

Len Griehs - A Good Man

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A good man. This phrase comes from the book of Acts, the 11th chapter, verse 24, where it says, he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. Of course you're saying, who was that person? Many some of you may remember that it was person called Barnabas. So Barnabas was called a good man.

Well, what is a good man? A lot of people have sort of debated what is a good man. If you were around in 1918, not too many more were, but my mom was born in that or my dad was born in that year. There was a song that was composed and sung by an old singer, Sophie Tucker. Some people still remember that call of the good man is hard to find.

And these were the words, good man's hard to find. You always get the other kind.

And so if you find one, it goes on. You can read the words, give them plenty of love and treat them right. For a good man nowadays, it's hard to find. A good man nowadays is hard to find. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

But it's also been used in legal terms. When juries were first set up, the whole idea was you pick 12 men, good and true. That was the phrase that was used when that phrase was coined way back in the early 17th century. Good, implied, distinguished, or some people of rank or people with certain valor. Today, you're not required to be any of that.

You can be anybody in order to be part of a jury. But before 1920, if you were a woman, you couldn't be on a jury, and now in the USA or the UK, since you can be a member of a jury and realize they're not. 1952 was when Canada passed the rule that you could be a woman and be on a jury, but you had to be married. 1964, that was done away with.

So John Kennedy said, the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing. At least it's attributed to John Kennedy. But who really said it? 61 Kennedy said it. But way back in 1920, we had the Railway Carmen's journal had that same phrase.

1916, a prohibitionist named Charles Akkad, he had that statement. 1895, we find that statement in a medical bulletin. In 1867, it's attributed to John Stuart Mills, who you may remember. So it goes back a long ways. The earliest you can find is in 1770, economist Edmund Burke coined that term and he was a supporter of the US Revolution, although he never wanted the revolution, but he supported the idea that rights for the United States should be there.

And he was a strong supporter, even though an English person.

First time we find this used in Scripture, however, which is what we're interested in is in the book of Micah, Micah 7:2. Remember Micah is writing at the time. Well last king Hezekiah, he's that king and two Kings before him. Micah is writing and this is his assessment of what's happened in Judah. He says the good man is perished out of the earth and there is none upright among men.

They all lie in wait for blood. They hunt every man his brother with a net. That was his assessment of the days of Israel and Judah.

But we are going to talk about a description we have in the book of Acts. Acts written describes Barnabas as a good man sent on a mission from the Jerusalem church, and it's in this passage of

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Acts 11:22, 24. The news about the prevalence of the Gospel at the church of Antioch got to the church of Jerusalem, which at that time was the central. I won't say central authority, but it was the major church at the time as the early church was beginning.

It says then when they sent Barnabas off to Antioch, this is the first time we have him mentioned in Acts 11. It's not the first time he appeared. We have this mentioned and the reason they sent him we have in this last phrase. For he was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. So they wanted verification that the church at Antioch was indeed blossoming in what they heard.

So they picked Barnabas to go. He hadn't been talked about since the fourth chapter of Act. That's where we find Barnabas introduced to us. Remember that the Jerusalem church started what would be considered a commune in our days or a kibbutz now, maybe like you have in Israel. But they started the commune where everyone would have everything in common.

And this was the passage read in Acts 4. So there was no one needy among them, as many as had their lands. They sold the lands and they brought the money in so that they could support everyone in the church, and says there was not a needy person among them. For as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles feet.

Distribution was made to each as they had need.

And in this chapter we are introduced to Barnabas, but not by the name Barnabas, by the name Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus. Thus Joseph, who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas. Remember Luke is writing this sometime later, looking back at this, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field which belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles feet. If you're a student of the Levitical priesthood, remember what was forbidden in the Levitical priesthood. They couldn't own land, at least in the promised land.

So it's interesting that Barnabas, this Joseph, who was a Levite and I think that's why Luke mentioned it especially, but he was a native of Cyprus. Cyprus wasn't part of that empire. It was part of the empire but it was not part of the land they couldn't own. So either he inherited it or some way. You know it's amazing when people, how people get around the law.

