

# **“THE WITNESS OF A BODY-BUILDER”**

**Acts 11:19-30**

**Sermon for Peace Church**

**Sept. 21, 2008**

**PURPOSE** – to commit to the example of Barnabas as someone who built the body of Christ.

**MAIN IDEA** – Barnabas built the body through his vision of the grace of God, his words of encouragement, his teaming with others in their gifting.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Let's turn in our Bible to Acts 11.

We've been making our way through this Bible book since the beginning of the year – gaining visions of a Spirit-empowered church – who it is, what it does. I have 2 more messages left – to take us through to the end of ch. 12 – which is a natural point to break from it.

In October, we'll shift to a new series “What Love Is Like” – from 1 Cor. 13 – seeking to know God's love and live it out in our lives – developing ourselves relationally.

“What love is like” will take us through Oct / November. December, we'll head into an Advent series. So that's where we're headed for the rest of the calendar year.

2. Today's passage, beginning in Acts 11:19, presents to us a person not unlike our brother, James. I've titled this message, “The Witness of a Body-Builder”.

- Which, in James' case, has 2 meanings:

(i) I've learned when getting in touch with James, never to call 10:00-10:45 ... = workout!

(ii) But in his case, as I pray with all of us, that's not the only way he body-builds ... there's another body we're part of – THE BODY OF CHRIST.

Let's read of someone doing that kind of body-building:

*READ ACTS 11:19-30*

## II. BARNABAS

1. BARNABAS – v. 24 – *“A good man – full of the Holy Spirit & faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.”*

= a body-builder

(i) Barnabas was actually his nickname. His real name was “JOSEPH” – but because he was such an ENCOURAGING presence to believers, he got nicknamed (Acts 4) BAR (Son of) NABAS – “Encouragement”

= the Son of Encouragement ... a BODY-BUILDER

A. Let’s be encouraged BY HIM this morning.

a. Bible says, *“He who walks with the wise becomes wise” (Pr. 13:20)* – let’s walk with him this morning!

b. Heb. 13:7 – *“Remember your leaders (like Barnabas), those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life and imitate their faith.*

People lead people.

2. Verse 24 - He’s a GOOD MAN, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.

To be clear, he’s not full of the Spirit because he’s good. You don’t get the Spirit because you’re good. It’s just the opposite. He’s good because he’s full of the Spirit.

You get the Holy Spirit through the knowledge & love of Jesus Christ. When such faith lives in you, the Spirit dwells in you, He makes you good!

... The fruit of the Spirit ... is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness ... GOODNESS!

(i) Goodness is a FRUIT of knowing Jesus thoroughly and walking with Him INTIMATELY.

3. For example, in that goodness Barnabas’ SIGNATURE GIFT is his ACCEPTANCE of OUTSIDERS! He has a heart for outsiders / ability.

(i) Back in ch. 9, you remember after Saul had just been converted – goes to Jerusalem to meet some Christians – they’re afraid of him because he was their former persecutor ... BARNABAS reaches out / Barnabas ACCEPTS this outsider. He steps out. He takes a risk. He accepts.

- Here in our passage, he’s sent to bring in GENTILE converts

- Later, he brings the outsider John Mark back into missionary service – after he had wimped out on an earlier trip and Paul decided to dump him. Barnabas doesn't give up on him.

A. Where does that goodness come from? Where do we gain the ability to reach out to those who are different, who have failed, who maybe even have been your enemy?

HE'S GOOD – because he's full of the Spirit & faith ... He's good because he HIMSELF knows the WONDER of being accepted into God's fellowship through Jesus Christ.

He knows that he was an enemy to God – in his sin (heart)

He knows that he was an alien to God – but, in Jesus, God reached out to him

He knows that he had failed God / wimped out in love ... but now forgiven in Christ & accepted.

Such FAITH fills Him with the Spirit & makes him GOOD. It's INSIDE OUT goodness.

And, if we aspire to such goodness ourselves, we start there:

WHO DO WE REALLY BELIEVE GOD IS?

Our lives / risks / bridges / reveal that understanding (Mt. 25)

Being a body-builder starts with knowing salvation in Jesus, being filled with the Spirit, whose fruit is GOODNESS ... expressed in ways like these:

Let's note what Barnabas sees, says, does in body-building:

### III. HOW

1. Verse 23 – When he got up to Antioch from Jerusalem, *HE SAW THE GRACE OF GOD AND WAS GLAD!*

Being a body-builder involves SEEING THE GRACE OF GOD.

*The eye is the lamp of the body – Mt. 6:22 – if your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. If your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. = you are what you see!*

(i) Now this was certainly not a perfect church that he was going to check out! FAR FROM IT!

These were NEW, GENTILE believers.

They were from outside the moral influence of God's covenant. Gentiles wouldn't be able to recite the 10 commandments. They wouldn't be Sabbath keepers or clean-livers. More likely, they were bikers and street-kids.

= PLENTY OF IMPERFECTION TO SEE

A. But Barnabas looked through that – to see God's grace at work

- A softening here, a joy there, a service, a tear, a trust, a hug, a recovery, a hope, a remorse, a prayer, a conviction

(ii) It's impossible to be a body-builder if all you do is see the shortcomings of this and that person! It's impossible to be a body-builder if all you can see are the imperfections of your church. Sure, there's plenty of that to look at.

A body-builder looks for evidence of the grace of God – an opportunity, a potential, a turning. There are times when it may not be in abundance to see. Ask God's help.

(iii) SEEING THE GRACE OF GOD ... Did you hear this week that Forbes magazine ranked Chicago the most stressful city in the United States in which to live?

