

Acts 11:19-26. ¹⁹ Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. ²⁰ Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. ²¹ The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. ²² News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. ²⁴ He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. ²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ 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.

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. She is a chip off the ole block. I can see your mother in you. Comparisons between daughters and their mothers may be common, especially around this time of year. There is certainly an impression that is left on a person by their mother, and that impact often lives on - in how daughters and sons live their lives. On Mother's Day, we set aside some time to recognize the blessings of our mothers and the many contributions that they have made in shaping our lives.

In a similar vein, today we will consider the impact and the impression that the love of God our Father has on our lives. By his gift of faith, we are called children of God in Christ Jesus. Another common way to portray our connection to Christ - belonging to him, being united in our faith in him, being made children of God who are devoted to his teachings - is that God has called us to be Christians. Through faith, we gladly have this name placed upon us and today we are encouraged in this way.

Christian, Wear Your Name Proudly.

1. Christ has given you a new name.

2. Make Christ known in your lives of love and encouragement.

At the center of our lesson for today was a man known as Barnabas. In a certain sense, Barnabas was a chip off the old block. Through the work of the Holy Spirit in his life, Barnabas was a reflection of God his Father and of Christ his Lord. In the book of Acts, we see the name of Barnabas showing up from time to time, as a contributing factor to the building up of the church, and as a trusted friend and travel companion of the apostle known as Paul.

At this point in church history, we are told that the group of believers at Jerusalem chose to send Barnabas to Antioch to offer encouragement and help in the early stages of the church there. Despite opposition and persecution after the martyrdom of Stephen (a deacon of the early church), there were significant advances in the spread of the gospel. As a good number of believers fled Jerusalem for safer surroundings, they took the gospel with them. The believers that remained in Jerusalem had identified Barnabas as an asset in encouraging these burgeoning pockets of believers in their faith. As they sent Barnabas on this mission, we are given a glowing assessment of his person and character. ***He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit, and faith.*** Barnabas was a blessing to the early church as it seems he wore his faith on his sleeve. He was a great and obvious source of Christian love and the church would thrive alongside his encouraging presence.

In fact, this was the essence of the name Barnabas, which meant “*Son of Encouragement*”. Do you recall that this familiar name was actually a nickname? Yes, this name is used so commonly in the book of Acts that we might tend to overlook the fact that this man was by birth given the name Joseph. But so impressed were the apostles of his Spirit-filled character and encouraging manner, that they dubbed him, “son of encouragement” or Barnabas, and the new name stuck.

And so it is fitting that as we recall this suitable nickname given to this man who was made new by Christ, in these same verses we are reminded of the new name that is used to describe those who followed Jesus. ***The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch (vs 26).*** Christians, those belonging to Christ, even sometimes referred to as those made to be little Christs, would be a fitting description and a revealing name for Barnabas and Paul. It would also be fitting for those that were learning about Jesus from them, as through faith they would receive Christ’s righteousness and would be made new in the life that he brings.

Scripture makes it clear Jesus was the long-promised Messiah and Christ. And the life-changing message of God’s plan salvation in Christ Jesus - his all-atoning life and sacrifice, his death and resurrection, his righteousness imputed and freely given to the sinner, along with the accounts of Christ’s love and compassion, his teaching and presence among his disciples, his love for all people – all of this, would leave a lasting impression upon those who were called to faith in him. Jesus himself foretold of such a reflection of his eternal love and a resemblance of his daily life when he commanded and urged his disciples to ***“Love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another.”*** ***By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.” (John 13:35).*** Dear Christians, make Christ known as you live in his love and reflect his love!

What a beautiful calling and what wonderful care Christ has given to us, even putting his name on sinners like us, and yet still we chafe under that title and that calling. Like an adolescent filled with restless angst, we never fully overcome our desire

to go and make a name for ourselves, or do our own thing, or make our own way. So often in our sinful pride, we shrug off that call to live in Christ-like ways. Thus, we may wear the name of Christian like a nametag in worship that we merely rip off and discard as we leave those doors. However, we are often eager to wrap ourselves in our brash and sinful mannerisms, wearing them proudly as a bold display of our individual identity. A vile and cantankerous tongue, a reckless lifestyle that contradicts God's design, a quiet fixation on disregarding God's Word so that I can do things my way - these are things that we should watch out and strive against as they drag us away from Christ and what he has made us to be, but the world eggs us on to "just be you". As those born dead in sin, as those plagued by a heart that is inclined toward evil and loaded down with selfish and hateful impulses, if we would follow our hearts, we would surely be dragged down into the damnation that our sinful hearts deserve, separated from God forever.

