

Where in the World is Barnabas?

Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another. . . (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

In our ministry, my husband and I travel internationally. Because of those travels, I am on a quest. I would like to find one Barnabas . . . or two . . . or three . . . or a whole church full would be preferable. You know who Barnabas is, right? He's that friend of the apostle Paul who was an encourager. Barnabas was the guy who first accepted Paul into the fellowship of believers (Acts 9:27). He was also the one who decided to set out on a missionary journey with Mark when Paul refused to work with Mark (Acts 15:36-39). Barnabas was the man who stood by someone who was having difficulty being accepted in the fellowship. He saw God working in the lives of his friends. He believed in them, and encouraged them.

You see, I have discovered a very sad fact. No matter where the body of Christ is gathered, there are believers who have been hurt by someone in the church. I mean, no church in the world is exempt from this issue. Many of the people that we work with are leaders in the church – pastors, their wives, someone with a leadership role. I can think of very few instances where we have had a chance to hear someone open up where the primary problem wasn't someone in the church! Even in countries where you would think the government would be the biggest obstacle to productive church work, it was often another church member who was causing the most heartache.

Unfortunately, that was the way it was with Jesus. He came to His own, and His own rejected Him. It was the religious leaders that had Him crucified. He hung on a Roman cross, but He was on that cross not because of the Romans, or the people who didn't care about religion at all, or the man in the street – but the people in “the church.” When He foretold His death, He showed His disciples how He would *suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day* (Matthew 16:21). See Matthew 26:59, 27:1-2 as well. The chief priests and the elders were the ones who incited the crowd and persuaded the multitude to free Barabbas, instead of Jesus (Matthew 27:20).

I cannot count the number of church leaders whom I have met who have been blindsided by someone in the church, often also in church leadership. Most of the time, the onslaught has been a total surprise – from someone the leader thought he could trust, even someone who had been closer to him than most of the others in the church. Many of the people telling their story were still reeling from an attack that happened months or years ago. What a tragedy!

It is not for me to judge whether the attackers were planted by Satan, unbelievers in the midst of a congregation, or believers who just stubbornly thought their way was right. Whatever the reason, the result is devastating. I have observed people with obvious spiritual gifts who are so downcast and hurt that they cannot see a way to continue ministry. Or they are just “treading water,” trying to stay out of trouble.

In His last discourse with His disciples, Jesus said that He was giving them a new commandment. *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:34-35). He repeats that commandment in John 15:12 and prays for unity and love of the fellowship in John 17.

About this “new commandment,” G. Campbell Morgan makes this statement:

Then followed the arresting statement, “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples.” Not by the creed you recite. Not by the livery you wear. Not by the hymns you sing. Not by the ritual you observe. But by the fact that you love one another. Tertullian tells how in those early days, the exclamation that was made about the Christians was, “See how these Christians love one another.” The measure in which Christian people fail in love to each other is the measure in which the world does not believe in them, or their Christianity. It is the final test of discipleship, according to Jesus.

Jesus knew where our biggest problems were going to come from. And He knew that if the world didn’t see our love for each other, the witness of the church would be lessened. Isn’t that happening today? Think of how the media loves to broadcast discord within a church, a denomination, a Christian family.

Obviously, this problem is not going to go away until Christ comes. However, the more we are aware of Satan’s schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11), the more likely we are to recognize that the cause of Christ is being harmed. If we all decided to obey His commandment, then our focus would be on Christ and His mission.

Certainly, I have met some who qualify as a Barnabas. Praise God for them. However, they are few and far between. We still need to ask the question. Where in the world is Barnabas?

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Quote from G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to John*, Fleming Revell Company, p. 241