And even in early Israel we know they did many things to get around the law. So if it's possible, descended from the Levite family that went to Cyprus which was not part of that land and bought land there. Anyways we're told that Barnabas sold that land and brought it and laid the money at the apostles feet.

What would that do? You have to think it was a substantial amount of money that was there, and we see that Barnabas was hailed and he immediately put him in a notable position amongst the brethren that were gathered in that commune. When that happens, anyone that's not sincere says hmm, if I could do something like that maybe I'd have the same kind of prominence. So remember the people that tried to do something like that, Ananias and Sapphira, apparently they coveted that position that Barnabas got.

We always wonder why did they do what they did? And I think it's because they were motivated by power and the desire to be accelerated within the community. So Ananias and Sapphira were told in Acts 5 they sold a piece of property but they did not lay everything at the apostles feet as we know. They brought just the part and laid it at the apostles feet, and of course then they were dealt

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with much more harshly because holding it back they were struck dead on the spot as a lesson of lying.

The apostles said to the Holy Spirit, that's really what we have for the background on Barnabas really don't have much more but he's going to play a very prominent part as we go forward in the book of Acts. As always when you don't have a lot of information, traditions pop up. So there was traditions that he had the same teacher that Paul had, Gamaliel, and he became then a follower of Jesus because when he saw Jesus coming on, perhaps he preached to Saul early on but Paul never responded. There's also thoughts by some that perhaps he was one of those 70 or 72 that were sent out by Jesus. In Luke 10 another thought that he actually had been associated with a kinsman, John Mark, who we learned later was his cousin.

And he was the one that was persuaded either by Mary or with Mary. So we really don't know. He just appears here. But his prominence later in the Book of Acts is what's important, and I think this background that Luke gives us in Acts to say that he was a good man and that he really was dedicated to the cause of that early Christian church is the important thing we take from Barnabas.

We do have throughout the Book of Acts descriptions about him. One is he's called the son of imprisonment. We read that in Acts 4. In Acts 9 we find that he's a believer in Paul, the first one. In Acts 12 we find he's a believer in John, Mark.

And I've got an asterisk because we'll come back to that later. He's called a prophet and a teacher. In Acts 13 also, he was persecuted in his travels with Paul, he was also called an apostle, and in that not one of the 12. Remember when you see the 12, that's always referring to those original apostles.

But an apostle could be one sent out. He was one amongst several others that were called apostles. He was a miracle worker, as we'll see in Acts 15, and perhaps we even have a physical description of Barnabas in Acts 14. I have a question mark, because I'm going to suggest some things when we get there about he and Paul and about the idea of descriptions of people and how they might have looked in the Scriptures from that point on.

Barnabas vanishes after we have this statement that he was a good man and what he did in that area of Jerusalem. But he vanished this for about three years until he appears with Saul in Jerusalem, and we have this recorded not in the Book of Acts, as much as knowing. It was three years later by something Paul says in Galatians 1:17, when he says he wanted Paul when he was converted and when he saw the vision on that road to Damascus, he didn't go to Jerusalem immediately. He says here it was three years later that he went to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas Peter and stayed with him 15 days.

And that's what we'll have recorded in Acts. He's accompanied by Barnabas on that trip. Barnabas plays the leading role in affirming Saul's integrity and his sincerity when they go to Jerusalem three Years later. Notice here we read in the book of Acts, chapter nine, where he next appears. When Saul came to Jerusalem, he wanted to associate with the disciples, but they were scared of him.

You would be too. Here's the guy that was persecuting the church and all of a sudden he's taking this right turn. But Barnabas. Notice says Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles. Described how he seen the Lord on the road.

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He vouched for Barnabas, just like you would vouch for someone that didn't know anything. So that's why there's a thought that Barnabas may have been acquainted with Paul before this whole thing happened. As a Levite and as a Jew, they might have been together. I'll show you why there's a further thought of that as we look into this. So that's the role Barnabas took.

He was the one that vouched that Paul was legitimate.

