

*This sermon was told in narrative form. Please read as if Barnabas was speaking to you.*

My name is Barnabas. Actually, I'm Joseph by birth, from Cyprus, a Levite. But my friends renamed me. It was common at that time. When you became a disciple of someone you were mentored. You would change. That was the whole idea. You spent hours following them, listening to them teach, learning their philosophy, becoming like them.

I'm an apostle of Jesus Christ. I'm proud to say that. I'm not one of the twelve of course – but Jesus had many disciples who were equally as devoted. There's you, for instance. In my century we would say you are His apostles. You know Him. I can see it in your countenance. You are expectant; reading about Him, wanting to learn, waiting for answers to prayer, knowing that Jesus lives. You are the ones He sends to tell others about Him. That's what being an apostle means. So you are apostles.

Well, it took me awhile to get there. My cousin, John Mark, was around Jesus a little more. He lived close. I lived a long way away, but my family went to Jerusalem each year. Being a Levite, celebrating the festivals was very important to us. We didn't serve in the temple; not all Levites did that. I was a working man.

I heard about Jesus from John Mark. He told me all about the night in the garden – that's the night everyone deserted Jesus. But when He came back from the dead, it was incredible. It all made sense. All of a sudden we understood the Scriptures. You know how it is to strive to understand the Bible, don't you? I suppose it's hard for you too. Sometimes you just can't imagine that it's all true, right? Maybe my story will help you see how impacting Jesus is.

But like I said, when He rose from the dead we were like, "this is unimaginable; God indeed does everything the Bible says." And this Bible tells all about it.

I was so impacted by Jesus and His resurrection that I changed my focus in life. I wanted to be a part of the believers so I stayed in Jerusalem with them after the festival. We were all together. I wanted to do something. I wanted to do my part to show I was serious. So I had this piece of land. It wasn't my house or anything, but I sold it and then gave the money to the twelve. They certainly didn't ask or expect it, but I needed to do it for me. I needed to express what I was feeling. And they would have done it for me.

I mean, faith without works is dead, right? So I feel great about it. I didn't give it a second thought.

I wanted to be part of something significant, and following Jesus Christ – is, in my opinion, the most significant thing you can do. There's something incredible about Him; something that draws me like nothing else on earth. He always makes me feel like I'm an important piece.

We didn't know how we'd be in those early days. We were together; watching one another's backs. We didn't know exactly what the church would become. Jesus had ascended. Right before He left He dropped the whole thing in our laps. Imagine! *'You build the church. You go out and*

*tell people about Me.* ' Frankly it kind of stunned us. We hit the dust – down on our knees to pray every day, and then we just kind of went with the Spirit.

There was another thing; I like to encourage others. It is just something I do. They saw that in me and began calling me Barnabas, Son of Encouragement.

There was this guy named Saul and he hated believers. He was wreaking havoc on us. He was powerful and he was dangerous; involved in a massive “clean up” of Christians. You see, the Jews, even though it was right under their noses in the Scriptures, didn't get it. Saul thought he was right. How blind you can be at times. But one day Jesus himself appeared to Saul outside Damascus.

Jesus has a way of making Himself known. So I heard all about it; how Saul did a 180, and began preaching about Jesus being the Messiah.

Now at first Saul remained in Damascus but then he wanted to meet the apostles so he went up to Jerusalem. They would have none of him. What if it was a trick? Saul wasn't beyond it. Why should they accommodate him? They didn't believe he had truly become a believer.

But I thought; *give the guy the benefit of the doubt.*

So I went to him and introduced myself. He told me the whole story. When he told me how Jesus talked to him, I knew Jesus had appeared to him. That's His voice! I recognized it!

Jesus is . . . well, there's just no one like Him! When you get to know Him, you see it. So I took Saul to the apostles myself, and told them what happened to him. Saul became a part of the believers after that.

We heard that Gentiles were becoming believers in Antioch. That was near where I was from so the apostles sent me there. Was I stunned when I got there! Jews and Gentiles together? Unheard of. But I was thrilled. Nothing in life made me more joyful than seeing all kinds of people turn to Jesus.

What are you excited about? What brings you joy? Do you see people you never expected coming to Jesus? Before, we never would have had anything to do with those people. They were pagans. But I care more now about the gospel being spread. Once you see it, you understand. There's more to life than the daily grind, and helping people discover that is a great blessing. I like to spread such good news. I want people to see that God can bring life and hope out of any circumstance.

They called this a missionary trip. I just went to be involved. I wanted to put Christ in the center of my life. He defines me. He brings the best out of me. He and I connect. I've got a trade, but Jesus is my passion. One's my job; Jesus is my life.

If you say you are a Christian then your life needs to say it. If you call yourself a believer in Jesus Christ, you need to live it. It just makes sense to me. At least it makes me feel like my faith

really does some good. Jesus was the most generous person in the world. He was out there giving of Himself, searching out others to talk to them about God; showing them the Father; offering healing, saying “Look up, look up, look up.”

So when I got there to Antioch, even though I had never done it before, I thought about what He did. And when I saw what was going on, that people believed, I said to myself, *this is the Holy Spirit*.

God was blessing that church. And so I wanted to help them grow. I wanted to help them believe and become strong in faith.

Do you ever think of following God first? Do you admire God’s ways? Do you admire Jesus Christ? Do you ever think you can show that to others? What if you were passionate about it and went and took a risk like I did. Do you think it’s impossible to do? Or do you think the cost is greater than the blessing? Perhaps if you try it, pay the cost, you will find that the benefit far outweighs the cost.

But a lot of times, people never take the first step and you are never going to enjoy the blessing until you try it. Faith does not grow if you don’t stand on it.

Here’s something in your world I could have never imagined - airplanes. Boy did it shock me when I saw one. But I got to thinking about it. There was the very first commercial flight. Somebody had to try it. Now people watched those airplanes fly. But unless they actually got on one, they would never know the blessing of getting from here to there in a very short period of time. It costs to fly, but it’s well worth the cost.

That’s exactly like faith. You have to say, “Lord, I’m yours. What do you want to do with me?”

Naturally, as I got started helping at that church in Antioch, I thought of Saul. He had gone home to Tarsus, but I went searching him out and said – come on over here. We need you. And he did; he joined me in Antioch. He and I taught crowds of people. Hundreds turned to the Lord; just because we took the risk of being in that community and spreading the message.

How are you doing in your community? I see lots of houses around. Yet I read your newspaper and only 40% of people in your nation go to church. What are you going to do about that? Faith without works will do nothing. I must tell you this. That’s what it’s all about.

That church in Antioch? They did other stuff too. A prophet came to town, and through the Holy Spirit prophesied that a famine was coming. So the church took up a collection to send relief to people in Jerusalem – even before the famine happened. It really helped those Christians. I know it was true; I delivered it. I like to think my own gift had a little bit of an influence on them.

Paul and I delivered the gift, and then headed back to Antioch. My nephew John Mark – the one who had deserted Jesus in the garden – he decided he wanted to go with us back to Antioch to serve.

What about you? How do you want to be used by God?

It's time for me to leave. I hope you have been inspired by my story. I have no regrets for how I lived my life. May your church be as strong and vibrant and full of the Holy Spirit as the church in Antioch. We were so much like Jesus Christ that people began calling us "Christians." It's a blessed way to live.