(Yea, tell me something new! Cf. Sun-Times newspaper headline) – Gas prices, population density, air quality, unemployment rates, ... FLOOD, Wall Street woes, politics!

A. We better get good at seeing evidence of the grace of God in our lives ... or we're going to EXPLODE!

Where's love? Where's joy? peace? Where are you loved?

B. Remember, Barnabas was GOOD because he was full of the Spirit & faith.

He would have been good at seeing signs of God's grace in his own life.

= a strength in temptation / an unexpected kind word / a meaningful connection with a family member / a spiritual healing / a word of truth deep in your spirit.

God does not treat us as our sins deserve.

As we learn to see grace in our own life, we can see it in others – and be body-builders

2. Second, Barnabas built the body by what he said.

Verse 23 – *He encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.*

OTHER TRANSLATIONS OF HIS WORDS:

- *With purpose of heart, cleave to the Lord*
- *Stay with it the rest of your lives*
- *Hold fast to the Lord with a resolute heart*

(i) That's not too hard to say to one another, is it? As we go through low times – “hey, stay true”. When in high times: “Stay faithful to the Lord”. Good & bad, temptations come – “stay true”.

= That's BODY-BUILDING

(ii) Barnabas might have referenced those Jewish believers living in Antioch who had shared Jesus with these Gentiles. Talk about staying true!

They had been scattered abroad by persecution. They had to leave their homes; the area they grew up in – for fear of imprisonment & even death. They had to start up whole new lives. They could have been down-in-the mouth. They weren't.

They were sharing Jesus – the joy of life!

A. The persecuted had become PREACHERS ... *“Stay faithful to the Lord with resolute heart”*

(iii) Ray Stedman comments: *Barnabas did not say to these new believers, ‘Look, you’ve started out in the Christian life, but there’s so much more that you haven’t yet received. No! He said, ‘You’ve received the Lord! You have received therefore ALL that he is ever going to give you once you’ve received him. You have all there is. There is nothing more for God to give you. Yes, you’ve not yet laid hold of it all. Through the years, you need to develop your faith. But there is nothing now to be added. IT IS ALL THERE when you have received Jesus Christ!’*

– 2 Peter 1:3 – His divine power has given us all that pertains to life and godliness ... so remain faithful! - *“Stay true to WHO you have.”*

### 3. THIRD, Barnabas body-built by finding a TEAMMATE.

Verse 25 – *Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch.*

#### WE DO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE TOGETHER TO BE BODY BUILDERS

(i) Elder Larry and I were at a Classis meeting this past Wednesday (@ Trinity CC – 3 Classes). They brought in a special speaker for the day – a CRC pastor whose starting a cluster of churches in Seattle – Randy Rowland – excellent.

He talked about church leaders as FIRE-STARTERS ... Holy Spirit- fires (like the one that burst out in Antioch).

Then he went on to talk about how to build a good fire – oxygen & combustion, the pieces of wood needs to be in relationship – pull it apart, out it goes QUICKLY!

(ii) Body builders find teammates to do their life in Jesus together.

“That’s discipleship”, Rowland reminded us. “Not committees, not learning the catechism. Yes, theology can contribute to discipleship, but discipleship is following Jesus – discerning his next steps for you in life & having the courage to take them. It’s not settling into a lifestyle.”

#### A. We do that together in the Christian life

= sharing with teammates successes & failures in being Jesus-follower – joys & concerns. Helping each other understand Jesus’ leading ... Encouraging each other to keep at it.

- If we don’t, we’re like the log pulled from the fire. Embers fade!

For most of us we’re WAY TOO ISOLATED at that level of our Christian life.

Satan loves this. He chews us up in discouragement!

(iii) Barnabas went & got a partner

Who are your partners in the Christian life? Who are you sharing your challenges with? Whose cheering you on? Whose praying for you at your places of need?

#### A. Barnabas went and got SAUL!

It had been 10 years since Saul met Jesus on the Road to Damascus. Barnabas realizes that now is the time, Antioch the place to join in ministry.

Undoubtedly he also had in mind Saul's gifts as a Bible scholar. Saul was highly educated in Scripture. These Gentiles would have had no background in Scripture. Saul could teach them Jesus from the Old Testament.

Barnabas too could train Saul as a pastor and missionary. Body-building, he's releasing gifts.

They become great friends – eventually doing mission trips together!

#### BARNABAS WAS A BODY BUILDER by FINDING TEAMMATES!

How are you doing at this?

We're going to ask you to become more relational in your faith in this year ahead. – to grow this way. You have faith to share with others – you have questions to ask with others; you have challenges to tackle with others; you have victories that OTHERS need to find joy in.

TO BE BODY BUILDERS WE FIND TEAMMATES.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

1. Having so blessed the body of Jesus in Antioch, here's what Barnabas GAINS – THEIR TRUST. They love him.

When they need to pass an offering on to needy Christians in Jerusalem, they give the money to Barnabas & Saul (v. 30). They trust them.

That's what Barnabas gains.

2. Here's what the believers at Antioch gain: A NEW NAME!

Verse 26 – *The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*

“Christian” – a Latin term denoting those belonging to / IN CHRIST

IN HIM (Bible) we die to sin / we rise to new life / we live to the glory of God

IN HIM we are a body, of which Jesus is the HEAD

Day by day, the world urges us to look after our body – with diets, exercise and nutrition.

Today, through the example of Barnabas, the Scripture today reminds us to look after THIS body - with EYES that see the grace of God, Words that encourage faithfulness, acts that find teammates for the cause.

May God so help us. AMEN.