What made him ready to do that? We're just presented with this idea that he did. So this suggestion that Barnabas was from Cyprus and already knew Saul from earlier years is a very credible sort of idea. Here you see the map. Cyprus and Tarsus.

Paul was from Tarsus, Cyprus. Tarsus was the cultural seat of that.

Cyprus was a neighboring island that provided a lot of things and they got from Tarsus. So it could be very likely that they did know each other. Barnabas, it says in Acts 11, when we get to that, that he sought Paul for the work. So you think, I'm not going to seek someone out that I don't know and can't attest to. So Barnabas, I think, knew his friend Paul would not lie about conversion on the road to Damascus.

Now, this is just a suggestion. We have no real credible scripture that says that they knew each other ahead of time. But it certainly seems plausible that this might have been the case.

Saul went to Jerusalem and he says he spent 15 days, says he stayed with Peter, and in the record he only sees Peter and James. I thought many times and wondered about the conversation. Here we are, brethren, we're spending two or three days together, and just think of all we're talking about.

You're spending 15 days and think this is Paul's first exposure, Saul's first exposure to someone who walked with Jesus. Think of what he's learning at this point, what he's asking and the questions. So it must have been a very interesting time when they were all there, and I think there's reason to believe that Barnabas was there as well. In this conversation after this, Saul goes back to Tarsus and that's when Peter then goes to Cornelius.

In this very next incident, Peter goes to Cornelius and the conversion of the Gentiles begin. That's where Paul, as you know, or Saul, is going to play the most important role in the church. What happened to Barnabas? Well, we're not really told but it says without the persecution now that Barnabas has vouched for Paul, the apostles are satisfied. Peter had to go and say, look, we're not going to have any trouble from this person again.

Let's go and preach. Let's take the Gospel out the way Jesus said to take it to the whole area of the earth, and so they sent out and it says those who were scattered because of the persecution that Saul had done now are going out to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one yet except to Jews alone. We have that recorded in Acts 11:19. Here you see that area where they would have gone up into the Cilicia.

Then we read in the Acts the 11th chapter, verses 20 to 21. There were some of them who came to Antioch. They didn't just go to the Jewish, they didn't just go to the temple. It says they began speaking to the Greeks. Also remember Cornelius is now the first Gentile.

So they were opening up the church to the Gentiles, preaching the Lord Jesus, the hand of the Lord was with them and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. So here we have the first

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mass group of Gentiles who are accepting Jesus and becoming part of the Christian way.

When the disciples at Jerusalem heard this, they needed to verify that this was true. Was Antioch now going to be a heart of Christianity? So Barnabas reappears. Barnabas was the one who vouched for Paul. He was the good man.

He had a good reputation. So it says the news about them. The Greeks reached the ears of Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Barnabas again is going to verify that what they've heard is true. Was it really true that the Jews and the Greeks who believed in Jesus as the Messiah were now together and worshipping Jesus?

I don't know if any of you have ever been on a fact finding mission, but many in the days of truth, when the things started opening up here or in Romania or Poland, many of the brethren went on fact finding missions. Africa. Let's see how the brethren accept things there. How are they found? Very good reports.

So Barnabas was sent on this mission. He observed, he listened and he was to make a recommendation to that church in Jerusalem that would impact the church forevermore.

When they sent Barnabas off to Antioch, he arrived and witnessed the grace of God. He rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord. Again we encounter this idea. This is where we started. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

Someone who could be trusted, someone who could verify and let us know that everything was as reported.

Barnabas then sought help. He left Antioch after he verified this for Tarsus to look for Saul. He initiates this contact with Saul, found him, and then he brought Saul from Tarsus to Antioch. It says for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers, and that's where the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

Remember, Christians is a Greek word meaning anointed ones, and that was coined by the Romans or this group now in Antioch, that was different. They were not the Jewish people that they referred to. Now we have got this group of people here that are worshipping Jesus or are following Jesus and they coined that term on how to describe them. But notice Saul and Barnabas spend a whole year there.

Think of what Saul is learning here and what he is doing. As he is preparing himself, he grows in spiritual stature. Christianity, meanwhile, is suffering persecution. Back in Jerusalem during this time this year, Peter is arrested. We read that he's freed by an angel.

