

FRUIT NO. 6: GOODNESS (Acts 11:22-24)

2.24.19

INTRODUCTION

Looking at the sixth fruit of the Spirit: “Goodness.” Goal: To see how goodness — and all these fruits — play a critical part in presenting Christ and His “good news” (gospel) to the world.

SETTING

First persecution of Christians:

Followed death of deacon Stephen (Acts 7:57-8:1) somewhere around 33-35 AD. Luke tells us that, following the death of Stephen, in fact, *[o]n that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria — Acts 8:1b.*

Led by Saul of Tarsus (later the apostle Paul): *Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison — Acts 8:3.*

Result of persecution:

Those who had been scattered (due to persecution) preached the word wherever they went — Acts 8:4. Christianity left its “birth center” in Jerusalem and began spreading the “good news” of salvation wherever they sought safety.

Some Christians in fleeing persecution went far from Jerusalem (Acts 11:19):

Phoenicia — present-day Lebanon

Cyprus — an island-nation about 70 miles off the coast of Phoenicia

(Syrian) Antioch —

About 300 miles north of Jerusalem

Third largest city in Roman Empire (behind Rome and Alexandria)

Population of between 250,000 and 500,000 people

Large Jewish population that maintained excellent relationships with Gentiles

Church intentionally evangelized Gentiles as well as Jews, particularly led by men from Cyprus and Cyrene (the capitol of a province in modern-day Libya in North Africa) (Acts 11:20); as a result: *The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord — Acts 11:21.*

Gentiles immediately accepted into Christian fellowship with no issue of claiming requirements of Mosaic law (especially circumcision, contrary to “Judaizers”).

Barnabas’ Story:

First appearance: *All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. From time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet — Acts 4:32-37.*

Second appearance: *When [Saul] came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. 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. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord — Acts 9:26-28.

TEXT (ACTS 11:22-24)

Third appearance: *News of [the church in Antioch] reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord — Acts 11:22-24.*

Supplemental: *Then Barnabas went to Tarsus (an important commercial and education center in the province of Cilicia in Asia Minor [modern-day Turkey], about 86 miles northwest of Antioch and about 10 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea) to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called “Christians” first at Antioch — Acts 11:25-26.* Incidentally, the term “Christians” means “belonging to Christ” or “followers of Christ.” It was a label first handed to them by nonbelievers and intended initially as an insult and, from that standpoint, meant “little Christ” or “Christies.” However, believers were drawn to the name because it showed their lives were now being viewed as something distinctive — both from Judaism and from the culture in general.

APPLICATION — What made Barnabas “good?”

First, what is “goodness?” According to the Greek, “goodness” is kindness of heart or act. It signifies not merely goodness as a quality; rather it is goodness in action, goodness expressing itself in deeds with grace, tenderness and compassion. It is the whole idea behind the words of Christ from the Sermon on the Mount: *“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 5:14-16.* So how did Barnabas display that kind of goodness when he was at Antioch?

First, he was joyful: *When Barnabas arrived (in Antioch) and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad — Acts 11:23a.* Barnabas was literally rejoicing in what he was seeing God do in that church and, in how he responded, he was displaying one of the fruits of the Spirit: “joy.” That joy was based on how he saw God so graciously working among all people — Jews and Gentiles — in that church, and how they were genuinely becoming one body through Christ, fulfilling what Paul would later be saying to the Galatian church: *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus — Paul, Galatians 3:28.* Not only was sin being washed away, but so was division. Something far bigger than human effort was at work here, and that brought Barnabas indescribable joy.

Second, he was an encourager: Barnabas *encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts — Acts 11:23b.* Barnabas was not only living up to his nickname — “son of encouragement” — but he was “exhorting” them, literally, urging them onward to continue to pursue the Lord — and the Greek tells us that he “continued encouraging them” to “continue remaining” true to the Lord — in other words, “keep on keeping on.” We call that “discipleship”

— the process by which disciples grow in Jesus Christ and are equipped by the Holy Spirit, who resides in our heart, to overcome the pressures, trials and cultural impacts of this present life and become more Christ-like. This is not about knowing more information about Jesus but knowing Him to become transformed into His image. In other words, it is not just teaching precepts about Jesus, but also modeling those precepts in our own lives as an example to those around us. Barnabas knew from personal experience that there is no life greater than the life found in God through Jesus Christ. His encouragement was not only to lay claim to new life, but to continue to grow in that life and, as David had written some ten centuries before: ***You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek You; I thirst for You, my whole being longs for You, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. . . . On my bed I remember You; I think of You through the watches of the night. Because You are my help, I sing in the shadow of Your wings. I cling to You; Your right hand upholds me — David, Psalm 63:1, 6-8.*** They had found life that brought them peace and purpose, and he wanted them to seek to find even more of that life in Christ; as Paul said to the Colossian church: ***[J]ust as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness — Paul, Colossians 2:6-7.***

