

Revitalization Sermon Series

from the Southwestern Baptist Theological
Seminary Center for Church Revitalization



Evangelism, Apologetics, and Gospel Sermon Outlines

SERMON 1

Theme: The Gospel Message Presented

Author: Dr. Carl Bradford, Assistant Professor of Evangelism

Title: *The Pardoning of a Prison Guard*

Text: Acts 16:22-34

Outline:

- I. **The Jailer Sought Salvation from His Physical Circumstances (vv. 27-28)**
 - a. He drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.
- II. **The Jailer Sought Salvation from His Spiritual Situation (vv. 30-34)**
 - a. What must I do to be saved? (The Prison Guard asked for a pardon)
 - b. He Surrendered
 1. Believed on the Lord Jesus
 2. Immediately he was Baptized

SERMON 2

Theme: The Gospel Message Defended

Author: Dr. Travis S. Kerns, Associate Professor of Apologetics and World Religions

Title: *Preaching Strange Deities*

Text: Acts 17:16-34

Outline:

- I. **Idol worship should lead us to compassion and action (vv. 16-18)**
- II. **Take every opportunity captive for Christ (vv. 17:19-21)**
- III. **Be bold, yet respectful, with the unbeliever (vv. 17:22-23 / 1 Peter 3:15)**
- IV. **Recognize Christ is our all in all (vv. 17:24-29)**
- V. **Jesus is proof enough (vv. 17:30-31)**
- VI. **Realize some will follow and some will laugh (vv. 17:32-34)**

SERMON 3

Theme: Emboldened to Share the Gospel

Author: Dr. Matt Queen, Associate Professor and L. R. Scarborough Chair of Evangelism ("The Chair of Fire")

Title: *Conquering the Corinthian Cringes*

Text: Acts 18:1-11

Outline:

- I. **The Source of the Corinthian Cringes**
 - a. The apostle Paul's preaching of the Gospel before his arrival in Corinth was met with persecution and expulsion from Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:50), mistreatment and the threat of stoning in Iconium (14:5), stoning almost to the point of death in Lystra (14:19), flogging and imprisonment in Philippi (16:22-23) and ridicule in Athens (17:32). No wonder Paul's first written correspondence to the Corinthians states that he came to them "in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Cor 2:3). The fear and trembling Paul experienced in Corinthian is what we call the Corinthian Cringes.



- b. Isolation was the first fear Paul faced at Corinth, arriving there alone (v. 18:1).
- c. Paul also experienced the fear of rejection. The Corinthian Jews opposed and reviled his preaching that Jesus is the Messiah (18:5-6). Rejected once again by his own people, Paul turned to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles in Corinth (18:6-7,8b).

II. The Solution to the Corinthian Cringes

- a. Paul feared preaching the Gospel any further. He seriously considered becoming a muted evangelist. In fact, his fear became so overwhelming that the Lord Himself appeared to him in a night vision, saying, “Don’t be afraid, but keep on speaking and don’t be silent” (18:9). Paul was to continue preaching because Jesus was with him, assuring him, “I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to hurt you, because I have many people in this city” (18:10). Christ’s presence with us and in us will cure the Corinthian Cringes.

SERMON 4

Theme: Gifted with the Gospel

Author: Dr. Deron Biles, Professor of Preaching and Pastoral Ministry

Title: *Paul Planted; Apollos Watered*

Text: *Acts 18:24-28*

Outline:

Apollos is one of the most gifted men we meet in Scripture. After this passage, Scripture only mentions his ongoing ministry in a few passages, and only in passing. But, the impact of his ongoing ministry is apparent (Acts 19:1; 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4, 5, 6, 22; 4:6; 16:12; Titus 3:13).

It is from this passage that we learn about his character. Note the adjectives used of him: eloquent, competent, fervent, accurate, bold, greatly, powerfully. Mere nouns were not enough for Luke to convey all he wanted to say about this man. Apollos was a remarkable man: He was gifted, growing, hot, accurate, courageous, teachable, and evangelistic!