The first apostle dies, which was James, one of the 12. He was killed. Harris Antipas, who had been the big persecutor of John the Baptist, is exiled by Caligula, the emperor, and he dies in exile, and it's during that time Barnabas and Saul hear of the brethren in Jerusalem needing funds. Remember, that's where the first commune was and where they were sharing everything in common.

They learned that the brethren in Jerusalem still needed help, and so they learned about the famine that was going on there that's described in Acts, and they go back with Barnabas nephew, a person named John Mark, who may have been that John Mark that was in the garden with Jesus. We had a lot of connections in those days that we don't appreciate. We have connections in the truth with

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family all over the place.

And I think it wasn't unlike that in the early church. There's a reason why God calls certain individuals and families because of the. The likelihood that they will continue, and they are the kind of people that he needs to carry his message. So as these things happen, the church is changing and Barnabas and Saul, after taking that to Jerusalem, go back and at Antioch, there they were prophets and teachers, as we're told.

And we have a whole list of those who are there, those elders that became the Antioch elders while they're there. In that year that we talked about, that year, the Spirit comes and tells them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work that he's called. God is now preparing to go on a much wider basis with this gospel message. When they had prayed and fasted and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. This was the first missionary journey that they were to go on.

Saul and Barnabas go.

You know that story. I just want to talk about one turning point in history related to this that happens while they're on that journey. It says, being sent by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia. From there they sailed to Cyprus where they Barnabas home territory, and they began to proclaim the word of God in synagogues and Jews.

And they also had John Mark, and that's just a footnote I put in here. John Mark claimed to be the cousin of Barnabas, and Colossians 4, 10 is where that comes from. Early Christian writers maybe say that that was a different mark.

I don't know. I hate to use the term scholars for those that write, because in my mind Bible students are the scholars. But it is a common historical aspect sometimes of who he may have been. But they did bring John Mark along as their helper, and they went through the whole island and they met this person called Sergius Paulus, who was a man, it says, described as a man of intelligence.

And he wanted to know what's going on. So Barnabas and Saul were summoned and they talked to him about the word of God, and it was at that place that a man called Elymas, a magician, we're told, started opposing them. But here we have the very first instance of Saul now being called by a different name associated with his ministry.

Luke simply says, also known as Paul, and from that point on we have him called Paul. In the Scriptures, he was the one that spoke up. Remember, Barnabas is the one who brings Paul. But Paul now speaks up and it's obvious that he perhaps is emerging in that role.

He's supposed to be as one of the leaders.

He gives this long dissertation against Elymas, who was a magician, and it says just the very last says, now behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time, and he was blinded. It was that that convinced the proconsul that had summoned them, that the message they were bringing was indeed a true message and something that he should pay attention.

Paul and Barnabas then go and they turn to a ministry of the Gentiles. They keep going on. They go to Lystra where man sitting Paul performs his first miracle. He listens to Paul speaking. Paul looks at him and says, stand upright on your feet.

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And he sprang up and walked. Man who had been a cripple from birth. So again we start to see Paul emerge as a leader amongst those who are going out to the Gentiles.

Well, if you saw a man that was crippled get up and walk, of course you'd pay a lot of attention, and it says, when the crowd saw that they did, they said, oh, the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men. Remember, these are the Greeks, these are those that believe in the many gods, and it says, Luke records for us saying, Barnabas they called Zeus and Paul because he was the chief speaker. They called Hermes.

I want to focus on that just for a minute because remember I said before, maybe we have a physical description of Paul and perhaps Barnabas.

They heard of it, of course, and they, they were immediately taken back, and Paul says, why are you doing this? Why are you worshipping us? And the people wanted to sacrifice to them, and of course they put that off.

So let's focus on this part where it says Barnabas they called Zeus and Paul as the chief speaker, they called Hermes. Hermes was the son of Zeus and he was the messenger in Greek mythology of the gods, and so naturally they called the chief speaker Paul. They called him Hermes. Zeus, on the other hand, they called Barnabas.

