

"Meet for the Master's use"

Acts 4: 36, 37; Acts 9: 26, 27; Acts 11: 19-26; Acts 15: 36, 37.

N. Anderson.

What has now come to pass in relation to Christ once crucified, raised and ascended, is that the Spirit of God has come down from that glorified Christ in order to announce that there is something for God established in Christ where He is today. One of the blessed features of the apostolic testimony in these early verses in the book of the Acts is that it draws attention to the fact that God's centre of administration has been transferred from earth to heaven. There is a mighty concourse of people gathered together in relation to an earthly system of things which, unwittingly to them, is going out in the ways of God. It is being displaced; it is being set aside; it is being wound up for a season; and if that is so, something new is coming in. The Spirit of God, in the apostolic testimony, draws attention to the fact that, at God's right hand in heaven, God's centre is established. Christ is at God's right hand in glory. Peter preaches Him as Lord and Christ, and the whole bent of the Holy Spirit's testimony is to draw attention to Him where He is.

As the testimony moves on in these chapters, the Spirit of God draws attention to an individual. We might speak of assembly features, we might speak of assembly character, of assembly order, of assembly power, of assembly service, of assembly worship; but all is the aggregate of individual hearts that have been brought into blessed contact with the Christ of God at God's right hand in glory. In the verses we have read we have a man, Joses, who has come under the mighty impact of the testimony that God's centre has been transferred from earth to heaven. The apostles have been pleased to give him a new name, Barnabas, and I think it indicates that very quickly in the life of this man there had been some reproduction in the power of the Spirit of God of features that were seen in Christ Himself.

We have been reminded of the intercessory service of our Lord Jesus Christ, and allied with that His gracious ministry of succour, sympathy, support and salvation, that the saints are the subjects of as moving here in a contrary scene. Barnabas appears to be one who, under the Spirit's power, has moved very rapidly into the apprehension of what is resident on that line in that blessed Man. We are all characterized by what we are engaged with, and as Barnabas, son of consolation, has his heart engaged with this blessed ministering Man at God's right hand in heaven, he betakes of the character that marks his Lord, and is seen as a *son of consolation*. He is one who carries on a service that is calculated to bind together the saints of God. Is the line we are on, in conditions where there is much to distress, depress and discourage, that of binding together the saints of God? Barnabas was a true son of consolation, setting himself to bind together those who with himself had come under the powerful testimony of the Spirit of God, whose hearts were entranced with this living Christ in glory, and who consequently, in some measure at least, had been led apart from that earthly system of things which was passing out of the ways of God.

We further read that he was a Levite. That is doubtless a reference to his natural history, but surely Barnabas became a Levite in the true spirit of Levitical service only as his affections were transferred from the earthly system of things and became focused upon God's new centre at His own right hand in heaven. He thus became a true Levite. One of the greatest features of Levitical service is to contribute something to that which will be for God's own pleasure in the sanctuary. The Levites in their calling were given to the priests to minister to them; and the priests in sanctuary service ministered in the presence of God that which had been gained in true Levitical service. A feature of Levitical service was that they were to carry (as it were figuratively in testimony) through the

wilderness all the holy things which composed the dwelling place of God. These holy vessels were committed solemnly to the charge of the Levites; things which the Holy Spirit has told us speak of Christ. And it is our privilege today as true Levites to carry in testimony that which the Spirit of God ministers to us relative to Christ, in the varied presentations of Him that abound in the word of truth.

Let me say especially to those who are younger, but not exclusively to them, steep your souls in the Word of God. Where is the material to be found that the Spirit of God can use to develop in your souls features truly connected with what God is doing now in relation to Christ in glory? — In the Word of God! So I repeat, search the Scriptures. There is a testimony to Christ written deeply on every page. The true Levite learns in the Word of God what he has to carry in testimony; and what he carries in testimony would afford him something that can be used in priestly service in the presence of God. Equally, of course, if we are to go on in true Levitical service, we must know something of priestly service in the presence of God. Barnabas became a true Levite in the power of the Spirit of God as his heart was entranced with the living Christ in the glory of God.

In the verses we read in Acts 9, we have the account of Saul's remarkable conversion. He was arrested by the same blessed Person who had arrested Barnabas, and in this record he is seen essaying to join himself to the disciples at Jerusalem. They are afraid of him, as well they might be, but Barnabas, as in the current of what Christ was doing from the glory, is aware of what is going on in Saul relative to that blessed Man on high. He knows of Saul of Tarsus, he knows a great deal about him; and he brings him to the apostles, declaring unto them how Saul had seen the Lord in the way. Barnabas very quickly laid hold of the fact that there was something distinguishing, something distinctive, and something potentially formative in seeing Christ as Saul had seen Him. Saul had not seen Him in the lowliness of His Galilean pathway; he had not seen Him in the sufferings of the cross, in the day when "sitting down they watched Him there." Saul hated Him, hated His Name, sought to extinguish it; but Saul got a sight of Him beyond the suffering, in the glory. And Barnabas is alive to what the Lord is doing, he is alive to the fact that Christ had arrested Saul, and that he had seen Him in the way. How important were the communications which the Lord made to Saul on the Damascus way! He had said to Ananias, "He is a chosen vessel unto Me" (Acts 9: 15), but He had also said directly and personally to Saul himself, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

He gave this distinct intimation to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road, that there was something on the earth so identified with Himself in glory that it could be spoken of as "Me." The assembly is here, Christ's body, and this truth was to be a cardinal feature of Paul's ministry — that Christ and the saints are one. I say again, steep your souls in the Word of God. We are not just a congregation of people who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; but having believed the gospel of our salvation, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, and we are united by that Spirit to Christ in glory; and all who are so united are members of His body, one with Him. There is a danger with us of falling into ignorance of this wonderful truth that has been so blessedly revived for us. Barnabas reports that Saul "had seen the Lord in the way, and that He had spoken to Him."

