

Jose: Committed to Encouragement

There has always been a need among Christians for encouragement; in fact, the night before He died Jesus promised His apostles that in His absence He'd send the Holy Spirit to support them (John 16:7).

The Greek word *paraklesis* is the term from which the Spirit derives the title of "comforter," and it means "to call to one's side," translated as "comfort," "consolation," and even "encouragement."

As the Lord promised, the Holy Spirit became an en-courage-ment to the apostles.

Acts chapter 4 tells us about the church when it was in need of some encouragement.

The first persecution began: Acts 4:1-3 read, As Peter and John spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. So they laid hands on them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. However, many of those who heard the Word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

Later on in verses 8 & 13 we're told that, with the Spirit's support, Peter and John defended themselves with boldness: verse 8 says that Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke to the rulers and elders of Israel, and then verse 13 says that when they saw the boldness of Peter and John ... they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. Then...

After being reprimanded, they were sent away. But...

Did this persecution stop the church from preaching the Gospel? Did fear replace boldness? No! Rather, verses 29-30 tell us that they prayed "Lord, look on their threats, and grant to your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your Word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done...."

Instantly the Spirit came to their aid: verse 31 says that When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness.

Here's the Lesson: **The Lord Is Committed to Encouragement!**

We can't encourage through miraculous means as did the Spirit in the first century, but we aren't left without an example; in fact, right in this very context there arose another great encourager who became a model for all uninspired people to follow.

He was a man of common abilities, yet his contribution to the church was so far reaching that, as we'll soon discover, we're encouraged by him today, 2,000 years later.

His name was Jose, and the noble attribute that we should desire to acquire from him is, like that of the Lord, a commitment to encouragement. He set four examples for us to emulate.

Firstly, Jose Was an Example of Encouragement in Finances.

After her establishment, the church grew at a phenomenal rate: 3,000 were added on Pentecost, and by Acts 4:4 there were 5,000 just male disciples, meaning that there could've been as many 15,000! (Indeed, as Jesus said in Luke 10:2, the harvest was plentiful.)

With such an amazing growth came an enormous burden of responsibility.

Imagine the multitude of needs that must be met in caring for thousands of people who didn't plan ahead to stay in Jerusalem long after Pentecost: they needed food, shelter, clothing, medical provisions for the sick, and so on; and this entire burden came to rest upon the shoulders of the apostles as the leaders of the church.

This was a most crucial time in the life of the young church; they were up against the wall, likely wondering from whence deliverance would come! Well...

Into this grim setting appeared Joses ... and with him comfort and encouragement.

Acts 4:32-37 read like this: Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the things they sold and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Joses wasn't the only one to give: all who owned land sold it and gave to the church. But among so many it was Joses in whom the apostles found such overwhelming source of encouragement.

There was something special about the encouragement of Joses: through his self-sacrifice, the apostles had been especially encouraged, and the church survived another crisis. So...

He was given another name to describe what was his special attribute—"Barnabas," a name that means "encouragement."

The word "encouragement" here is from the Greek term *paraklesis*, the same word used to describe the Holy Spirit who worked to encourage the disciples in the same context with spiritual gifts.

Just as the Spirit was *paraklesis* or "by the side of" the apostles to support them, so Barnabas had come "alongside the church" to support her with physical gifts. So...

How can we encourage in finances like Joses did?

When the church is in financial need, we can follow Joses' example of self-sacrifice by digging deeper into our pockets to meet that need, a need that's usually superior to other needs of life. Also...

We can encourage financially on a personal level: if it's possible to help a needy brother or sister, we should do that: First John 3:16-18 say, By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in Him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

First Corinthians 10:24 describes the proper attitude: Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. So...

Let's keep alert to the needs of our brethren, always being open to this form of encouragement.

Secondly, Joses Was an Example of Encouragement through Intercession.

There's nothing more encouraging than when two opposing parties are brought into peaceful unity by the efforts of an intercessor.

This is the great encouragement we receive through Jesus Christ, for while the law of Moses divided the world into Jews and Gentiles, alienating one from the other, Jesus as the world's Intercessor broke down that wall and made peace according to Ephesians 2:13-18.

Another word that describes intercession is "advocate"; an advocate is one who pleads in behalf of another, like our present day attorney.

According to First John 2:1, Jesus is our Advocate to the Father; so when our sins separate us from God, Jesus intercedes and pleads on our behalf. Incidentally...

The word "advocate" as used in First John also comes from the Greek term *paraklesis*. Surely...

To have a capable friend pleading our case is a great source of encouragement and comfort.

Through intercession, Barnabas brought rest to the church and needed encouragement to a new and young brother named Saul.

Saul of Tarsus, a renowned enemy of the church, was converted on his way to Damascus (Acts 9).

Then, instead of persecuting Christians there as was his plan and orders, he preached Christ: verses 20-22 read, Immediately he preached Christ in the synagogues that He's the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. And...

This enraged the Jews, so to save his life he was forced to flee from the city: verses 23-25 tell us that After many days past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him, so the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket. Then, sadly...

When he returned to Jerusalem he found himself rejected by the brethren: verse 26 says that he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him and didn't believe that he was a disciple.

They were afraid to risk their safety by allowing him to approach them; after all the harm he had done, they didn't trust his claim of conversion. (After all, there were "false (hypocritical) teachers" during that time [2 Pet. 2:1].) So...

