

Life-Link

Topic: Spiritual Attitude 2: Barnabas vs Barabbas

Life- Link Study #42

Introduction

“There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need. For instance, there was Joseph, the one the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (which means “Son of Encouragement”). He was from the tribe of Levi and came from the island of Cyprus. He sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles.” (Acts 4:34-37)

Spiritual attitude, (whether keen or callous) has a way of separating the boys from the men. This attitude is what signifies whether or not someone is considered a man after God’s heart (King David) or a spiritual rebel (King Saul); an heir or an outsider. As in the case of Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus whose real name was Joseph which means “may God give increase,” the apostles nicknamed him Barnabas which means “*Son of Encouragement*”. This nickname did not come by lightly; it was a summary of his character and reputation. Barnabas was a giver and would do so to see the kingdom of God grow, and see people happy. He had a heart for people and would rather see the best in people, recognize their potential and empower them. He was the first to receive Paul (when he received Jesus), brought him in and vouched for him, even when other Apostles were suspicious and fearful of Paul (having been a massive critic and persecutor of Christians). This same Barnabas went to search for Paul and brought him to Antioch when the Grecian Jews tried to kill him after he debated with them (Acts 9:26-31). For a year Barnabas and Saul ministers together and taught great numbers of people (Acts 11:22-30). The Bible shows that Barnabas had strongly supported and encouraged Paul and John Mark (at a later time) to help them enter into ministry.

A completely different type of person and character was Barabbas who was a rebel, murderer and a thief (Matt 27:16, Mk15:7, Lk 23:25, Jn 18:40). He led a riot and got arrested. Sentenced to die, he was set free by governor Pilate who presented Barabbas and Jesus for the crowd to choose who was to be released. The angry crowd chose Barabbas for release. Although he was already sentenced, he knew his release would mean the sentence of Jesus.

The Barabbas spirit signifies those who rebel against authorities causing disunity and confusion in the community. Barabbas breaks the law, with a tendency to create uproar or upset things and kill the zeal of others. They do not feel happy if there is peace and quiet. Even when everything seems to be going well, they tend to disrupt the spirit of the moment and cause strife. They whine, complain and criticize anything. The Barabbases are not fun to deal with, they drain our energy.

Q1: Considering the opening scripture, discuss why was Joseph nicknamed “son of encouragement?” What does it mean to be a Barnabas?

Q2: What kind of attitude is required to be a Barnabas or Barabbas.

Q3: How can the spirit and influence of Barnabas be cultivated and encouraged?

Should we imitate Barnabas who strengthens, generous in building God’s kingdom, encourage, build up others while pointing them to Jesus, or be like Barabbas who discourage people, has a critical spirit, taking the place of Jesus in the heart God’s people. Like Barnabas, we can practice this ministry of encouragement in the church without trying to be the centre of attention. By speaking words of life instead of death or criticism we release the potential in people. The Barnabas spirit informs, enlightens and builds up the church. The Barnabas ministry is an excellent ministry.

Prayer

Lord, help me become an influence to build and empower my community with the message of hope, faith and peace in Jesus name. Let the light of your word shine through me. Amen