

# The King's Highway

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### Tragedies of The Ministry

"And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from another: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus" (Acts 15:39).

The text presents to us a striking picture of one of the ministerial tragedies recorded in the Bible. It concerns a minister who had been one of the chief actors employed by the Holy Ghost in preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, as recorded in chapters 9 and 15 of the Acts. At verse 29 in the fifteenth chapter, this powerful minister of the Gospel "drops out of the picture," so to speak, and never appears again, neither is his name mentioned by any subsequently inspired writer excepting the Apostle Paul.

It was Barnabas who first took the newly converted Saul and gave him his first introduction to the Apostles. It was Barnabas who so magnanimously ministered to the people of Antioch, as recorded in Acts 11:23. It was Barnabas of whom it was said: "He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." It was Barnabas who had been Paul's constant companion for months—who had stood with him, through thick and thin. They had shared together their dangers, their victories. All of this, however, becomes a thing of the past—only a pleasant memory—and this truly great Levite of Cyprus drops out of the Biblical picture, never to return. The reason for this we would briefly notice.

If the reader will consult Gal. 2:13, he will find what appears to be the underlying cause of this tragedy, while in the text before us, the immediate cause is to be found.

Paul tells us that "even Barnabus" was led away by a certain "dissimulation" which took place in Antioch. This dissimulation was a "policy method" for avoiding trouble, instituted by the Apostle Peter. Paul openly opposed and rebuked Peter at the time, because, he said, "he was to be blamed." Now, if this rebuke was directed at the great Apostle himself, we may well suppose that Barnabas came in for his share, though the inspired account gives us no actual record of this. However, he seems to have caught himself in time, and the wedge of difference, though started, proved hardly sufficient to entirely separate these two men.

Shortly after this, Paul suggested to Barnabas that they "go again" to minister to the Gentiles. The tragedy of the text then took place. Barnabas assayed to take with him his nephew, John Mark, to which Paul refused to consent. The difference became so great that an open rupture took place, and Barnabas, taking his nephew, took his departure to his homeland, and in this seemingly rash proce-

sure, disappeared from the records of sacred narrative. He dropped out of the picture through a "contention." Paul, who seems to have had the confidence of the Church at Antioch in this matter, received their benediction and, choosing Silas, entered upon his second missionary journey in the interest of souls.

Barnabas was not the first minister, or the last, to drop out of the picture because of a contention and a rash decision which followed. There have been many such. A "church row" in which the pastor took sides, or a disagreement with a church board, of which the pastor was chairman. Perhaps it came about by contending for relatives who were in the wrong, and a few hasty words which were uttered.

Sometimes the dropping out is sudden, and at other times it takes on a more gradual nature. In either case, the outcome is sure and certain. The preacher is never the same afterward; his power in the pulpit wanes perceptibly; he quits his church for another, and still another, and several years later he is found tending a farm, or sitting in a real estate office.

While speaking of this tragic dropping out of the ministry, or out of the minister's sphere of usefulness, as is often the case, other pictures and causes come before our mind's eye. We knew of a man wonderfully used of God both as a minister and in exercising certain gifts of the Spirit. His life of prayer was marvelous, and a great field of usefulness was opened up to him, in his declining years, in instructing the young in the life of prayer and its secrets. Instead, he became rabid on the dress question, failed to be charitable with those who could not see exactly as he saw, on the subject, and dropped out of the holiness movement, dying in obscurity in his mountain home.

We do not think he was lost—far from it, but oh, what a tragedy to have missed those years of great usefulness by running out on a tangent of his own making. We would not have the reader to feel for a moment that we consider the dress question unimportant; but, when ministers become rabid in sustaining their views about it, there is imminent danger of either souring, or side-stepping.

Demas dropped out of the picture by becoming too much interested in Corinth, with its deadening worldliness. Other preachers have dropped out, from the same cause. They catered too much to the lovers of the world, stifled their convictions too often to please a worldly wife or family, throttled their conscience to meet the demands of the worldly-wise of some church, and today they are powerless, out of demand among the godly, and spend most of their time bolstering up their compromises by "well adapted" passages of Scripture.

Many a preacher's wife has fought his convictions, and has lived and dressed so worldly that it was a constant thrust at his own family if he dared to preach against the world. Finally, he "caves in" mentally and spiritually, and decides to take a middle course. Sooner or later, he drops out of the picture and perhaps joins a church where the "standards" are more to the liking of his family.

Others have dropped out by defending a good thing in a wrong spirit. They meant well and were undoubtedly on the side of right, but they became so determined in their "defense of the right" that they lose sight of a patient Christ—the "Dove of Peace" takes His departure, and it soon becomes evident that when they preach, they have only a shell of what they formerly possessed. The preacher himself feels it, and those to whom he ministers ultimately become aware of it. Tired of the deception, he quits the ministry for other pursuits.

Still other tragedies of this nature trace their cause to the love of money. The preacher started on "hard-scrabble circuit" with meager pay and plenty of fire. Success crowned his efforts; money flowed more freely and his "fire" correspondingly diminished. Soon he answered only calls from the well-paying centers of religious activity, and gave a wide berth to the circuits of other years. Once he was humble and would do almost anything—sweep the floor of the old school-room where he was holding a meeting, sleep almost anywhere without complaint and, in general, considered the treatment he received and the accommodations provided for him far better than he deserved. If he had not a comfortable bed, he prayed most of the night, and got up blessed in his soul and bright of face.

But today, things are much different from those in those good old days. In the first place, he will not even go to a place without a certain amount of money guaranteed. While he is there, he complains of the accommodations, worries the pastor almost to distraction about "pressing the people" for his offering, and considers it beneath him to lift a hand toward helping with the menial work connected with the revival. The "money god" has such an octopus-grip upon his soul that he later begins investing in real estate or oil stock to slake his inordinate thirst for gain or becomes a dealer in "antique" furniture on the sideline. Soon he drifts out of the picture altogether and disappears. A suicide in a "Valley of Hinnom" marked the sad end of a case of this kind, in the case of a minister named Judas going to the place of his own choice.

How pathetic is all this! How tragic! And yet, how true! May God save us from a ministerial eclipse of this nature is our prayer.  
—Holiness Methodist Advocate.