

Sermon Notes: June 11, 2023

Focus: Barnabas

[Lectionary Readings](#)

Barnabas aka Joseph Barnabas was a New Testament minor player. Despite limited historical records, we do know he was a significant evangelist in the years right after Jesus' death.

Early Life:

Barnabas was born into a Jewish family in the Levite tribe on the island of Cyprus, in the first century AD. He was given the name Joseph at birth but became better known by his nickname, Barnabas, meaning "son of encouragement" or "son of consolation." Little is known about his early life before he shows up in the New Testament.

Conversion to Christianity:

In the last days of Jesus' life OR right after Jesus' death, Barnabas was moved to dedicate his life to Jesus and encourage others to do that same. Don't expect journalistic details about him; they don't exist. Furthermore, and this may sound wrong to you, we know more firsthand information about the Apostle Paul than we do biographical details about Jesus. Disagree? That's fine, let's chat. You might be right, change my mind. According to the Book of Acts, Barnabas was one of the people who sold their possessions and gave the proceeds to the apostles for the early church (Acts 4:36-37).

Role in the Early Church:

Barnabas played a crucial role in establishing trust among the believers. He is best known as a mediator and peacemaker. Many Churches either name themselves after him explicitly: St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church or less explicitly (and more non-denominationally) "Encourager Church." Barnabas vouched for Paul's conversion and helped him gain acceptance among the disciples (Acts 9:26-30). We likely would not have Paul moving freely in early Christianity without Barnabas.

Missionary Journeys with Paul:

Barnabas is best known for his partnership with the apostle Paul in missionary work. They embarked on several journeys together. Their first significant missionary journey took place around 46-48 AD. They traveled to Cyprus, Barnabas' homeland, and then ventured to cities in modern-day Turkey,

including Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. During their journeys, they faced persecution, opposition, and experienced miracles and conversions (Acts 13-14).

Paul:

Despite their successful partnership, Barnabas and Paul had a later disagreement regarding the inclusion of John Mark, Barnabas' cousin, on their second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-41). Barnabas wanted to give Mark another chance after he had let them down on their previous journey. However, Paul disagreed, so they split. Barnabas went on to Cyprus with Mark, while Paul chose Silas as his new companion. (In my opinion, Paul would be really hard to work with).

Later Ministry and Tradition:

Following his separation from Paul, little is known about Barnabas. Early Christian traditions suggest that Barnabas continued his missionary work, particularly in Cyprus and other regions. Some traditions claim that he became the Bishop of Milan or Alexandria, while others associate him with the authorship of the Epistle of Barnabas, a letter attributed to him but not included in the New Testament canon. Much of what is described as his backstory is fuzzy, and I am not sure we can rest our conviction about real events based on hagiography (stories of the saints).

Death:

According to one pious tradition, he was martyred in Cyprus, while others claim he died a natural death.

Conclusion:

Barnabas is a big deal as a model of compassion for the church. He is an example of how to engage the world with a deft hand. May his encouraging spirit encourage us.

Todd

