



Never Been to Spain

The Journals & Journeys of Paul

"A Pair of Parakletos"

I'm guessing most of us don't speak Greek but we all know a few Greek words from studying the Bible. *Agape* comes immediately to mind, as does *koinonia*.

Another might be *parakletos*. It's the word Jesus used for God the Holy Spirit when He told His disciples He was leaving but would give them another *parakletos* like Himself to be with them, with us, forever.

A *parakletos* is an advocate or a counselor or a comforter or an intercessor - someone who comes to help us, usually (but not always) through difficulty.

It can also be translated *to come alongside*. When a ship became disabled because of wreck or disrepair another ship would be dispatched to come alongside the first one and accompany the disabled vessel to safe harbor. The second ship was called a *parakletos*.

We're studying the life of the apostle Paul and have come chronologically to the time in which he was sought out by Barnabas to come help with the Gentile church in Antioch. Each movement in the story is a great living-out of the idea of coming alongside. Barnabas comes alongside the church at Antioch, then alongside Paul; then they both come alongside in Antioch and to the believers in Jerusalem.

One very important gauge of whether or not we are ministering for The Lord is how much or how little we are coming alongside His work in and through others. If God the Holy Spirit is the *parakletos*, and since He indwells us, how can we not be coming alongside others in His power?

Acts 11:19-21

19 Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.

20 But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus.

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

For the first few years after the resurrection of Jesus the believers were all Jews. Social customs and prejudices between Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles) kept the good news from spreading. All of that changed when Stephen, the first martyr of the Church Age, was stoned. Believers were scattered all over the Roman Empire to the advantage of the Gospel.

The farther a Jew lived from Jerusalem the more likely he was to have dealings with Gentiles. Arriving in Antioch, Cyprian and Cyrenian believers spoke to the Hellenists. These were Greeks who had nothing to do with Judaism.

Literally it reads, *in believing they turned to the Lord*. God receives whoever will believe in Him. Whoever you are, wherever you're from, whatever you've done... God has redeemed you on the Cross of Jesus Christ and saves you in believing.

Acts 11:22-24

22 Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.

23 When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.

24 For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

Why send Barnabas? We can't know for sure how they arrived at their decision. It was probably a combination of many factors:

- Barnabas was originally from Cyprus so he would relate well to the fellows in Antioch sharing Christ with Gentiles.
- He was faithfully serving the Church at Jerusalem.
- He was obviously available and willing to go!

A lot of factors go into when, where, and how you are called to serve God in His Church. Your part is to stay busy serving, be faithful in your service, and make yourself available.

I like the idea that Barnabas could **see** "the grace of God. It was obvious to Barnabas these Gentiles were genuinely saved. They had turned to God from the wicked, pagan idolatry of their Greek culture.

When the text says Barnabas "encouraged" them, the word so translated is a form of *parakletos*. He came alongside them to help them grow in The Lord.

He was able to *parakletos* because of three things. First, Barnabas was "a good man." Since only God is truly "good," when used of a man this indicates his goals and desires were in harmony with God's. God's goal and desire is to conform you into the image of Jesus. You come alongside others when you interpret their lives and circumstances, and give them counsel, that will further their being conformed.

Second, Barnabas was "full of the Holy Spirit." He was Spirit-filled and that meant Spirit-led.

Third, Barnabas was "full... of faith." It doesn't mean he had more faith than others but that he allowed faith to fill him. He believed God was at work and only wanted to discover God's plans and purposes then follow along.

In *parakletos* mode, we read of Barnabas,

Acts 11:25-26

25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul.

26 And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

In our modern Christian terms we'd say that God put Paul on Barnabas' heart. It may sound mystical; it's not - just spiritual. In *parakletos* mode you are always thinking in terms of the spiritual resources at your disposal and how they may best be used for The Lord. Barnabas realized, by the indwelling Spirit of God, that Paul and Antioch were a great match.

We've experienced quite a lot of this sort of thing over the years:

- When believers in Tulare were looking to establish a Calvary Chapel we realized Pastor John Maher was a great match for them. Many years later - this year, to be exact - when John was leaving to pursue a new call we realized Jacob Kelso was the Spirit's choice and sent him out.
- I could tell similar stories of Calvary Chapel of the Sierra or Calvary Chapel of Eureka, both of whom we've been *parakletos* to.

We love to help, to come alongside, other believers and other fellowships. Turns out it is evidence we are spiritually healthy.

Commentators try to make too much of the search Barnabas made for Paul in Tarsus as if he had retired from ministering and was sulking until Barnabas resurrected his career. It would have been easier, don't you think, to find Paul if he was living at home, making tents? As we've seen and said, he was busy preaching the Gospel in all the region of Syria and Cilicia.

For his part Paul was willing to come alongside the believers in Antioch so he accompanied Barnabas back there. For a solid year the two of them disciplined the believers by teaching them the Word.

They were first called "Christians" in Antioch. The name Christians is variously translated as *Christ's followers* or *Christ-like*. Jews would not have given them this name because Christ is the Greek equivalent of Messiah.

It's been suggested that this was somehow a derogatory name, given by pagans to ridicule; but I don't think so.

These believers in Antioch were so full of grace, so overflowing with grace, that they were like Jesus Christ Himself. People looked at them and saw Jesus.

Acts 11:27-30

27 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.

28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.

29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.

30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Prophets traveled from place-to-place. They spoke forth the Word of God. They also apparently could speak predictively about future events.

Agabus was going around prophesying a coming famine. With no prompting other than by the Holy Spirit, the Christians at Antioch determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.

God the Holy Spirit, the *parakletos*, prompted them to come alongside their Jewish brothers in need. And He prompted them before they even had the need!

It was a good news/bad news situation. The good news - we're giving you money to buy food. The bad news - famine is coming.

In the context of what we are learning, about being *parakletos*, I'd have to say that giving financially is an important way the Holy Spirit will prompt us to come alongside. Only Paul and Barnabas could go; or at least they were the only ones who needed to go. It wouldn't do brothers facing a famine to have more mouths to feed. They needed money.

Barnabas, you'll recall, was super-generous with his money. I think it freed him to come alongside in these remarkable ways.

We all want to grow in The Lord. We all want to be those who come alongside. Being stingy works against those spiritual goals. Take a look at your giving; at your generosity in general; and make whatever adjustments suggested by the Holy Spirit.

Acts 12:25

25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

John, or John-Mark, was Barnabas' cousin. The two men would come alongside him to further him in his ministry. A time would come, later, when Paul couldn't hang with John-Mark because he flaked out. Was Paul wrong? Was he not coming alongside?

Well, it was John-Mark who refused to come alongside... So Paul didn't want him along at all. It was a tough call, but Paul's was a tough calling. He needed folks he could count on and John-Mark wasn't quite there.

Just as God has sent a *parakletos* to us in the form of the Holy Spirit, we ourselves need to be *parakletos*.