**A Man Who Wasn’t Full of Baloney!**

(Acts 11:24-30)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

One day a game warden happened upon a redneck sitting next to a lake with a big bucket of fish. When he asked to see his fishing license, he replied, “Oh, I’m not fishing. These are my pets. Once a week I bring them here and release them into the water, and let them swim around for awhile. Then I whistle, they come back, and I take them home.” The game warden replied, “You’re full of baloney—and you’re under arrest!” But the redneck said, “It’s true, we do it all the time!” The warden looked at him dubiously and said, “Prove it!” So he dumped the bucket into the lake, and after a few minutes he whistled. When nothing happened, the game warden said, “Well, where’s the fish?” And the redneck replied: “What fish?”

Well, it turns out the warden was right, he *was* full of baloney! But last week we were introduced to a man named Barnabas who—as we’re about to see—was full of something else. In verse 23 of our text, Barnabas had just finished encouraging the new believers in Antioch to cleave to the Lord, and in verse 24 we learn why he did that:

**“For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord” (Acts 11:24).**

That word “for” there indicates that the reason Barnabas exhorted those new believers to cleave to the Lord was because he was “a good man,” and in our last lesson we learned *why* he’s described so favorably. It was because *he himself* cleaved to the Lord, even after God picked Matthias to be the twelfth apostle instead of him. It takes a good man to cleave to the Lord instead of forsaking Him after a disappointment like that.

Of course, Luke is quick to tell us that *another* reason he exhorted them to cleave to the Lord was that he was “full of the Holy Ghost.” As I’m sure you know, the Holy Ghost is always in favor of believers cleaving to the Lord!

This means that Barnabas was one of the believers that we read about in Acts 2:1,4, where it says:

**“…when the day of Pentecost was fully come…*they were all* *filled with the Holy Ghost,* and began to speak with other tongues…”**

Barnabas was obviously one of those 120 believers (Acts 1:15) who were filled with the Spirit on that historic Day of Pentecost. And when our text says that he was *still* filled with the Spirit a few years later here in Acts 11, that tells us that the filling of the Spirit wasn’t just a one-day experience.

And that’s important to understand, for it was during those years that the Apostle John wrote to those disciples and said,

**“Whosoever is born of God *doth not commit sin…*he *cannot* sin…” (I John 3:9 cf. 5:18).**

The most remarkable thing about those disciples wasn’t that they could speak in tongues. The most remarkable thing about them was that they literally *could not sin!*

But we know that this filling of the Spirit didn’t last *forever,* for later the Apostle Paul had to write,

**“…when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, *because he was to be blamed”* (Galatians 2:11).**

If you know that passage, you know that Peter was doing something that he shouldn’t oughta been doing. That means that he was *no longer* filled with the Spirit—and neither has anyone been filled with Him since that time, no matter how many people you’ve met who claim to be able to speak with tongues.

But you don’t know that the filling of the Holy Ghost and that sinlessness *began and ended* during those few years between Acts 2 and Acts 11, you’re going to read I John 3:9 and think it’s saying that born again believers *today* can’t sin. And then you’re going to be tempted to conclude that you yourself must *not* be born again because you *can* sin.

Unless you’re one of the sincere believers who have deluded themselves into thinking they don’t sin any more. Years ago a grace pastor named Don Elifson held a debate with the pastor of a church whose members had convinced themselves they no longer sinned, based on their misunderstanding of I John 3:9.

But if you don’t understand the temporary nature of that filling, you’re more likely to do what a lot of pastors do, and that is to say that I John 3:9 *must not mean what it says.* And then you’re going to do what they do and start monkeying around with the word “commit” in I John 3:9 and say that it means *practice,* to make it fit the experience of God’s people today—all because they fail to recognize that John was writing to Jews living back then, *not* to believers living today. And once you start changing God’s Word to fit your understanding of God’s Word, they can stick a fork in you, as they say, because you’re done, spiritually speaking.

When verse 24 says that Barnabas was also full of *faith,* that’s one of the times when the word “faith” means *faithfulness,* as it does when Paul said of the unsaved Jews who crucified the Lord and stoned His prophet:

**“For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make *the faith of God* without effect?” (Romans 3:3).**

Just because some Jews didn’t have faith didn’t mean God would be unfaithful to the rest of the Jews. And because *Barnabas* was faithful, “much people was added to the Lord” (Acts 11:24).