With parentlike patience and care, God rebukes and restores, molds and guides his children. With lasting impact, Christ Jesus reminds you of his love and his good and gracious will for your life and your life eternal. Dear Christian, the Lord sent his Son to save you from your sinful heart and to make you new! He gives you a new heart through his Spirit working through Word and Sacrament. He transforms our hearts and minds by his life-changing persistent and dependable love. Look at how your Savior wraps you in His righteousness and calls you to live to God's eternal glory! He planned, prepared, and produced a life of service and sacrifice to write your name in heaven, to prepare a place for you in God's eternal household. In baptism, he would write His name upon you to assure you of these eternal blessings and to change and impact your daily life to the glory of God! O the undeserved grace of God that he would call us to be his own, that he would make us heirs together in Christ Jesus! That he would call us to be Christians, citizens of heaven, through faith in Christ Jesus.

Take to heart how his grace would pursue us as well! Consider how Jesus tirelessly went about proclaiming the message of salvation, reaching out with the message his Father gave him to seek and save, to reclaim sinners and bring them back to God. He who sought out and spent time with sinners and outcasts, proclaimed the good news of salvation to all who would hear. He lived a life of constant love and compassion, and then willingly, lovingly, went to the cross scorning its shame to reconcile us to God. Bursting forth from the tomb he not only rescued us all from sin and death and hell he set us free to live in his love. Consider the love of our God, and don't forget along the way he taught and trained his disciples to share that message of salvation so that the life-giving rays of God's grace would radiate from that epicenter of Jerusalem and the good news would go out into all the world. Armed with this word of truth, we see how God sent the early believers out into the world eager to share the good news of Jesus to both Jew and Gentile. In Acts chapter 11 we are told that they ***traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. And the Lord's hand was with***

them. Messengers of his grace, directed by God's gracious hand, would head out with a Christ-like passion to seek and save the lost. They would go out in all directions so that both Jew and Gentile would be gathered back to God. And with that same pursuing love his saving word came to you. In his love, he reclaimed you as his own and he has put his name on you. And now Jesus calls you and encourages you as Christians to remain in him as he forever remains your Savior and friend. He is Christ the Lord, and we are blessed to be called Christian.

Dear Christian, remain in him and gladly bear his name your whole life through. This was a chief encouragement that Barnabas gave to those that he met with. He encouraged them ***all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.*** Joseph, the man known as Barnabas, was a man saved by Christ and made new by Christ's love and his gift of forgiveness that Jesus won for him and for all people. This love of Christ had an everlasting impact in his life, and it showed. Even in a time of persecution and pressure, he sought out a man who was once known to be a persecutor of the church. We are told that Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul. He spent time with him and worked together with Saul to grow in God's grace and share the message of reconciliation and peace with God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. We are told Barnabas spent a whole year going about this task of learning, preaching, and teaching the saving message of Christ Jesus – while also modeling the forgiveness of Christ. With Christlike compassion Barnabas treated Saul - who we know would also gain a new name of Paul - as a friend and brother in Christ.

Barnabas carried both of his new names well. He was a son of encouragement, encouraging and lifting up many in the early church. As a Christian, the bible reveals how he was a chip off the old block, as his life was a testament to the love of Jesus Christ. Yes, Joseph, gladly called Barnabas, proudly called Christian, proclaimed the good news of God's salvation and lived a life of love and forgiveness and faith and it showed. May the Lord fill us with his Holy Spirit, so that we may also carry the name of Christ well, as we make Christ known in our lives.

The love that has been shown to us in Christ leaves a lasting impression upon the children of God. As children may imitate and reflect the traits of a mother who cared for them, dear Christian, reflect the love and forgiveness that Christ has shown to you. Jesus Christ has claimed you as his own. Let us live our lives as a reflection of our Lord and Savior. Love one another as Christ has loved you. Live good and decent, humble, and helpful lives. Love all people. Encourage each other in the faith. Rejoice in the work of the gospel that saves and restores and calls the straying and the lost back to God. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. The Lord's great love daily changes and transforms your hearts and lives. Dear Christian, be encouraged to wear your name gladly, proudly, daily, to the glory of Jesus Christ who saved you, reclaimed you as his own, and has placed his name on you. Amen.