

June 27, 2021

Making a Difference

God's word is full of stories about the major heroes of faith that all of us have heard about and studied for years. As believers we realize the importance of Abraham and Moses; David and Solomon; and Peter and Paul. There are, however, among those heroes of faith that we all recognize, many whom we might overlook, but whose role in furthering God's plan is still very important. These are the faithful who, while they have played a less-important role themselves, still made the works of others possible.

Among these 'lesser known' heroes has to be the one the Apostles called the "**Son of Encouragement**". We are first introduced to Joseph in Acts 4:32-37. Luke tells us that he was a Levite from Cyprus who had already gained the nickname Barnabas, from the Apostles. The fact that Joseph had already earned this designation tells us that his story started well before these verses. Biblically, his story begins when he sells a field and donates the proceeds to the Apostles.

After the conversion of Saul at Damascus the future Apostle arrives in Jerusalem and attempts to join the disciples, but they were understandably afraid of him. (Acts 9:26) In his character as the "**Son of Encouragement**" it is Barnabas who finds Paul and brings him to the Apostles. When Paul's life is threatened the believers in Jerusalem send him off to Tarsus where he remains.

When next we read about Barnabas he is being sent to Antioch by the Apostles remaining in Jerusalem to support efforts there to evangelize the Gentiles. After arriving in Antioch and seeing the amount of work to be done Barnabas travels to Tarsus to bring Saul, who would become the Apostle

Paul, to work with him. The two of them spent a year preaching and teaching in Antioch and a great number of people believed. This seemingly small effort by Barnabas was the beginning of Paul's great ministry.

In the roll of those who labored in the work in Antioch after that year Barnabas is listed first while Paul is listed last. It is interesting, I think, that the Holy Spirit called on the believers to "**Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.**" It is clear at this point in time that both the believers in Antioch and the Holy Spirit considered Barnabas the driving force while Paul played a less significant role.

Within just a short time as the two set out on their first missionary journey, a few weeks at most, the two have switched roles with Paul leading the way and Barnabas in support. We are left to wonder how Barnabas may have reacted to this change in the team dynamic as Scripture doesn't really give us any insight.

Following the Jerusalem Conference we read about in Acts 15 Paul and Barnabas determine to set out on a second mission. Sadly, they fell out over Barnabas' desire to bring John Mark with them and Paul's unwillingness to give the young man a second chance. Eventually the disagreement became so strong between them that they chose to go their separate ways and to pursue separate missions. After these events Barnabas drops out of the Biblical account of the early church, but his influence most certainly continued especially through the lives of the Apostle Paul and John Mark, the author of the first gospel.

While we might think that Barnabas played only a small role in the spread of the Gospel in the first century, his influence extended well beyond his story. The "**Son of Encouragement**" made

it possible for both Paul and John Mark to overcome their past failures and to fulfill important roles in the early church. It would be easy, I think, for many of us to see our role in the work of the church as small and unimportant. However, when we encourage those within our circle of influence to reach their potential we are, like Barnabas, playing a significant part in God's complex plan.