That’s when Barnabas realized he was going to need some help with the *teaching* of that many new believers, so he did what it says he did as we read on in our text:

**“Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul” (Acts 11:25).**

Now here it’s no surprise that Barnabas would look to Saul for help. He and Saul went way back! Don’t forget, Barnabas was the one who convinced the 12 apostles that Saul was really saved when they were all afraid of him. Barnabas must have had extended conversations with Saul to have trusted him enough to risk exposing the Lord’s apostles to him. And that means Barnabas probably knew that the Lord had given Saul a new ministry among the Gentiles

But that means he *also* knew that Saul was going to need a base of operations for his new ministry, a home church that could serve as his spiritual headquarters—just as *Jerusalem* was the headquarters of the twelve’s ministry to the Jews.

And in our last lesson, we learned that this church in Antioch was filled with Grecians, Jews who spoke Greek instead of Hebrew. And Greek was *the language* of the Gentiles, making Antioch the *ideal* base for the apostle of the Gentiles.

Saul must have thought so too, for as we read on in our text we see that he accepted Barnabas’s invitation to come to Antioch:

**“And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26).**

Now when it says they taught the church for “a whole year,” that tells us that Saul wasn’t the only one who benefitted from this new arrangement of making Antioch Saul’s home base. Saul knew the Old Testament Scriptures *well,* having learned them at the best Ivy League school in Jerusalem, the school of Gamaliel. And now that Saul also knew *the Lord,* he knew how to *teach* those Scriptures as they should be taught—in a way that pointed to *Christ.* So the church here in Antioch was going to get as much out of Saul as he was going to get out of them!

But this verse raises a question that I’m often asked by grace believers, and that is if *we* should be called Christians. The reason grace believers ask this is that they know Peter wrote to the Jewish kingdom saints in I Peter 4:16 and said,

**“…if any man suffer *as a Christian,* let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.”**

Since Peter uses the term “Christian” in writing to Jewish kingdom saints, grace believers naturally wonder if *we* should use it too. But we know that “Christian” is an *interdispensational* term, for a couple of reasons. First, because of what Agrippa said to Paul in Acts 26:28:

**“Then Agrippa said unto Paul, *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”***

Now I know what grace believers sometimes say about these words. They are quick to point out that it was *Agrippa* who used the term, not Paul. But as we read on, we’ll see that Paul didn’t argue with him. That is, he didn’t say, “I’m not trying to get you to become a Christian!” Instead,

**“Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were*…as I am…”* (Acts 26:29).**

And if that doesn’t mean, “and I am a Christian,” then I don’t know what it would mean.

But if you’re not convinced that members of the Body of Christ should be called Christians, look what Paul wrote to the members of the Body of Christ in Ephesus:

**“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, *of whom* the whole family in heaven and earth *is named”* (Ephesians 3:14,15).**

Our apostle Paul says that you and I are “named” of Christ, and I don’t know what that name would be if not *Christian.*

Now I take the time to say all of that because when grace believers *over—*rightly divide the Scriptures, and say that something is for kingdom saints only when it’s actually for *all* believers, it does more harm than good. For other believers can see right through that, and that tends to make them want to throw the baby out with the bathwater and dismiss “rightly dividing the Word” altogether. We have many things in common with the people of Israel, and one of those is the name of our common Savior.

Well, Barnabas and Saul didn’t ask for any help in teaching the people, but as we read on we see some help seemed to materialize without their asking:

**“And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch” (Acts 11:27).**

But I personally don’t think that these prophets went to Antioch because they heard Barnabas and Saul needed help teaching those new Grecian saints, for after they arrived we read:

**“And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar” (Acts 11:28).**

Now we know that a “dearth” was a *famine,* for the first time the word is used in the Bible we read:

**“And the seven years of *dearth* began to come…but in all the land of Egypt *there was bread”* (Genesis 41:54).**

But now here we have to ask why prophets in Jerusalem would travel 300 miles to Antioch to tell this new church that there was a famine on the way. You say, “To warn them about it!” Well, maybe. But as we read on we see that they might have had what we call an ulterior motive in warning them about it:

**“Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea:**

**“Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:29,30).**

Here you get the idea that maybe these prophets traveled to Antioch to let those new believers know that the church in Jerusalem was going to need their help in surviving the impending dearth. If so, it looks like they took the hint and determined to send them some relief, whether they were hinting for it or not.

