**THINGS THAT MATTER MOST - DEVOTIONAL PAPERS BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**37. A FRIEND OF THE SUSPECTED by JOHN H. JOWETT**

SUCH was the character of the Apostle Barnabas. From his life there emanated the strength and perfume of goodness, and he ministered among his brethren as the son of consolation. Whenever people were under a cloud he brought the light of cheer. Whenever they moved in timidity, by reason of suspicion, he brought the atmosphere of confidence. I want to look at his character and inspect the springs of his disposition and service.

How was his life related to God? First of all we are told he was "full of faith." The word "full" is strangely significant. There are analogies which may help us in our apprehension of this side of his character. We speak sometimes of a singer as being "full of music." I spent an hour a little time ago in the presence of a distinguished singer. Every moment she seemed to be bubbling over with song. Every interest in her life was controlled by the dominant passion. Every power in her being seemed to sway to one inspiration like fern and reeds responding to the common movement of the wind. An organist's fingers are raining music even when he is not at the organ. They are moving to inaudible sounds. The soul that is full of music brings its music into everything, and every circumstance becomes the home of song. And so it is with the life that is "full of faith." Let me give another analogy. When the conductor of an orchestra raises his baton the eyes of every instrumentalist are fixed upon him. It would be right to say that the orchestra is "full of obedience." Every member in the fellowship is controlled by one will, and all the powers co-operate in this common subjection. The life that is "full of faith" is a life in which every power of the soul pays homage to the will of the Lord. Every faculty is open in trustful dependence on the Unseen, and this obeisance is paid in all the varying circumstances of the ever-changing road. Barnabas was "full of faith."

And the second characteristic of his supreme relationships was this: he was "full of the Holy Spirit." This fulness is a sequent to the other. Faith is the willingness of the soul to receive the Holy Spirit. Faith implies that the soul is disposed to Divine hospitality. It is willing to entertain the Lord. It is ready to open the door to heavenly presences, and to throw the windows open to heavenly airs. I suppose that some of the most nauseous places on the face of the earth are on the high seas. Where the air is purest and cleanest uncleanness may most abound. There can be nothing more repulsive than the air of many a sailor's cabin, and this in spite of the fact that his boat is enveloped in the purest air that enswathes the earth. We can breathe a stenchful atmosphere when immeasurable leagues of finest air are pressing round on every side. Now, to open the port-hole is to have fellowship with the infinite. The little cabin becomes filled with air that has been washed and sweetened by the influences of immeasurable space. And so it is that faith opens the life to breathings of the Infinite Spirit. Faith makes the soul competent to receive the Holy Spirit. Barnabas was open to the Divine, and the Divine became his guest.

Now turn to his human relationships. What should we expect such a man to be in his active life in the world? I should venture to characterize the life of this early apostle in one phrase. He was the friend of the suspected. First of all he was the friend of suspected individuals. Saul heard the call of his Lord, and responded, and became a disciple of the Son of God. Now, there is always a strange reluctance to believe in the goodness of people who have been reclaimed. We suspect that their apparent improvement may be only a fresh disguise of their vice. Their tears may be only part of their trickery. We say to ourselves and to one another, "We have known him of old." Or we say, "What is he up to now?" His conversion is regarded as a new make-up by an old actor. In some such way was the Apostle Paul regarded at his conversion. He was the object of deep suspicion. He was suspected of being a Jesuit before even Jesuitry was born. He might be seeking deeper intimacies in order that he might carry out malicious designs. "They were afraid, and did not believe that he was a disciple." What then can be done for a man who is treated with such chilling vigilance? "Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles." It was a very delicate companionship which Barnabas thus offered to the timid convert to help him along the early steps of the way. I try to imagine the two as they made their way to the apostles' company. I try to imagine the character of their intercourse. I can feel how they would grow into each other, and how heart and mind would commune with heart and mind in a fellowship never to be broken. And this is the kind of strengthening communion which thousands of converts need in our own day, especially those who are leaving behind them the record of glaring and notorious lives. They need the friendship of men who shield them from suspicion, and who by their confidence nourish their frailty into hopeful strength.

Let me give another instance of this man's disposition and service. We lose sight of the convert Saul. He became a recluse. He retires into comparative privacy and solitude. He seems to be lost to the Church, and no one appears concerned about his whereabouts. For some years he vanishes from our sight. And then Barnabas came to Antioch to execute a commission with which he had been entrusted by the Church in Jerusalem. And when his task was done he "departed to Tarsus to seek Saul." I like to think of that man setting out on his journey in quest of the other man destined to be the great apostle to the Gentiles. It seems as though the Apostle Paul was twice saved by Barnabas to the services of the Christian Church. He brought him to Antioch, and the great missionary crusade began. How much we are indebted to the folk who seek out the hidden people, the folk who fetch us out of our holes! There are thousands of people hiding away in forgotten corners, and Barnabas is needed to bring them to their places of ministry and service.

There is one other instance where Barnabas overwhelmed the suspicions of others and redeemed the defeated man from alienation. John Mark had become fearful. He was perhaps afraid of the fever that haunted the swamps along the Asiatic coast. Or perhaps it was the looming of other kinds of danger and difficulty. Whatever it was it was something that frowned upon them, and Mark left the apostolic company and turned back. He at once became a child of suspicion. And at a later day, when a new enterprise was being commenced, "Paul thought not good to take him." But again Barnabas interposed and "took Mark." How much we are indebted to the gracious folk who are willing to give us a second chance! What a radiant record shines behind the names of those who have permitted the fallen to try again! It is the way of the Lord.

When Jonah had rejected his first command, and had turned his back upon it, and wandered in the ways of trespass and transgression, the Lord gave him a second chance. "And the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time." This is the disposition that needs to be manifested by the followers of the Christ. There are multitudes of people who have broken their covenant, who have deserted to the foe, who have eaten the bread of the enemy, but who are longing to return to the old camp. Barnabas was the friend of just such longing souls. He was the helper of those who had failed. He was the advocate of the second chance.

But he was not only the friend of suspected individuals. He was the guardian of suspected causes. There were strange doings at Antioch, which were reported to Jerusalem as the extension of the Kingdom of God. Great doubts arose as to its being genuine, and many looked upon it with severe suspicion. Barnabas was sent as a deputation of inquiry. And what is the record of the mission? "When he had seen the grace of God," Barnabas had the requisite light. His eyes were anointed with eye salve and his perceptions were clean and clear. He knew the old fruit, even when he found it growing in a new garden. He recognized the old tokens of grace, even when they were revealed in strange conditions. "When he had seen it he was glad." And these, too, are the folk we want in our own time. We need people who can see Christ when He appears in a new dress, who can discern the cause of the Kingdom when it shows itself in novel conditions. We need the spirit of candour and of consecrated expectancy, and for these we require the fulness of faith and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. There is great work for Barnabas nowadays, for everywhere God is revealing Himself in new and diverse manners, and watchful, faithful men will love His appearing.