He was the ruler of Mount Olympus. So maybe as you looked at Barnabas and you looked at Saul, Barnabas appeared much more bolder and stronger than Paul. As you see with Zeus and Hermes, the difference in them, it may just convey to us some idea about why they did that. They were used to that idea that the gods would come down and visit them. But it spurred me to think, where do we have physical descriptions of biblical characters?

We don't have a lot. There are women, as I mentioned here, that are called very beautiful. Among them, Sarah, Rachel, Rebecca, all those. We have Leah described as plain looking, in contrast to Rachel, who says had a lovely figure and was beautiful. That's the description we have of the women, of the men, we have some descriptions.

Esau, hairy and red haired. David, going with health and having a fine appearance and handsome features. You all remember Ruth Eldridge because they lived here for a long time. But Ruth and I used to have these discussions about David and what he looked like. She was convinced that he had blonde hair and blue eyes.

So we had fun with this description of him. Samson, Absalom. All we know is they said they had long hair. We know Saul the king was tall because he stood out above everybody. On the other hand, we know Zacchaeus was short because he was up in the tree so he could see.

2nd Corinthians 10:10 tells us Paul's appearance was unimpressive. So that's why perhaps Hermes was a choice for him. There are images and descriptions in connection with the tabernacle in the temple. Remember, we have the commandment that you wouldn't make any graven image to worship. But it doesn't mean there weren't images.

We had angels on the Ark of the Covenant, the curtains had angels on them. The holy of holies. Remember how decorated it was, as we see here? So those images were conveyed, and on the doors of Solomon's Temple, we had images of animals, things.

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So it wasn't as though the images were forbidden. It really was about worship, and what you looked at is those images. We even have description of God's appearance in some cases. But I think they're intended to create a mental image for us, not a visual image.

Remember when Moses wanted to see God and we had this recorded in Exodus 33, how God showed him his hind parts as he passed by. He was called the Ancient of days, and we had the description of him in Ezekiel and other places. Humans are called Adam, is called made in the image of God. But the thing that we don't want to do, and Paul is the one that advises here, do not confuse a crafted image or one of flesh and blood.

That was the guilt that was associated with the commandment not to create an image. Why? Because I think that's exactly what what would happen. They would be used for worship, which Paul forbid, and I think that's why we don't have a physical description of Jesus.

Now, these are all conveying different artistic ideas of what Jesus looked like. Remember one sister, when we put pictures, of course, illustrating, sometimes in the herald, different articles, we what someone's picture, an artist rendering and questions. Are you saying that's what that person looked like? Well, we really don't know, but it helps, and as we see here, I think all of us perhaps have that picture.

There's a picture on the road to Emmaus of the disciples walking. So why didn't God give us a physical description of Jesus. I think it's because people would be making pictures of him to better worship him. Think about what people do with their bodies today. Radical followers would be putting body modifications like we see them, make them look like someone else.

Imagine them trying to make themselves look like Jesus because faulty humans focus on the outward appearance. That's what we're told in Samuel. But Proverbs 31:30 says, Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting. All of us know that as we grow older. Doesn't matter how good you look when you're young, aging takes a toll.

We are told in Isaiah 53 just these words about Jesus. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him. Nothing in his appearance that we would desire him.

Well, Paul and Barnabas established the Gentile churches of Asia. We read here in the book of Acts, chapter 14 all the places that they went and did. The important part I want to focus in is this last statement. When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. The Lord was ready to open up the Gospel to the Gentiles.

And it was Paul and Barnabas that took that first journey to do that in a widespread way.

And it was on this trip that Paul's status as God's choice I put to replace with a question mark. I don't think Paul was ever meant to replace Judas. I think he would be chosen. From the beginning, Paul was, as Saul was designated to be this apostle who would take the gospel to the Gentiles. Some never called him an apostle.

Even today some of my Catholic friends will say, well, Paul wasn't an apostle. Well, God made him that. But think about what they did. They established all the Ecclesiastes, the governance of those Ecclesiastes, and they prove to everyone Gentiles were ready.