Not being able to bridge the gap between them, there should be no doubt that Saul felt discouraged, rejected, and misunderstood; Saul needed an advocate. And who would that be?

Barnabas stepped forward and became that advocate: verses 27-28 read, Barnabas took Saul and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road and that He had spoken to him and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.

Barnabas risked his safety, for if Saul really wasn't converted, he'd be cast into prison like many others had been; besides that, he risked his reputation, for if Saul turned on the brethren, he would've lost his credibility. So...

A willingness to stick out one's neck is standard equipment for the encourager: we must be brave enough to take some risks for the brother or sister who needs an advocate.

Due to Joses' encouragement, two things occurred:

1. Saul didn't lose faith through discouragement. And...
2. Since Saul was the main leader of the persecution, the church had rest: verse 31 says that The churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

We can encourage through intercession today as well.

When two parties within the church are alienated from one another, the church is encouraged when someone is brave enough to intercede and make peace; so, "Yes," sticking our noses in where *some folks believe* we shouldn't is biblical. And, of course...

Another way to intercede is to pray for those in trouble, and let them know they're being prayed for.

Thirdly, Joses Was an Example of Encouragement toward Spiritual Growth.

The work in Antioch was expanding so rapidly that Barnabas needed help. So...

He went to Tarsus to find ... none other than Saul: Acts 11:25-26 read, Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. 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. See...

Obviously Barnabas recognized Saul's potential and encouraged him in it by offering him the chance to work at Antioch. And...

For some time afterwards, these two men were considered an evangelistic duo, being (according to Acts chapter 13) the first missionary team sent beyond Syria.

Barnabas continued to encourage Saul's spiritual growth, and Saul's talents continued to increase; then, as Saul's greater ability and success raised him to prominence over Barnabas, Barnabas quietly stepped back to follow Saul's lead.

Initially they were known as **Barnabas and Saul** (Acts 11:19, 12:25, 13:3, & 7), but they soon became known as **Paul and Barnabas** (Acts 13:43, 46, 50, 15:2, 22, & 35). (Just as Joses' name was changed to Barnabas [Acts 4:36], Saul's name was changed to Paul [Acts 13:9].)

Eventually Barnabas slipped back into obscurity, and Paul went on to take the Gospel to the Gentile world; even so, we see no hint of jealousy: Barnabas had the heart of a sincere encourager—one who doesn't seek to feed his own ego, but whose greatest desire is to see The Work move forward. If another person is better equipped for a job, a godly encourager will encourage that person in that work so that the Lord's cause may prosper. So...

We must be committed to each other's spiritual growth, and we do this when we show interest in each other's spiritual lives, even in the details.

Fourthly, Joses Was an Example of Encouragement toward Those Who Fail.

The person who failed in this case was John Mark.

According to Acts 12:25 & 13:1-5, John Mark had traveled with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but for some unknown reason he left them and returned home (13:13).

We've all experienced failure, so we can empathize with John Mark.

As Paul and Barnabas contemplated a second missionary journey, there arose a difference of opinion: Barnabas wanted to take John Mark along, and Paul didn't. Let's read Acts 15:36-38: **After a while Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the Word of the Lord to see how they're doing." Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. Now...**

Imagine this conversation:

Paul says, "He can't go! He failed once ... he'll fail again. He can't be trusted!" To which...

Barnabas says, "No Paul. He can do it! He'll succeed with some encouragement." Now...

We're in no position to judge this situation; we can only state what we know from verses 39-41: The contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Just think of the encouragement that John Mark received from Barnabas! John Mark failed, but Joses believed in him to the point that he thought it worth dissolving the first missionary team; due to this act of encouragement, many more received encouragement. Notice:

Paul's confidence in John Mark returned:

In Colossians 4:10 he was recommended by Paul to the Colossian brethren.

In Philemon verse 24 Paul considered him a fellow-laborer in the cause of Christ.

In Second Timothy 4:9-11 Paul spoke of John Mark encouraging him while he was in prison.

We also receive encouragement from John Mark today ... when we read The Gospel According to Mark. Yes, John Mark was its author! The encouragement of Barnabas therefore reaches us today!

See the good encouragement has done! Is there someone we know who has failed and has demonstrated the heart of one who's willing to try again? Then this is the time for encouragement!

Have you ever needed encouragement after you've failed? Weren't you revived and given new hope when someone else showed faith in you? Then let's don't be like Paul was in Acts 15, but dare to encourage others who have failed.

The return may far outweigh the time and energy spent as in the case of John Mark. You know...

In Conclusion...

The greatest motivation for encouraging others comes not from the example of Barnabas, but from the source of all encouragement: as indicated in our introduction by saying that **the Lord is committed to encouragement**, our heavenly Father, according to Second Corinthians 1:3, is the God of all comfort.

Here again we discover that the Greek term for comfort is *paraklesis* which means "encouragement."

Verse 4 says that He comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

The source of Joses' encouragement was the encouragement he had received from the Father; he, as a child of God, was merely reflecting the nature he had received from his Father.

Every Christian has received comfort from the Father, and now it's our turn to reflect our Father's love by following the example of our brother Joses.

Let's be committed to encouragement...

- ~ through finances,
- ~ through intercession,
- ~ toward spiritual growth, and...
- ~ toward those who fail.

[Leland Byars, 1996?. Adopted & revised by Tony Denton, 9/07.]