

# An Invitation to the Balcony

Sermon text: Acts 4:32-37

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## Encounter with an Extraordinary Encourager

I enjoy cooking out on the grill. We've got a propane-fired barbeque on the lanai and, as far as I'm concerned, it's one of life's little miracles. You turn the knob and click the button and magic happens. I like cooking steaks or blackened pork tenderloin or barbequed chicken on that grill. Sometimes Cindy and I will sit out there and talk, enjoying the smell of dinner cooking on the grill, and sipping on a drink as we watch the late afternoon sun shining on the lake.

The only problem is that it's hard to tell how much propane is in the tank. Every now and then, the tank runs out, the meat stops sizzling on the grill, and we're forced to resort to a backup plan for getting dinner on the table. A propane-fired barbeque with an empty tank isn't a miracle – it's a problem. When the tank is full, you can cook all kinds of wonderful things on it. But when the tank is empty, the grill isn't good for much until you fill it up again.

In some ways, people are like gas grills. We have tanks too – figuratively speaking, of course. We are at our best when our tank is full and not good for much when our tank is empty. You can get a good idea about whether someone's tank is empty or full by looking at them. You can see it their eyes: are they bright and lively, or are they dull and glazed over? You can see it in the way they move: do they walk with purpose and energy, or do they just kind of trudge along? That's why I say gas grills and people are similar – both are at their best with a full tank.

You've probably noticed that there are some people who fill up your tank when you are around them. They are positive and uplifting. You feel good about yourself and good about life after you've spent time with someone who fills up your tank. You could call them "balcony people." They're kind of like your personal cheering section. They sit in the balcony of your life encouraging you to be your very best. Do you have a balcony person like that? I hope so.

Our focus this morning will be on one of the great balcony people in the Bible. We meet this extraordinary encourager in the text from Acts 4. We find out that his legal name was Joseph. He was from the island of Cyprus, but he was also Jewish. In fact, he was a Levite. That means he was descended from the tribe in Israel who were religious professionals. For generations, his people had served in the temple. But since Joseph was from Cyprus, he was considered a foreigner – a Hellenistic Jew. He wasn't allowed to serve in the Jerusalem temple because he was an outsider. It would've been easy for Joseph to have been bitter and resentful about being treated like that by his own people. But he didn't respond that way.

He seems to have been the kind of guy who looked for the positive in things. At least that's

the attitude Joseph exhibited when he became part of the community of those who believed in Jesus as Messiah. In fact, he was so upbeat and so encouraging to others in the early church in Jerusalem that they came up with a nickname for him. They called him Barnabas – the son of encouragement.

Our passage tells us that Barnabas owned a piece of land. He sold the land and gave the proceeds from the sale to the apostles, so they could help meet the needs of the poor. His generosity is one reason why Barnabas was an extraordinary encourager to those around him.

### **Efforts to Extend that Encouragement**

From his example, I would like for us to spend some time today considering how we might be balcony people. How might God use you and how might God use me to fill up the tank of others? What might it look like for us to be a son or a daughter of encouragement – a kind of modern day Barnabas?

That's what I want to be. Because I have seen, and I'm sure you have too, that there are too many anti-Barnabas types already. If Barnabas was a balcony boy because of the way he encouraged people and cheered them on to be their very best, then we might refer to the anti-Barnabas types as basement people. These are the folks who don't fill up your tank, they drain it. They bring you down with their ability to see the dark lining in every silver cloud. Spend time with a basement person and you'll soon realize that the glass has been half empty all along.

But I don't want to spend much time talking about basement people. That's not where the story of Barnabas leads us to focus. It leads us to focus on being positive and supportive and encouraging to people around us. Some form of the word "encouragement" is used over 100 times in the New Testament. And being an encourager is an important part of what we are called to do as followers of Jesus Christ.

I am so thankful that God has given me the great gift of balcony people in my life. My parents were always encouragers for me – loving me, believing in me, and challenging me to be the best person I can be. I've also had good friends and family who have been like Barnabas – being supportive of me, spending time with me, and asking the hard questions that caused me to wrestle with God's plan for my life and my family. I hope and pray that you have at least one Barnabas – a balcony person who fills up your tank to help you do life at your very best.

This morning I'd like to extend an invitation for us here at Church of the Palms to be balcony people by doing something like what Barnabas did in Acts 4. Over the next few weeks, we will have the opportunity to learn more about what it would mean to sponsor a translation of the JESUS Film into the heart language of an African people group who have not heard the good and encouraging news of the one true God who loves them and longs to be in relationship with them through faith in Jesus Christ. We're not supposed to name the actual group because they live in a part of Africa where they could be in physical danger for

listening to the gospel.

Later this week, those of us in the church family will be receiving a letter inviting us to participate in a Palm Sunday offering to underwrite the cost of producing a translation of the JESUS Film for these people in Africa who haven't had the opportunity to know the Lord like we do. For our guests who don't receive the letter, we'll be sharing other information in the coming weeks so that everyone who wants to encourage this group of African people with the good news will be able to do so.

It may be that you've actually never seen the JESUS Film yourself. This coming Friday in the Campus Center, we'll munch on some pizza, pop up some popcorn, and watch the JESUS Film together. What we'll see is essentially the gospel of Luke made into a motion picture. It is scripture come to life – a truly compelling way to present the truth of the gospel to a group of over 130,000 people who have not heard it before.

Like Barnabas, when he laid the proceeds from the sale of his land at the apostles' feet, we will give our money to bless a group of unreached people in Jesus' name. Because of what we give, people will come to know life in the fullness and abundance and joy that God intends. Lives will be changed for all of eternity. Let's be balcony people together as we share what God in Jesus Christ has done for us. Let us prepare to gather around the Lord's Table.