You may not be gifted like Apollos, but

- I. All believers can use the gifts God gave us for His glory (18:24).**
- II. All believers can grow in our understanding of God’s Word (18:24-25)**
- III. All believers can be fervent in our work for the Lord (18:25)**
- IV. All believers can speak and teach the Word of God accurately (18:25)**
- V. All believers can be courageous in carrying out His will (18:26)**
- VI. All believers can be teachable as we grow in our faith (18:26)**
- VII. All believers can have a heart for the lost wherever He allows us to serve (18:27-28)**



THE GOSPEL MESSAGE PRESENTED

The Pardoning of a Prison Guard

Acts 16:22-34

Sunday School Teacher's Guide—September 8, 2019

Introduction

When the Apostle Paul entered a new city, his evangelistic “modus operandi,” or customary method, was to find a gathering of people who might be interested in hearing the good news about the Messiah, which at this point in his ministry would be a synagogue: a place where Jews gathered to be taught the word of God. However, Philippi was a Gentile city with very few Jewish men; synagogues could only be established with 10 or more Jewish males. With no synagogue at which to preach, Paul found the next best thing: a group of God-fearing women who gathered down by the river at the city gate. It was by this river that Paul witnessed to Lydia, who “opened her heart” to Jesus, and “she and her household were baptized.” At Lydia’s urging, Paul stayed in Philippi and continued to reach out to people in the city. His next ministry encounter, however, was not so successful. While visiting a city market, Paul was hounded by a slave girl who was being promoted by a demon to aggravate Paul and his companions. When Paul cast out the demon from the slave girl, her owners were so upset that they instigated a riot and had Paul and Silas thrown in prison.

Teaching Guide

I. Presenting the Message in Difficult Circumstances 16:25-26

- a. Paul and Silas express joy in trials 16:25
- b. God supernaturally responds to their difficulty 16:26

Commentary:

Even though Paul and Silas had been dragged through the streets of Philippi and unjustly thrown in prison by the authorities, they found cause for joy in their situation. With “the peace of God that passes all understanding” (Phlp 4:7), Paul and his companion made the best of their situation by starting a midnight songfest. They were singing songs of praise to God and praying loud enough for the other prisoners to hear, and they were listening closely to the pair’s musical witness. All of sudden, the hand of God touched the ground beneath the prison and what seemed like an earthquake shook the walls and floors of the Philippian jail. The unthinkable (and miraculous) happened when every cell door swung open, and the chains constraining the prisoners—including Paul and Silas—broke loose, freeing their hands and feet and offering liberty to everyone who had been in bondage.

Key Concept:

The message of our salvation in Jesus Christ is amplified by the way we demonstrate the joy of our salvation in difficult times.

Class Interaction, Discussion/Application:

It was likely that some of the prisoners were annoyed, while others were inspired by Paul and Silas’s late-night “camp meeting.” What, however, could no one deny about these two men? (Possible answer: they were different; they had an uncommon joy compared to everyone else in the prison; they were devoted to their God).



When have you encountered someone whose joy in the Lord was on display during a trial in this person's life? How did their joy affect the people around them?

Why is someone who shares their joy in the Lord in times of difficulty such an appealing witness to a lost world?

II. Following the Spirit's Leading 16:27-30

- a. The jailer responds to the situation 16:27-28
- b. Paul provides assurance to the jailer 16:29-30

Commentary:

Although the action shifts at this point to the response of the jailer, one cannot help but wonder what was happening in the cells when the rumbling ceased. The prisoners may have been too scared or shocked to move. Paul and Silas may have been urging their cellmates to remain calm and avoid a scene with the jailer arrived. Or perhaps, the Spirit of God took over the prison and kept the inmates from escaping. When the jailer felt the rumble and heard the noise, he woke from his slumber to see the doors of every cell wide open. His immediate reaction was certainly understandable. The jailer was entrusted by the Roman government with the confinement of his prisoners; a failure of his responsibility would bring swift execution. Taking his own life would be a more merciful alternative.

However, just as the jailer pressed the knife against his body, he heard Paul's voice: "don't do it; everyone is still here"! Racing into the heart of the prison accompanied by torches, the jailer saw the firelight reflected in the eyes of Paul, Silas, and every other prisoner. This may have been the greatest shock of all! When he realized that every person was present and accounted for, he fell to his knees in amazement, but also in fear. Paul and Silas represented a power the jailer had never before encountered. In that moment, the Holy Spirit took over the jailer's fear and turned it into conviction, when he asked Paul the most important life question anyone can ask: "what must I do to be saved?"

Key Concept:

The message of the gospel is the perfect remedy for anyone whose life falls apart.

Class Interaction, Discussion/Application:

Based on his response to seeing the cell doors open, what was going through the jailer's mind at that moment? Likewise, when he saw that all the prisoners were still there, what might have been some of his first thoughts?