Now you’d think it would be the other way around. That is, you’d think that the established church in Jerusalem would send help to those new believers in Antioch. After all, didn’t Paul say,

**“…the children ought not to lay up for the parents, *but the parents for the children”* (II Corinthians 12:14).**

Children don’t leave an inheritance for their parents, parents leave one for their children. Of course, about all my wife and I will be able to leave our kids is our house—which if they sell they just might be able to pay off all the debts we’ll probably *also* leave them!

But if parents are supposed to lay up for their kids, you’d think that the “mother church” in Jerusalem should have sent money and provisions to the tender young assembly in Antioch, not the other way around. *Especially* when we remember what we read about the church in Jerusalem earlier in our study of Acts:

**“*Neither was there any among them that lacked:* for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need” (Acts 4:34,35).**

Not a single member of the church in Jerusalem lacked for a single thing. So why would they send prophets to Antioch to hint that *they* should help *them?* Or if I’m mistaken and they *weren’t* hinting, why would those new believers determine to send such relief?

Well, when it says that they liquidated their assets in Jerusalem, you should know that the assets that they liquidated were their *investment* properties—what we would call “income properties; lands and houses that they rented out to others for financial reimbursement. We know that the “houses” they sold didn’t include their primary residences, for in the very next chapter we read of Peter:

**“And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John” (Acts 12:12).**

As you can see, believers still had houses to live in. They just sold their *income* properties. But when you liquidate your income property, you can’t live on the proceeds forever! Eventually you’re going to run out of money and need *additional* income. So how come they decided to live that way?

Well, as you may remember, the Lord *told them* to live that way *if they wanted to be saved:*

**“A certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him…*sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor…”* (Luke 18:18-22).**

So *now* we have to ask why the Lord told His people to do something so ridiculous! I mean, didn’t He know what bad financial advice that was?

Well, it was only bad advice when you have long term planning in mind. It was actually very good advice in you’re making a short term investment—and the Lord was definitely thinking short term. You see, this is one of the many proofs we have that the Lord knew they were at the doorstep of the Tribulation, the seven years of trouble that Daniel predicted in Daniel 9, the Tribulation that would have come had God not interrupted His prophetic program with the dispensation of the mystery. That’s why the Lord said to His disciples,

**“When *YE* therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place…Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains” (Matthew 24:15,16).**

The abomination of which He spoke was *the Antichrist,* and the Lord expected that His hearers would live to enter the Tribulation and see the beast with their own eyes. That’s *also* why He told them,

**“*Take no thought* for your life, *what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink;* nor yet for your body, *what ye shall put on*…Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; *yet your heavenly Father feedeth them.* Are ye not much better than they?...And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, *shall He not much more clothe you,* O ye of little faith?” (Matthew 6:25-33).**

Now if you want to talk about bad financial advice, that takes the cake! But the Lord *went on* to say,

**“Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?...*But seek ye first the kingdom of God,* and His righteousness; *and all these things shall be added unto you”* (Matthew 6:31-33).**

The Lord told His followers that their Father would provide food and clothing for them if they sought His kingdom by selling all they had to get saved so they could *enter* the kingdom. If they did that, and pooled their resources as He also told them to do, they would lack for nothing during the short term of the Tribulation that was about to fall on the earth.

And as we saw in Acts 4, *it was working!* The Jews who followed the Lord’s instructions didn’t lack for a thing.

So how come those prophets were in Antioch hinting that those saints in Jerusalem would need relief? That’s a question that even a lot of *pastors* can’t answer very well. But you can, for you know that God interrupted His prophetic program and the Tribulation didn’t materialize.

And when it didn’t, the people in the church in Jerusalem began to run out of money, eventually becoming “the *poor* saints in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26) when what was supposed to be a short term arrangement ended up spanning many years instead.

Now if you don’t understand all that, you’re going to think that the Lord didn’t know what He was doing in giving that bad financial advice. Or worse yet, you’re going to try and *follow* that bad financial advice and end up lacking like you wouldn’t believe! Or you’ll end up doing what most pastors do and conclude that what the Lord *meant* was that they shouldn’t take *too much* thought for what they should wear or where their next meal would come from. That’s the only way you can make His words fit what’s happening today.

But that’s not what He said! He said what He meant and meant what He said—He just didn’t say it to you! Here we have yet another example of the importance of “rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15). It’s the only way the Bible can be understood.

