

BARNABAS ... who loved helping converts  
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(ACTS 9:27; 11:25)

"And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is, being interpreted, the son of consolation), a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:36, 37). Splendid! Few men had such a glorious introduction to the sacred record. Barnabas had a great passion -he loved helping people. He was gifted at pouring oil on troubled waters. His soothing words of comfort were to many the balm of Gilead.

#### The Man and His Virtue

Happy indeed is that man of whom history says, "For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit, and of faith . . ." (11:24). When this new member was added to the Church, the fellowship became immeasurably richer. Yet Barnabas never became prominent until the persecutor, Saul of Tarsus, tried to associate with the apostles. He who had easy access to the highest courts in Israel, was barred from the Christian community, because ". . . they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple" (9:26). Perhaps the young convert was a little disheartened: " But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken unto him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus " (v. 27). It is easy to imagine that when Barnabas heard of Saul's embarrassment, he sought him, sat with him to hear his story, and then pouring consolation into the wounded soul of the young man, took him to the leaders of the Church. Well done, Barnabas! You were a genius!

#### The Man and His Vision

Probably they became friends, and Barnabas was a little sad when Saul was sent home to Tarsus (v. 30). However, the convert was in danger, and " prevention was better than cure." There is reason to believe they never saw each other for three years (Gal. I : 18). During all this time, Saul was being instructed by God in what he afterward called " my Gospel." Then came the revival in Antioch, necessitating help from the parent Church. Young people needed guidance, persecuted converts needed comfort; and when these facts were brought before the apostles, ". . . they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord " (I I : 22, 23). Surrounded by these young Christians, and probably feeling unequal to the demands being made upon him, Barnabas thought of his friend Saul of Tarsus. " Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch . . . (vv. 25, 26). Barnabas was never as good a speaker as Saul (I 4: 12) but his influence on the man of fire was invaluable. Truly he was "the son of consolation," and his untiring companionship increased immeasurably the power of his friend's ministry. And while Barnabas helped the one convert, he cherished ambitions of finding another of his type; so after a little discussion, " Barnabas and Saul . . . took with them John, whose surname was Mark " (12:25). Well done, Barnabas.

#### The Man and His Vacillation

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Alas, John Mark failed, and thereafter storm clouds loomed in the sky of the two missionary pioneers. At a later stage they quarrelled, "And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God" (15:39-40). It would be easy to blame this unfortunate quarrel on the unrelenting Paul; but this was only the climax of something which had been going on for months. Poor Barnabas had been slipping. Even Peter momentarily lapsed when arrogant Jewish teachers proclaimed the supremacy of the law. The church had been divided; and following Peter's example " . . . the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation" (Gal. 2: 11-13). Coming events cast their shadows before. Barnabas, alas, had taken his eyes from the Master. But at least Barnabas was consistent. He came into the Bible story helping a young convert called Saul; he went out of the same story trying to help another young convert called John Mark. Happy is the man who lives to help others. See Bible Treasures, 129; Bible Cameos, 157.

The Negro Minister . . . Who Came Up From The Depth

The Tent Hall, Glasgow, was packed with over two thousand people, and their enthusiastic singing rang through the famous old building as they waited for the "Saturday at Seven" meeting to begin. Soon, I would be required to preach again, and sitting quietly in the superintendent's room, I prepared for the moment when I would stand before the large audience. Then the door slowly opened and an usher said, "Mr. Powell, here is a brother who wants to see you." He stood aside to permit the entry of a negro. The visitor seemed shy; I think he was a little conscious of his color, for the room was filled with Europeans. He was very smart, but apparently nervous as he looked for "the man from Wales." His collar silently announced the fact that he had been ordained to preach the Gospel. Suddenly he saw me, and immediately his face beamed. "Ah, Mr. Powell, it is wonderful to see you. Do you remember me?" I smiled and admitted that I could not recollect ever having met him. I blamed my poor memory, and admitted that I should have known him instantly: but perhaps I was getting old! "Mr. Powell, do you remember coming to preach at a Sunday evening service in British Honduras House in Edinburgh?" I stared-it was quite impossible. "Ah, sir, you do remember. I can see you do. Mr Powell, I was one of those whom you led to the Saviour."

Fourteen years earlier, I had accepted the invitation of the Rev. David Laurie to conduct a crusade in Carrubber's Close Mission, Edinburgh, and it was at the close of one of the meetings that a married couple came forward to ask a favor. "Sir, we know you are very busy, but we are wondering if you can help us. We are trying so hard to hold meetings in British Honduras House, but sometimes we get discouraged. Mr. Powell, the building has been set aside for the use of the colored soldiers, but the place is overrun by prostitutes. To go into the place is like going into hell. They do not really want us; they merely tolerate us because of certain amenities which come their way. We have a service each Sunday evening, and we would love you to come and speak to these young people."

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I looked at my audience, and discarded my prepared sermon. This was no place for homiletics. The soldiers were tall, and extremely tough. The white girls did not enhance the virtues of their sex. During the opening hymns the audience giggled; the girls were playing up to their overseas friends, the boys were rolling their big eyes. The man whose invitation I had accepted, announced that a visitor had come to address the meeting, and instantly all eyes were focused on me. I have long since forgotten the details of that strange address; I know only that I spoke of sin, of the evil consequences of forgetting God, and of the joy I found when I surrendered my life to Christ. At first it was extremely difficult to interest the listeners, but after a while even the unfortunate girls became respectful. When I gave the invitation to yield to the Lord Jesus, several of the soldiers responded, and with them came one young lady whose speech suggested she belonged to a good home. I explained how they could become Christians, and then returned to the manse in which I was staying.

"Yes, sir, I was one of those whom you led to Jesus. The gentleman and his wife held on to me, and taught me many things about the Bible. I grew in grace, and eventually was able to go to the divinity school. Quite recently I graduated and was ordained, and in August I am returning to British Honduras to become a missionary to my own people. When I heard you were coming to Glasgow I was so happy, because I wanted to see once again the man who led me to Christ."

"It's seven o'clock, Mr. Powell. It's time to be on our way." When I gripped my brother's hand and whispered, "God bless you," my heart was full. Then two elderly people came forward to say, "Mr. Powell, we would like to shake hands also." I hardly knew what to say, for these were the wonderful couple who had invited me to speak at the memorable meeting. They were very much like Barnabas of old, for they found their greatest happiness in helping converts. I have since wondered what would have happened to the negro Christian if they had failed to do their duty.

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