Why are people more open to the gospel when they face difficulties and trials in life?

Describe a time when you have had an opportunity to share your faith with someone during a time of extreme pain or difficulty in their life. What was their response?

III. The Impact of the Message

- a. Paul presents the message of salvation 6:31-32
- b. The effect of the message is multiplied 6:33

**Commentary:**

In one of Paul's shortest gospel presentations on record, he laid out the plan of salvation in five words: "believe on the Lord Jesus." When Paul told the jailer to "believe," he was not referring to head knowledge. The jailer needed salvation, not just information. The jailer needed to do more than simply acknowledge someone named Jesus; in the original language, "believe" also means to have faith and to trust. Paul called the jailer to have faith in the One who died for his sin on the cross, was resurrected three days later, and to trust his life to One who would be his Lord and Christ.

Interestingly, this is the second time in Acts 16 where the impact of one person's salvation overflowed to the rest of his or her family. At the beginning of the chapter, Lydia is instrumental in leading her household to follow Christ. Here we see the jailer's family coming to Christ on the heels of his conversion. Paul not only led this family to faith in Jesus, but he baptized them all that very night! This is one of many scriptural references to the importance of baptism by immersion as an outward sign of one's profession of faith in Jesus Christ and an act that should follow as soon as possible one's declaration of faith.

The jailer's care for Paul and Silas--washing their wounds (16:33) and feeding them in his home (16:34)—was a response of gratitude to these men, but was also evidence of regeneration. The Gentile jailer's old life was gone; he was a new man with a new heart, created by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Key Concept:

The message of the gospel not only transforms the life of the one who believes, but also affects family, friends, and all those whose lives they influence.

Class Interaction, Discussion/Application:

The gospel is a fairly simple message; other than the five words used by Paul, how would you answer someone who asked you, "what must I do to be saved?"

What does it mean to "believe" in Jesus Christ, and how does that relate to faith and trust?

The message of the gospel also extends throughout the remainder of one's life: salvation leads to discipleship. How would you explain to a new believer about their new role as a disciple of Jesus?



THE GOSPEL MESSAGE DEFENDED

Preaching Strange Deities

Acts 17:16-34

Sunday School Teacher's Guide—September 15, 2019

Introduction

After Paul and his companions left Philippi (Acts 16), they remained in Macedonia, traveling west to Thessalonica. Although they were well-received—planting the first seeds of a church there—the Jews “became jealous” (17:5) of their success and incited opposition against them. Moving south to Berea, Paul and Silas experienced a short time of success among the “open-minded” (17:11) people before the Jews once again stirred up persecution against those who were preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul went south through Achia (modern-day Greece) to the metropolitan city of Athens, where he waited on Silas and Timothy. While he was in Athens, Paul had an opportunity to present and defend the gospel to a thoroughly pagan audience in a way he had never experienced before.

Teaching Guide

I. Paul's Responds to Idol Worship 17:16-21

Commentary:

As Paul waited for Silas and Timothy to arrive, he explored the evangelistic possibilities in Athens. Statues of the twelve Greek gods were strategically placed throughout the city. Whether along the roads, in the marketplace, outside the temples, Paul saw the false gods of stone on display, which stirred up Paul's concern and compassion for people who lived in spiritual darkness. Although he was discouraged being in a city steeped in idolatry, he found opportunities to engage some thought leaders in the city with his message about Jesus and the resurrection. Paul's gospel message was confusing to these pagan intellectuals, but they were willing to give a hearing to his ideas, regardless of how strange his beliefs sounded to them. Civic leaders invited Paul to forum at the Areopagus in which he could expound on his beliefs and argue his case for believing in the one he called the Messiah. The Areopagus was center for religious and philosophical arguments to be heard. Paul ascended the hill to defend his faith to an audience completely unfamiliar with the name of Jesus.

Key Concept: Concern and compassion should motivate you to share the gospel with the lost.

Class Interaction, Discussion/Application:

What did the statues of the gods tell Paul about the city and the people of Athens?

What do you see around you every day that reminds you of the lost people in our world?

Where are some places in your community where you would be likely to find people to talk to about Jesus?

How can you develop a concern and compassion for lost people?