He recognizes that there is something here precious to Himself. And if we get the truth into our souls as to what the saints are to Christ in their union with Him in glory, it will change our whole attitude, if it needs to be changed, in regard to practical fellowship. All movements amongst the saints of God will be motivated by this blessed truth, that Christ and the saints are one. Barnabas relates the wonderful fact that Saul had so come under the power of this blessed Name, the Name he had sought to extinguish, that he had boldly preached at Damascus in the Name of Jesus. I think that is blessed. Just visualise this man, leading those who sought to stamp out the Name of Christ, and the sight of Christ in glory so entrances, so morally revolutionizes him, that he is unable to restrain himself from announcing

that name. This is the wonder of Christianity, it is spontaneous and has no legalism about it; he cannot help himself, he is preaching in the name of Jesus. Saul (afterwards Paul) thus becomes the willing servant of Christ, and in his service he commences at the very heart of the testimony, "he preached Christ, in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God."

One mark of coming under the power of the Spirit of God is this, that we shall be aware of what Christ is doing in this world today, alive to the true character of the testimony connected with the saints in their union with Christ in glory, and thus we shall be found moving in concert with Him.

In Acts 11 we read that the saints of God had been "scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen." Whilst the enemy thought he had scattered the saints, he had unwittingly spread the testimony of God. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee; the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain" (Ps. 76: 10). We see the testimony spreading by those who had been scattered, and who are seen preaching the Word, initially to none but the Jews. They were at the moment in the current of what God had in view; the testimony of Christ in glory as the centre of God's thoughts. But the Spirit of God is operating, and there are some who move a little further, and we find them in Antioch speaking to the Gentiles, "Preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord" (verse 21).

What power there is in a Spirit given testimony! What power in the proclamation of it, when hearts engaged in it are in the enjoyment of what they are preaching, and in communion with the One they preach! Eventually tidings of these things came to the ears of the assembly in Jerusalem, and the brethren evidently knew the man who would be alert as to what was going on amongst the Gentiles. "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."

Here is a man with a heart for the grace of God; he is looking for the evidence of the grace of God, and he sees it. It is sometimes said that we see only what we want to see. Our spiritual sensibilities can become deadened if we are occupied disturbingly, and sometimes destructively, with things that do not feed the saints of God. Let us get on to the positive side; let us be engaged with that which will build up the saints. Thank God the Holy Spirit delights to turn our eyes to what God is doing in relation to Christ. Barnabas goes to Antioch and seeing "the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." He besought them to cleave to the Lord. He may have besought them out of the purpose of his own heart, but I believe he was equally beseeching them that out of the purpose of *their* heart they should cleave to the Lord. Brethren, let us cleave to the Lord.

If we are found cleaving to the Lord in reality we shall be cleaving one to another. As cleaving to the Lord we get right values, we get right judgment. Barnabas "exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man." He was a man ready for the occasion. It was an important moment in the history of the testimony of God, and Barnabas does not need to be conditioned to it, he is conditioned already, conditioned in the presence of God. How often we fail to seize an opportunity because we are not ready. "He was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith; and much people was added unto the Lord."

The true servant of the Lord has a true judgment, first of all of himself, he knows his own limitations; but he knows also the qualities of others, and this is seen in Barnabas as he sets out and seeks Saul. Here is a movement in the current of what Christ was doing at that moment, a moving out from Judaism to the Gentiles in order to bring them into the blessedness of the unsearchable riches of Christ. Barnabas recognizes that Saul is the servant for this, and he goes off to seek him. Let us not be

selfish in our service; let us recognize our own limitations, and then recognize the qualities and abilities of others. Thus Barnabas sought Saul, and brought him to Antioch, and there together they laboured amongst the saints of God.

The verses read in Acts 15 present a sadder picture. Barnabas seems to go out under a cloud. Why are we told of this declension in such a man of God? Would it not emphasize the fact that there is only one perfect Servant. "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; Mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My Spirit upon Him . . . He shall not fail" (Isa. 42: 1, 4). The word I think can be literally translated, "He shall not burn dim." I think Barnabas in this chapter was burning dim. Scripture gives us some indication why. John Mark was his sister's son. Barnabas allows the ties of nature to come in, to invade the province of his service to the Lord; and when we allow in our service to the Lord what is foreign to it, there is bound to be disaster. We rejoice in the earlier references to Barnabas; why does the Holy Spirit record his failure? That we may take heed; if Barnabas broke down, then we are liable to break down. The rocks are charted that the mariner might avoid them. However sad the close of the history of Barnabas is, let us cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart, and thus we shall continue to be identified with the present interests of Christ.