

Title: *The Fruit of the Spirit is Goodness*

Text: Galatians 5:22,23

I try to be precise in my use of the language. To use certain words and phrases in different ways and to be as precise as I can in the way I use different words. For example, you might meet someone and say, “He’s a good guy.” Maybe you’re talking about a mutual friend and you and the person you’re speaking with will both say, “He’s really just a good guy.”

What do you mean when you say that? I mean that he’s a nice person, fun to be with, probably someone that I wish I could get to know better. We should all hope that people would say about us, “He’s a good guy, or she’s a good gal.”

Now when you say someone’s a good man, what do you mean by that? Maybe I’m making too big a distinction here, but when I say of someone, “He’s a good man,” I mean something a little different. To say someone is a good man as opposed to a good guy carries a bit more heft to it. It’s as if there’s more at stake. A good man is a man of character, a man of integrity, a man of honor.

Maybe it’s just one of my peculiarities that I make that distinction, but the question for the morning is, “What does it mean for you to be a good person?” We bristle at the notion that we go to heaven because we’re good people. Our goodness isn’t what takes us to heaven. We’re saved by the grace of God, but one of the things that happens when we get saved is that God by his spirit begins to work goodness into our lives.

I went looking around the house for something to read the other day. The e-reader I got for Christmas broke so I was looking on my bookshelves and found Walter Isaacson’s biography of Benjamin Franklin. In his introduction, he states his purpose for writing. He asks the question, “How does one live a life that is useful, virtuous, worthy, moral, and spiritually meaningful?”

It’s interesting that Isaacson would use those words because each of them highlights a different facet of what it means to be good.

A carpenter will say, “That a good saw because it gives a nice, easy, clean cut and I can work with it.”

One of the words that also gets translated goodness in the New Testament carries with it the idea of “virtuous”. II Peter 3 says, “³ His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The other things in that quote are worthy, moral, and spiritually meaningful. All of those

are components of goodness.

It's always better to look at a picture than it is just to hear words about something. We all have different heroes of the Bible – David, Peter, Joshua, Moses, the Apostle Paul. One of the people I would most like to meet is Barnabas. I saw a quote recently that said, “People may or may not remember what you said, but they will always remember how you made them feel.” I think Barnabas always gave people a lift and made them feel better. I did a chapel time recently with the day care kids about being an encourager and I basically told them, “Do you tear someone down or do you build them up?” When I was in youth ministry (for a brief time; I wasn't very good at it), I had a little mantra with our youth, we don't tear each other down, we build each other up. Barnabas is a nickname which means son of encouragement. I see 4 basic attributes that went into Barnabas being a good man. He was a giver, he was an encourager, he was full of faith, and he was full of the Holy Spirit.

Many of you may not even be aware of what Barnabas' real name was. The first time we read about him is in Acts 4. We read about the blessing that is happening in the early church.

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. ³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.”

It's interesting that Barnabas, who was a giver would be known as a good man because in some translations, goodness is translated as generosity. One of the ways that goodness shows up in our life is through generosity. Isn't it just characteristic of a good person that they are a giver? Don't giving and goodness just go hand in hand?

John asks the question, ¹⁷ “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?” James asks the question, ¹⁴ “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

The reason for mentioning this in the context of generosity is to say that we are made good by our faith. A living faith will create goodness in your life.

Barnabas was just the kind of guy who when he saw a need, he gave of himself to meet the need. It's interesting that in Acts, it says, “there were no needy persons among them.” It's not because they were all rich as some people might try to preach or have us believe. It was because the people of the community of their own accord gave of themselves to meet the need. It's amazing how there is an outpouring every time there's a tragedy or a disaster. Some folks just

clean out their closets and get rid of their junk. Other step it up and really reach down deep and do something sacrificial. Which do you think is the greater evidence of the working of God's Spirit in someone's life?

I don't know what Barnabas' plans were for that land, but when he saw the needs of others, he said, "It's no so important that I keep that land. God's been good to me and has provided everything I've needed thus far in life and He'll continue to do so. I'll just trust Him." That kind of trust. That kind of working of God's Spirit goes into making someone that we look at and we say, "There's a good man."

The next thing we see about Barnabas is that he is an encourager. Barnabas isn't even his real name. It's a nickname that was given to him because encouraging was just something that he was all about. We had a dear sweet lady in my former church by the name of Ella Gales. I would sometimes call her a living, walking ego stroke because she was so kind and gracious toward me. She always had such incredibly encouraging things to say to me and about me. When somebody's that way toward us, what's our natural inclination or our first response sometimes? You're just being nice. There's no way that I'm all that you say I am. Maybe you've seen the bumper sticker that says, "Lord help me be the person my dog thinks I am." I mean this in total love and respect for Ella, who went to be with the Lord last year, "Help me to be half the man that Ella says I am."