II. Paul Opens the Conversation 17:22-23

Commentary:

The Areopagus, or “Ares Rock,” was named after the Greek god of war (called Mars Hill by the Romans) and was the site for notable criminal trials and religious debates. The people of Athens prided themselves in being tolerant and open to other religions and beliefs. They knew about the Jews, as synagogues existed within the city limits, but they had not heard about this new offshoot of the Jewish faith, focused on one called Jesus the Messiah. Paul’s audience was likely a mix of those who were skeptical, those who were somewhat curious or amused, and those who were willing to listen and consider his claims. He rose to his feet, walked into the center of the rock, and began his defense by appealing to their sense of religiosity and tolerance. Paul started not with condemnation of their beliefs and a “fire and brimstone” sermon, but with an appeal to their appreciation for spiritual ideas and their awareness of the mystery of spiritual understanding. He first statement included a reference to a famous monument in Athens: one dedicated to the UNKNOWN GOD. The inscription on this altar was not as much an admission that their gods were not genuine but that there may be more than 12 gods. They believed that honoring this unknown god would appease the deity and keep them safe from the wrath of a vengeful god or goddess. Paul’s mention of the altar TO AN UNKNOWN GOD set the stage for introducing his KNOWN God, who was the only True God.

Key Concept: Take every opportunity to start a conversation about Jesus with unbelievers.

Class Interaction, Discussion/Application:

What do you think would have happened if Paul had started his defense of gospel by condemning the idols he saw in Athens?

Why did Paul start his defense of his gospel by using the example of their UNKNOWN GOD?

Describe a time when you were asked to share your faith with someone who was unfamiliar with Jesus or the gospel? How did you start the conversation?

III. Paul Explains and Defends the Gospel 17:24-34

Commentary:

Paul’s presented an organized defense to the Athenians. First, he introduced the “unknown God” and revealed His true identity, His nature, and His relationship with all creation. Second, Paul pointed out this God’s holy standard and man’s accountability to God as judge and Lord over all. Third, the apostle explained the manner by which God will one day hold every person accountable to His holy standard.

Gaining people’s attention is one of the first steps to sharing the gospel. Paul understood his audience and the need to respect their culture, yet at the same time present a truthful and impactful testimony. Paul also knew he had a narrow window of time in which to present his case. Now that he had their attention by connecting his God to their “unknown god,” Paul proceeded to God he served. The apostle started with creation. There were already myths and legends about how the



world came to be, and most of the legends included the participation of more than one deity; however, Paul proclaimed boldly and radically that his God alone created everything in heaven and on earth, including every person on earth, beginning with “one man” (Adam) out of whom all nations came to be.

In the Greco-Roman world, the gods were impulsive and indifferent to humans, who were created primarily for the gods’ amusement and selfish schemes. Paul’s God, however, was one who created mankind to “seek Him” and “reach out” to Him: in other words, for relationship. Why was God so interested in a relationship with His created beings? Because they are His “offspring,” or His children, implying that God loves those He created. Paul even quoted one their own poets (“For we are also his offspring”) to remind His listeners that being an offspring of God—created in His image—was not foreign to their worldview.

Paul shifted at that point to man’s accountability to God. Implied in God’s call for all people to repent is the reality of sin. He promised the Greeks that one day his God would judge the world of their sin, and He would accomplish this judgment through the “one man” who was truly righteous. This man was the one who Paul had earlier presented to them as the one who was raised from the dead. This was too much for some of his listeners; their minds were closed and their hearts were hard to his “ridiculous” claim about a man being resurrected from the dead. There were, however, those who were intrigued by Paul’s assertion. These seekers followed him from the Areopagus and were later convinced through the convicting power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus died for their sins and was raised on the third day. Dionysius, Damaris, and “others” started their journey with Jesus Christ on that day, and a new church in Athens was born.

Key Concept: While being bold, yet respectful, allow the Spirit to work through you to explain and defend the gospel to an unbelieving world.

Class Interaction, Discussion/Application:

The Holy Spirit provides the opportunities and the courage to tell others about Jesus. What evidence of the Spirit’s power do you see in Paul’s experience with the Greeks at the Aeropagus?

Paul’s experience affirms 1 Peter 3:15: “Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” Why does the gospel need to be defended?

How do you prepare yourself to defend to truth of the gospel?