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They were ready and accepting Jesus. God had opened up the way, and it was on this certainly that Paul emerged, as I said, as the spokesperson and as the leader of this group on their return. Acts 13 we have recorded that Barnabas nephew John Mark has fallen as companions but out to sea from Paphos and and came to Perga and Pamphylia. But John left them and returned to Jerusalem.

We don't have any record of why he returned. There's been a lot of speculation, but it did not go well with Paul who had urged him to carry on. But here we had a major event take place where for some reason John went back to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas resume their eldership in Antioch, and one year later is when they go to the Jerusalem conference to settle this matter with the Gentiles.

That was recorded for us in Acts 15, and you'll notice here it says after some days, Paul said to Barnabas, this is after the conference, let us return and visit the brethren in every city where we went before and proclaimed the Word, and it is on this decision to go and revisit that the separation of this partnership comes. Barnabas wanted to take his nephew again. But what did Paul say?

Paul said, no, we are not going to take him. He left us on the last journey. We have just this minor record that says there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated one from another. Barnabas took Mark on a separate journey to Cyprus, and Paul went with Silas, and from that point on, they had separate things.

We know very little about what happens to Barnabas after this point. But we know Saul becomes that chosen vessel to spread the word in two more journeys throughout the empire.

We do know, however, that there were no hard feelings. Eventually, in Galatians 2, Paul tells us, after an interval of 14 years, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along. So they did reunite. It wasn't a separation be forever, and it's a lesson for us brethren in that sometimes we have disagreements with our brethren so much that we separate.

But notice the example of Paul. They had a wide dispute. When it was time to reunite for a purpose, they did. But from this point on, Barnabas fades from Scripture.

So what are the lessons we can take from the life of this good man?

One, you don't have to be an elder to do a work or to lead others. Barnabas, he took a secondary role, but it was such an important role. He was used, remember, to develop the most powerful apostle. There's been some very strong elders we know, or some strong leaders that others were used to bring in. Think about Pastor Russell himself, Jonas Wendell that he hears preach.

He spurs them on to think about all the things that he's not been thinking about, who knows about Jonas Wendell anymore. So there are times when we need people like Barnabas that are really reaching out, but they take a secondary role. They aren't prominent beyond a certain point of bringing them in. So we should never use that excuse. Well, I can't do this because I'm not enough.

The Lord decides who is enough. The second thing, second lesson, your integrity is more important than your works.

This is a principle we need to put in our life. I put up a note here. Can you take the New York Times Test. Other people don't think so much of the Times anymore, but it is a widespread newspaper. When I was working, we used to use this in talking when we were talking to the public or talking to

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investors, is what you're saying and what you're doing.

Would you be willing to have that reported on the front page of the New York Times the next day? That's a good test for all of us. When you have a tough decision to make or tough things say, take that test. Would I be okay if this was reported on old Ron tomorrow?

3. Your position does not equal your importance to God's work. It doesn't matter where you fit in, in the ecclesia or in the church arrangement. Barnabas was the one that was chosen to train Paul. Then what did he do?

He stepped aside because he knew that Paul was the chosen vessel. So don't ever let that inhibit you about where you are or what you do. Your position doesn't matter with God. If he chooses you to do that work, you will have all the strength you need to do it and the sanction to do it.

We are not right all the time, brethren. Even the best of us can be wrong sometimes, and we need to recognize that. In Galatians 2:13, remember when Peter was sitting with the Jews rather than everyone eating? Barnabas was also carried away with their dissimulation.

The choice of the Jews over the Gentiles. Barnabas was wrong, and Paul, Remember he rebuked Peter, and we have to think Barnabas took that same lesson. So we can't be right all the time.

And it's something we have to remember. Always question, am I right in this or am I not looking at it correctly? Just like Paul and Barnabas. Well, we hope these lessons from the life of a good man will strike things in your heart and realize that God has used individuals for his purpose since the beginning of the church. Each of us should be ready and willing to step up when we hear that call.

Just as Barnabas did, and by the Lord's grace, can we be called a good man or a good woman. That should be our goal. To God be the glory forever and ever. Amen.