gloriously ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty, Joseph went to Jerusalem—perhaps to carry out his Levitical duties at the Temple. He came into contact with the Christians in the Holy City and, through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God the Holy Spirit worked faith in his heart. He rejoiced that the ultimate sacrifice for all sins had been offered up on the altar of the cross. The victim of that sacrifice was our perfect Savior, Jesus Christ, who toppled death's control and shattered the devil's authority through his gruesome death. Three days later the heavenly Father certified Jesus as our King of kings and Lord of lords by raising him from the dead.

Out of love and gratitude for the Savior, Joseph wanted to give an offering to the Lord. So what did he do? He sold a field and presented the proceeds as a gift to be employed in Christ's kingdom work. He remained in Jerusalem for over a decade, sharing the encouraging Word with all who would listen. The apostles nicknamed Joseph "Barnabas," which means "Son of Encouragement."

Meanwhile, some Christians from the island of Cyprus went up north to Antioch in Syria. They began to share the Gospel with the Greek-speaking community. When the church in Jerusalem heard about this, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he saw how the Holy Spirit was working in the hearts of Jews and Gentiles alike, he was glad, and he did what he was known for—he encouraged them to remain faithful to the Lord with all their hearts.

Seeing how the Lord was blessing the Gospel work in Antioch, Barnabas came to realize that he needed help. So, he went to Tarsus and brought Saul (who became known as the apostle Paul) back to Antioch. For an entire year they diligently labored, teaching great numbers of people. It was in Antioch of Syria that disciples of Jesus were first called Christians.

Antioch served as the launch pad for the apostle Paul's missionary journeys. On his first missionary tour, Paul was accompanied by Barnabas and John Mark. Barnabas and John Mark were cousins. Half way through their trip, John Mark abandoned them and went back to Jerusalem, while Paul and Barnabas traveled throughout Asia Minor. Through their gospel work, the Holy Spirit established a number of congregations. They encouraged these early believers, saying, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."

When it was time for them to go on their next missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take John Mark along. Paul didn't think that would be a good idea because he had deserted them on their previous trip. They had such a sharp disagreement about this that they decided to part ways. Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus, and Paul went back through Asia Minor.

Barnabas, the "Son of Encouragement," refused to give up on his cousin John Mark. Because of his decision to stand up for Mark, the Gospel was carried to more places. Over a decade later, we find Mark in Rome by the apostle Paul's side, who was under arrest because of his testimony about Christ. Paul was released and was able to carry the Gospel to a number of different places before he was arrested for the last time. As Paul languished in prison facing the death penalty, he longed for Mark's companionship. He wrote to his friend, "Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry." Mark went on to write the divinely inspired account of Jesus' saving work—the Gospel of St. Mark. He went from deserter to helper to evangelist (Gospel-writer)—in part because of Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement. June 11 is the Festival of St. Barnabas, Apostle. Although we don't hear about Barnabas all that much, we can learn much from him. Like Barnabas, out of love for Jesus we will want to employ a portion of our wealth in Christ's kingdom work. Like Barnabas, we will want to encourage others with the Spirit-filled Word of God. Like Barnabas, rather than "cutting bait" on those who have let us down, we will want to encourage them and spur them on to love and good deeds. May God grant that each of us be a "Barnabas," a "Son of Encouragement."

After sharing this devotion with your family, take the time to read Acts 4:36-5:11.

Pastor Zuberbier