You know what all that affirmation did for me, other than fill me with a deep love and affection for Ella? It made me want to do better and be better. If there was someone who thought that much of me and would say such nice things about me, I wanted to live up to what she said about me.

Barnabas was just that kind of person. In team sports, a truly great player is the kind of person who makes everyone around them better. It may be because on the field they possess extraordinary vision that just enables them to see the game in a way that few can or do. Wayne Gretzky was said to have that ability to skate not to where the puck was going to be, not where it was. It may simply be that they are such a positive presence in the clubhouse and in the locker room because they just have a way of encouraging someone who's in a slump or dealing with difficult off the field issues or making sure that personalities that may clash otherwise get along with each other – they're kind of lubricant between guys that don't necessarily see eye-to-eye all the time.

Part of that is just being an encourager. Where do we see Barnabas as an encourager? Maybe the most noteworthy instance is where Saul of Tarsus wanders into the meeting of the Christians – or the followers of the Way in Antioch. Here's this notorious persecutor of the church who has on his way to Damascus with letters so that he could arrest anyone who was a follower of the Way and bring them back to Jerusalem as prisoners. He's converted. He goes to the house of Ananias who has been told in a dream to accept this man, that he is God's chosen instrument to carry the gospel to the Gentiles. The folks in Damascus hatch a plot to kill Paul so he escapes and makes his way back to Jerusalem.

In Acts 9, we read, “²⁶ When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.” Barnabas was the one who was willing to take a chance on Paul when no one else would.

They became great co-laborers together in the cause of Christ. In Acts 13:2, the text reads, ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Notice that Barnabas’ name was first as it was first in the list of the teachers and prophets in the church at Antioch. As Paul and Barnabas journey together for a little while, the center of gravity shifts and instead of it being Barnabas and Paul, it was Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas could have resented that. He could have been difficult and blown up the partnership arrangement because he was just seething with resentment, but he didn’t. He was the type of encourager that was pleased to see someone whom he could call a protégé flourish and develop in the faith.

It’s interesting where Paul and Barnabas did come to a parting of the ways. It was in the situation involving John Mark. John Mark had deserted them on the first missionary journey. We’re not told why, but evidently Paul didn’t think he had a very good reason for abandoning them. When you have a good man such as the Son of Encouragement, what are the issues that he will go to the mat over? Refusing to give someone a second chance. Barnabas was related to John Mark and he was willing to give him a second chance. Maybe given John Mark’s temperament and whatever it was that caused him to bail out on the first journey, he needed someone like Barnabas to take him under his wing and just encourage him. He went on to write the second gospel (which may be the next big series I undertake) and was valuable to Paul at the end of his life. Who can begin to state the value of Barnabas and his encouragement in giving us the gospel of Mark which most scholars believe was the first of the synoptic gospels to be written and was very influential in the writing of Matthew and Luke. It could be said that it was the encouragement of a man like Barnabas that gave us much of our biblical understanding of who Jesus is and what he did.

Then we see that Barnabas was full of faith. There are two specific individuals about whom it is said that they were full of faith – Stephen and Barnabas. Stephen in Acts 6 and Barnabas in Acts 11. In each case, the early church needed people they could depend upon for the completion of a specific task. In Acts 6, we read, that the apostles said, “³ Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

The other person they said this about was Barnabas. In Acts 11 we read that the church in Antioch was growing like crazy and they needed someone to come and teach and encourage the people. Barnabas was the natural candidate for that. ²² News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord

with all their hearts.²⁴ He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.”

Faith is simply trusting God. In Hebrews 11 we see that faith is that quality that enabled all of the heroes of the Old Testament to be saved. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. God is looking for our faith . . .

The last thing we see about Barnabas is the he was full of the holy spirit. There are a lot of different understandings of what it means to be full of the Spirit. I've entitled this series “Portrait of a Christian”. The point of the fruit of the Spirit is to say that when God's spirit is working in our life, these are the characteristics that will be evident. If one of the definitions of goodness is to say that you are useful for what you were made for, as you yield yourself more and more to the Holy Spirit, you will become a useful person, able to fulfill the purpose for which you were made. You can live a life pleasing to God and beneficial to others.

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