EMBOLDENED TO SHARE THE GOSPEL

Conquering the Corinthian Cringes

Acts 18:1-11

Sunday School Teacher's Guide—September 22, 2019

Introduction

Paul's second missionary journey was a mixed bag of success and resistance. Paul and Silas found willing hearts among the people of Philippi. Lydia and her household and the Philippian jailer and his family were among those who came to faith in Jesus, but the missionaries were also beaten and spent time in jail for proclaiming their gospel message (Acts 16:37). Moving on to Thessalonica, they taught in the synagogue and "some were persuaded" to follow Jesus (17:4), but immediately the Jewish leaders stirred up a riot against the believers in the city. Paul and his team then slipped out of town under cover of the night. Once again, they experienced success while in Berea, where "many of them believed, including a number of the prominent Greek women as well as men" (17:12). On the tail of this success, however, the Jews from Thessalonica stormed into Berea and incited another riot against those who were preaching about Jesus. Paul was then "shipped off" by sea to Athens, without his companions, and encountered a mix of interest and skepticism among the Greeks. The apostle then traveled west to Corinth to regroup and wait for Silas and Timothy. Paul later admitted to the Corinthians that he came to city "in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Cor 2:3). In Corinth, he found the renewal he needed to continue his missionary calling with confidence.

Teaching Guide

I. Paul's entry to Corinth 18:1-4

Commentary:

Located on a narrow strip of land between the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas, Corinth was an influential city in the Roman empire because of its position on the east/west trade route. Corinth was not only a center for commerce and wealth, but was also a cultural, religious, and political hub within the empire. Corinth was the type of city to which Paul was drawn because of its outreach potential. The gospel could spread rapidly out of Corinth and into the far reaches of the Roman Empire and beyond. When Paul arrived in Corinth, he met Priscilla and Aquila, a Jewish couple who followed Jesus and were also tentmakers like Paul. This couple had come to Corinth from Rome after the emperor Claudius ejected all Jews from Rome. Some historical accounts connect this event to conflict among the Jews related to someone called "Chrestus," which could be a reference to the Christ. Whatever the reason, Priscilla and Aquila were providentially led to Corinth and were perfectly positioned to work alongside Paul in establishing a church in Corinth. Even though Paul came into Corinth alone, God quickly provided him with the encouragement in the form of co-laborers who were committed to the same Lord and the same mission. During the week, Paul would work with the couple in their common trade as a means of supporting himself; but on the Sabbath, he was in the local synagogue preaching the gospel and seeking to win to Christ anyone who would listen and respond.

Key Concept: Joining with other co-laborers in Christ empowers us to accomplish more together than we can alone.



Class Interaction, Discussion/Application:

What challenges would Paul have faced if he came to Corinth and found no one with whom to co-labor in his mission?

In what ways did Priscilla and Aquila's relationship with Paul benefit and encourage him?

In what ways do other believers, as well as the body of Christ, empower you to share the gospel?

II. Success and Resistance Acts 18:5-8

Commentary:

Paul's encouragement grew when, after a time, his missionary team joined him in Corinth. When we last encountered Silas and Timothy, they were in Berea. They likely stayed behind in Berea to help the fledgling church after Paul was quickly sent away to Athens. When they finally joined the apostle, he was in doing what Paul did best: preaching the good news of Jesus the Messiah. This was the point in Paul's ministry where he experienced great success and tremendous disappointment. The apostle stayed in Corinth for more than a year, and during that time a church blossomed and thrived as "many of the Corinthians, when they heard, believed and were baptized" (18:8b). The length and detail in the two Corinthian letters testify to the success of Paul's church-planting ministry. He also experienced disappointment through the resistance of the Jews to the gospel. Although Christianity began as a offshoot of the Jewish faith, as this new faith expanded, Jews became increasingly hardened to the gospel as the Gentiles accepted the truth in greater numbers. Acts 18:6 was the turning point in Paul's ministry to the Jews. So unbending was their resistance that Paul "shook his robe," which was an act of protest or indignation similar to shaking off the dust from one's feet (Acts 13:51). Along with this symbolic action, Paul's angry words made it clear that he would take accept no responsibility for the hard-hearted response to the gospel from his fellow Jews. In words reminiscent of Pilate's indictment of the Jews' rejection of Jesus (Matt 27:24), Paul walked away from his "blood brothers and sisters" and concentrated from this time forward on outreach to the Gentiles. Another act symbolic of his new direction was leaving the synagogue and going directly to a house church led by a Gentile, Titius Justus. Indicating that all Jews had not rejected Paul's message, Luke mentions the conversion of the Jewish synagogue leader, Crispus, and his family.

Key Concept: As we reach out to the lost, we must be prepared to face times of success as well as discouragement.