But now when verse 29 says that the Jewish saints in Antioch determined to send relief to Jerusalem “every man according to his ability,” how come those believers had the ability to *send* that relief? I mean, hadn’t they sold all that they had too? If so, how could they help others?

The answer is that God only expected the saints *in Judaea* to pool their resources to get through the Tribulation. God had *another* plan to provide for His children in the outlying areas, as we see when the prophet Micah prayed for Tribulation Jews, saying:

**“*Feed Thy people*…let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old. *According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt* will I shew unto him marvellous things” (Micah 7:14,15).**

Well, how *did* God feed His people when they came out of Egypt? If you forgot, Exodus 16:14-18 reminds us when it says,

**“…upon the face of the wilderness there lay…*manna*…And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat…Gather of it every man according to his eating…And the children of Israel did so, *and…had no lack.”***

Hey, where’d you hear that “had no lack” before? In Acts 4, when the Jews in Jerusalem pooled their resources! But as you can see from Micah’s petition, in areas *outside* of Jerusalem, God plans to feed His children with *manna.*

And He *also* plans to feed them in some other ways, like how He fed Elijah during a famine that was caused by a drought:

**“Elijah…said unto Ahab…there shall not be dew nor rain these years…And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying…hide thyself by the brook Cherith…that thou shalt drink of the brook; *and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there…*And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening” (I Kings 17:1-6).**

Boy, talk about room service! I’ve heard of Meals on Wheels, but never Meals on Wings. By the way, we have a word for “bread and flesh.” We call it a *hamburger.* I can just hear the ravens saying to Elijah, “Would you like fries with that?” I’d respond, “Yes, and supersize it!”

But as we see in the rest of that passage, God had still *another* plan to feed His prophet:

**“And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath…behold, *I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee”* (I Kings 17:7-9).**

If you’ll check that passage you’ll see that that woman was a Gentile! And that typifies yet *another* way God plans to feed His children in Israel during the Tribulation. Don’t forget, when the Lord describes how He’ll judge the Gentiles in Matthew 25:31-46, He plans to judge them on the basis of whether or not they fed His “brethren” in Israel.

You say, “What makes you think all this is a type of how God will feed His children in the Tribulation?” If so, its because of what James said about Elijah in James 5:17:

**“Elias…prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth *by the space of three years and six months.”***

If three and a half years sounds like a familiar period of time, it’s because that’s how long the “great tribulation” will last (Mt.24:21), the last half of Daniel’s 70th week. *That’s* why I think that the ways God fed Elijah are types of how He will feed His children during the Tribulation if they live in areas like Antioch. As I always say, Israel’s past is a dress rehearsal for her future.

Now it’s important to notice that each man in Antioch gave “according to his ability” because that’s *always* how God wants His people to help others. God has never been in favor of His people overextending themselves financially in order to help others, and He has likewise never asked His people to overextend themselves in order to help His work. And we know that’s as true today as it was back then, for our apostle wrote to the Corinthians saying,

**“I mean not that other men be eased, *and ye burdened:* But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: *that there may be equality”* (II Corinthians 8:13,14).**

See how that shows God didn’t expect them to go broke helping others?

Now having said that, under grace we can *choose* to burden ourselves to help others, as the Macedonians did. Paul wrote,

**“… we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy *and their deep poverty* abounded unto the riches *of their liberality.* For to their power, I bear record, yea, *and beyond their power* they were *willing of themselves;* Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints”**

**(II Corinthians 8:1-4).**

Those guys certainly didn’t give according to their ability. They gave *above and beyond* their ability!

If you’re wondering what could make a man act like that—let alone a whole *church* full of people!—the answer is *the grace of God.* The grace of God is what caused those Macedonian saints to do what we read in the next verse of that chapter:

**“…they…*first gave their own selves to the Lord,* and unto us by the will of God” (II Corinthians 8:5).**

Do you know what that means? It means if you do what a lot of Christians *talk* about doing and give yourself to the Lord, you’d first better be sure that’s something you want to do. Because—if you do—you might just find yourself helping people above and beyond your financial ability to help them, and giving to the Lord’s work above your ability as well. And that usually leads to giving of yourself in all other areas of life too. You see, helping others is addicting! (ICor.16:15).

But after 41 years in the ministry, I can assure you that you won’t regret it, for a life lived that way for the Lord is the most rewarding, fulfilling and satisfying life imaginable. And the retirement benefits are out of this world—literally!