Third, he was ***a good man, full of the Holy Spirit — Acts 11:24a.*** No one can be called good in the Biblical sense without being filled with the Holy Spirit, the result of a life surrendered to God through Jesus Christ. What made Barnabas good was the fact of the Holy Spirit having filled his life and how that directed everything about him; as Christ had said: ***“[W]hen He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth” — Jesus Christ, John 16:13a.*** That same Holy Spirit allowed Barnabas the full courage to completely engage himself in the work of the body of Christ because, as someone full of the Holy Spirit, he knew that, as Paul wrote: ***[I]t is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come — Paul, II Corinthians 1:21-22.***

Fourth, he was full of ***faith — Acts 11:24a.*** Faith in the Greek means “firm persuasion” and, when used in the NT, is always referencing faith in God or Christ, or things spiritual. Because faith is connected to relationship with God through Jesus Christ, the main elements of such faith are (1) a firm conviction, producing a full acknowledgement of God’s revelation or truth, culminating, of course, in the revelation of Jesus Christ, (2) a personal surrender to God based on that revelation, and (3) a conduct or lifestyle inspired by that surrender. Barnabas was sold out for Christ because he acknowledged God’s truth as presented by Christ and surrendered his life to God based on what Christ promised. And now, in the presence of the Christians in Antioch, his faith also showed itself in how he conducted himself to the point that his faith became transparent to all those around him. No matter what was happening, he projected the faith that God was in complete control of everything around them, that God’s promises were sure, that his presence was real, and his ultimate victory was complete. As Paul would write to Timothy: ***I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able — Paul, II Timothy 1:12b.*** Christ’s resurrection had shown Barnabas the ultimate power of God and, if that power could raise the dead, that same power would also sustain all his promises of guidance, protection, and love.

Fifth, as a result of how his faith in God through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ showed to those around him, ***a great number of people were brought to the Lord — Acts 11:24b.*** God used Barnabas, through his words and actions, to be a means of presenting the gospel. The

good with which Barnabas lived his life became a platform that showed Jesus; as a result, people could see the life of Jesus in him. His life validated what his preaching and teaching about Jesus presented. And notice: The text doesn't say that people were brought into that congregation. The numeric growth in the Antioch church is not what is being celebrated. It is people coming into the Kingdom of God. That's the great event of which Luke is making note.

And of course, this was just the beginning of God's work in Antioch, as he inspired Barnabas to go to Tarsus in Asia Minor to get Saul so that he could join into the work which God was doing. Barnabas truly lived a life that reflected "goodness."

CONCLUSION

In Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth, he penned these words: *[T]hanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of Him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing — Paul, II Corinthians 2:14-15.* There is to be a sweetness to our witness to the world, both in our words and in our actions. The writer of Hebrews issued this warning regarding our testimony to the world: *See to it that no one misses the grace of God — Hebrews 12:15a (NIV 1984).* And yet, if we are to be honest, the impact of Christianity on the world today has taken a decidedly negative turn. To put it simply, Christians have one large-sized publicity problem.

In his 2014 book, *Vanishing Grace*, author Philip Yancey quoted from the president of a research company located in Phoenix which had done some research on our contemporary culture's response to Christians. He uncovered a degree of animosity that went far beyond a mere difference of opinion on today's issues. Instead, "Evangelicals were called illiterate, greedy, psychos, racist, stupid, narrow-minded, bigots, idiots, fanatics, nut cases, screaming loons, delusional, simpletons, pompous, morons, cruel, nitwits, and freaks, and that's just a partial list. . . . Some people don't have any idea what evangelicals actually are or what they believe — they just know they can't stand evangelicals."

Another recent survey noted the following: 84% of young nonbelievers said they personally knew at least one committed Christian, yet just 15% thought the lifestyles of those Christians they knew were significantly different from the lifestyles of the rest of the world.

Some other facts:

Barely a third of French and British respondents to a survey even believe that God exists.

Steve Jobs (Apple) left church when the pastor had no answer for his questions about God and the starving children of Africa.

Comedian Cathy Ladman: "All religions are the same: religion is basically guilt with different holidays."

"Nones" (those who on census forms claim no religious affiliation) now comprise one-third of those under the age of 30 — a larger group than all Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Lutherans combined.

In 1996: 85% of Americans with no religious commitment viewed Christianity favorably.

In 2009: 16% of Americans with no religious commitment viewed Christianity favorably.

In 2009: 3% of Americans with no religious commitment viewed "evangelicals" favorably.

Best representation of that: St. Mary's Episcopal (stories of "hurts" in churches in people's past)

According to *Christianity Today*: Four (4) common complaints about Christians:

You don't listen to me.

You judge me.

Your faith confuses me.

You talk about what's wrong instead of making it right.

