

Why Are Christians Still Throwing Stones at Kanye West?

Time Magazine's recent headline stated, "How Kanye West's controversial 'Jesus Is King' Is Dividing the Christian Community." This is a sad but true reality.

After reading negative responses to Kanye West's recent conversion to Jesus, I found myself asking, "Where are the Barnabases in the church?"

In my opinion, Barnabas is one of the greatest leaders in the early church. He's an unsung hero, if you will. A faithful follower of Christ who quietly made his impact on the growth of the church without drawing attention to himself.

Kanye West's conversion reminds me of another young man who possessed a bad reputation but ultimately became one of the greatest missionaries in history—the apostle Paul.

After he came to Christ, there were those who questioned the validity of his salvation much like Kanye has experienced. I have no firsthand knowledge concerning Kanye, but his story illustrates something that is lacking in some quarters of the church, which is an unwillingness to embrace people from different and often questionable backgrounds. This is a blind spot, which we are going to need to correct because there are large numbers coming to Jesus who don't look, talk or act like we think is "appropriate."

Are our attitudes ready for them? Could this be a reason the end-times revival is being held up? This is where we need the Barnabases in our generation.

We are first introduced to Barnabas in Acts 4:32-33. He was

highly regarded by the early church because of his integrity and his ability to encourage others. In fact, Barnabas was actually a nickname. It means *son of encouragement*.

It has been my observation that encouragers are faith-filled, risk-takers and secure in their identity in Christ. Let's briefly look at how Barnabas' encouragement had a major impact on two future leaders in the church.

When Paul first came to Jerusalem, though several years after his conversion, the believers were afraid of him. Evidently, some believed Paul's visit was just a plot by the Jewish leaders to infiltrate the church. Barnabas took a huge risk to reach out to Paul.

A period of three years had transpired between Paul's dramatic Damascus Road conversion and the visit to Jerusalem. Few outside Damascus knew if his conversion was genuine or not. They did not have the benefits of cable news or social media to give them 24/7 reports from around the world. They didn't accept him. Thankfully, there was Barnabas.

Then when he (Barnabas) arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers (Acts 11:23-26).

How different might church history have been if Barnabas had not taken this dangerous risk and met with Paul (still known as Saul in the verse above) and taken him under his wing? It says for an entire year they met with the church and taught. Paul wasn't sidelined to just watch. Barnabas worked side-by-side with him to mentor him.

I wonder how many new believers like Paul or Kanye West have slipped through the back doors of our churches because there were no Barnabases willing to take the risk to encourage them and work with them? It took a faith-filled, risk-taker to do this. Ultimately, that risk changed the world.

There was another time Barnabas was used to encourage a young man who had a bad reputation because of a mistake. That decision ultimately caused the split between Paul and Barnabas' apostolic missionary team.

It started when Paul wanted to check on the churches they had planted. Barnabas agreed and desired to take Mark along. It was at this point Paul balked! Why? During their first missionary journey, Mark had abandoned them and returned home (Acts 13:13).

We don't know the real reason for Mark's desertion; however, Barnabas wanted to give him a second chance and Paul was not willing.

Apparently, their convictions were so strong, they split into two teams. Paul took Silas and headed back to Asia Minor while Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus.

This is the last mention of Barnabas in Acts. The silence has led some to believe this is a judgment on his life. If that were true, we would have to conclude Peter was also judged because he is not mentioned after chapter 15 either. Unfortunately, this has led many to miss the greatness of Barnabas' life and the incredible impact he had on the early church.

Barnabas saw past who people were, to who they could be. And then he helped them get there.

Mark had failed them once when they needed him, and Paul was not going to give him the opportunity to do it again. Barnabas, the encourager, on the other hand, looked at this

differently. He saw potential in Mark and was willing to give him a second chance. It was a risk, but one he was willing to take.

It is amazing how many of us in the church are like Paul was at this point in his life. Are we an enforcer of rules rather than an encourager of faith? Is our thought, *If you fail me once, you will never get a second chance*? Unfortunately, that response happens not only in the church, but also in the home, at school and in the workplace.

When I witness this, I often think how thankful I am that Jesus does not treat us like we oftentimes treat others. He never gives up on us, regardless of how many times we fail Him. Why then can we not do the same for others?

Why is this such an important point? New believers like Kanye West and Mark will make mistakes. But real encouragers will use those opportunities as teachable moments.

Who was right in the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas? That question is answered from what we know about Mark's subsequent life. He became the author of the Gospel that bears his name.

A final point about his life can be seen from a seldom-quoted verse in Paul's final letter.

"Only Luke is with me. Get Mark, and bring him with you, for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11).

Did you catch that? Paul asked Timothy to bring Mark because he was helpful. This is the same Mark who had split the missionary team years earlier, and now Paul wanted him along. Quite a change!

Who is the only common denominator in Mark's transformation? Barnabas. What happened between Acts 15 and 2 Timothy 4:11? We can only surmise that Barnabas had mentored Mark into a

quality, faithful servant of the Lord. Thank God for secure leaders who will not give up on us. Everyone needs someone to believe in them like Barnabas did with Mark.

For years I've felt a far-reaching revival is on the horizon, but now the time is upon us. Great numbers are coming into the church, and a significant portion will not look like your typical church-goer. They will have tattoos, piercings and colored hair. Many will have bad reputations from their past lifestyles. It is going to be a boat-sinking, net-breaking load. But there are signs the nets may break, and we will lose too many if we don't make preparations to handle the incredible harvest coming.

As we consider Kanye West and others who are coming from those nets, I have to ask, "How many Marks have slipped or will slip through the church because they make mistakes and come from questionable backgrounds?"

What could have happened in church history if there had been more men and women like Barnabas who could see God's potential in the young Pauls and Marks and were willing to invest time to help them reach their destiny?

Because of Barnabas, the encourager, we have two of the most influential men in church history. Unfortunately, I have witnessed the opposite all too often in the church. Older believers have rejected younger, immature believers because they did not measure up.

May we determine to be an encourager and not an enforcer, so that none of our nets will break. Eternity is at stake!

Where are the Barnabases in this hour? I hear the clarion call of the Holy Spirit for you to rise up! {eo}

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