None of these sound like having anything to do with friendship or even relationship. This is HUGE because most conversations come about as an outgrowth of friendship.

When Philip Yancey asked people, "Tell me the first word that comes to your mind when I say *Christian*," not one time has someone suggested the word *love*. Yet without question that is the proper biblical answer. Christ said: "***By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another***" — *Jesus Christ, John 13:35*. And in a poll of college students, asked to write the first thing that came to mind when they heard the word *Christianity*, most frequently wrote: "People who don't practice what they preach."

Jonathan Sacks, the former chief rabbi of Great Britain, said: "The Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) in one verse commands, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18),' but in no fewer than 36 places commands us to 'love the stranger.'" He adds: "The supreme religious challenge is to see God's image in one who is not in our image." We need to see our "neighbors," whoever they may be, not as a potential convert but rather as somebody God *already* loves.

INCREDIBLE DISCONNECT! WHY? We have not communicated the very essence of the gospel: LOVE. [Story of Dutch Catholic theologian and writer Henri Nouwen and his visit to AIDS clinic in San Francisco in the days before drugs were found that could to some level treat that disease. He walked around that clinic and asked the men he saw if they wanted to talk. As he listened to accounts of promiscuity and addiction and self-destructive behavior, he heard hints of a thirst for love that had never been quenched. His prayer moving forward from that experience became: "God, help me to see others not as my enemies or as ungodly but rather as *thirsty* people. And give me the courage and compassion to offer Your Living Water, which alone quenches deep thirst."]

We are all "wired" to be seeking after God; Solomon said: ***[God] has also set eternity in the human heart*** — *Ecclesiastes 3:11b*. It is that inability to satisfy that yearning for eternity by our own means that keeps people seeking what Father Henri heard in that AIDS clinic. Human solutions failed, but the thirst, the yearning for satisfying that sense of eternity, continued.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman whom he met at the well: "***Everyone who drinks this water (the water from the well) will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life***" — *Jesus Christ, John 4:13-14*.

So, what must we do? A few things:

First, remember that Christianity is NOT a religion. One of the great mantras of nonbelievers is that "all religion is the same." When it comes to the manmade false religions of the world, yes, that is absolutely true. And YES — Christ's name has been damaged by those who have made His name a manmade religion and, as a result, have misrepresented Him terribly. Manmade Christianity is as hollow as any other manmade faith. However, that is not true of biblical

Christianity precisely because it is not a manmade religion; it was never intended to be seen that way. Biblical Christianity is a relationship, created by the amazing grace of the redemptive work of a loving God engineered through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In fact, one way of summarizing the Bible is: “God gets His family back.” Family — that’s relationship.

Second, we can rightly have issues with matters of sin. But we can never forget to love the sinner. God’s love met sinners where they were; look at the life of Christ with sinners. And guess what? God’s love still does that; it still meets people where they are. Any chance that we have to have credibility with nonbelievers starts with understanding them as people burdened with sin and not knowing any way out. The way out is not about us. The way out is about God; we are just an example of what that way out looks like.

Third, remember that one complaint of Christianity, that Christians point out the wrong without saying how to make it right? When we make noise about sin, that’s fine but, if we don’t give people the context of where we’re coming from — “why are you calling that sin?” — our noise is no more than that — just noise. Sinners sin; it’s what they do. It’s what I did before Christ captured me. If we don’t approach it as a brother or sister in need of help, as someone who is “thirsty” and then come alongside the sinner, we will never have their attention. Our love needs to be constant and unconditional — in other words, love given completely without regard to our perceptions but only focused on Christ’s perceptions.

And fourth, and last, evangelism begins with relationship. We have been looking at the “fruit of the Spirit.” For people to really understand the difference God has made in our lives, they need to be able to get to know us to learn what God has truly done and continues to do in our lives. They need to see us — warts and all — to see and understand the difference between the victories in life achieved in our own strength, and the eternal victories accomplished in God’s strength. But love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and today, goodness — these can only be viewed through the close-up lens of relationship. A relationship, a close friendship, gives them the vantage point of being able to see the foundation of the fruit of the Spirit our lives are intended to reflect. When people see no difference between their lives and ours, when they see no difference in responses, in attitudes, in bigotry, in indifference, in unforgiveness, from the rest of the world, why should they believe any of the so-called claims of Christ? They ain’t seeing it in His so-called “followers,” so the natural conclusion: There must not be much to it. I’ll just keep living the way I am.

The “fruit of the Spirit” allows us to proclaim, not just in our words but in our actions, that Jesus is alive and real, and we are completely different because of Him. The “fruit of the Spirit” allows the world to catch a glimpse of what Jesus truly is. And that glimpse can be used by the Holy Spirit to plant a seed that can become another life in Christ. So, our job? Let people see the platform. Let them see the fruit. Let them see Jesus . . . in us. Let’s pray!