Class Interaction, Discussion/Application:

Was Paul reaction to the resistant Jews appropriate? Why or why not?

How should we respond when others reject our attempts to share the gospel with them?

How should we respond to "evangelistic success" (when our efforts are successful)?



III. God's Promises and Protection 18:9-11

9 Then the Lord said to Paul in a night vision, "Don't be afraid, but keep on speaking and don't be silent. 10 For I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to hurt you, because I have many people in this city." 11 And he stayed there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Commentary:

Following his confrontation with the Jews in the Corinthian synagogue, Paul was certainly feeling a mixture of disappointment and fear: disappointment in being rejected by his own people and fear of how they might retaliate. Memories of persecution in Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Thessalonica, and Berea were likely flooding Paul's mind as he tried to sleep. In his time of need, the Lord visited Paul with a vision of grace. The use of the term "night vision" indicates that Paul experienced a visual message directly from Jesus rather than an internal confirmation from the Spirit. Paul's relationship with the Lord was so intimate that he shared repeatedly about visions he received from the Lord (Acts 22:17-21; 23:11; Acts 26:19). This particular vision was one of promise, provision, and protection. The Lord's promise was that "I am with you." Although Paul knew the Lord was ever-present, Paul needed comfort during a time when he felt alone and vulnerable. Perhaps Paul was thinking he needed to move on to another city as he had done frequently during missionary journeys. The Lord, however, had different plans this time. Paul would stay in Corinth for eighteen months (18:11); he needed confirmation of the Lord's presence to sustain him for the months ahead. The message of protection was "don't be afraid . . . no one will lay a hand on you to hurt you" (18:9-10). The wording of the Lord's message in Acts 18:9-10 is similar to God's revelation in Joshua 1:9. When the people of Israel faced one of their greatest challenges—to occupy the Promised Land and eliminate the enemies of God—He told Joshua to "be strong and courageous Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." As Paul faced a similar test, the Lord addressed his fear with assurance of safety for the mission in Corinth; any effort of his enemies to hurt him would fail. Finally, the Lord's message of provision was "I have many people in this city." During times of fear and discouragement, we have a tendency to feel as if we are absolutely alone in the battle. The Lord reminded Paul that He had followers throughout the city. Paul had brothers and sisters in Christ he could lean on for support and encouragement and depend on to help him proclaim the gospel. This vision empowered Paul to wake the next morning prepared to courageously and confidently serve the Lord.

Key Concept: Christ's presence with us will empower us to overcome fear and discouragement in sharing the gospel.

Class Interaction, Discussion/Application:

Based on the Lord's message to Paul, how was Paul likely reacting (emotionally, spiritually, etc.) to his encounter at the synagogue?

What was Paul's greatest need at this moment?

Describe a time when you have faced discouragement or even fear in your ministry efforts? How did you react? How did you experience God's empowerment during that time?

Aside from night visions, how does God empower and embolden us to persevere in our efforts to share His gospel?



GIFTED WITH THE GOSPEL

Paul Planted; Apollos Watered

Acts 18:24-28

Sunday School Teacher's Guide—September 29, 2019

Introduction

Once Paul finished his work in Corinth, he made his way back to Antioch (Syria) by way of Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila. After a short stay in Ephesus, he sailed for Syria but left Aquila and his wife to continue working with the Ephesian church (Acts 18:18-22).

As one reads the last half of the book of Acts, it is easy to get the impression that the Apostle Paul was the only powerful “missionary evangelist” in the early church. However, there is a short passage in Acts 18 that introduces us to a man named Apollos. There is no mention of where he and Paul became acquainted with each other, but references of Apollos in 1 Corinthians and Titus indicate that he and Paul were friends and co-laborers in Christ. One thing is certain, however: Apollos was a gifted preacher, and he provides an example of how one person can use his gifts and abilities to advance the gospel.

Teaching Guide

I. Meeting Apollos 18:24-25

24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. 25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.

Commentary:

The word “meanwhile” is significant at this point because the spotlight is taken off Paul momentarily. While Paul made his way back to the mother church in Jerusalem and his sending church in Antioch, the attention focuses on a man named Apollos: a man, like Paul, who was gaining a reputation in the early church. Apollos was a “Hellenized Jew,” meaning that he had grown up in the influence of Greek culture; even his name was derived from the Greek sun god, Apollo. Having grown up in Alexandria (Egypt), which was an intellectual and cultural center, Apollos was certainly a “learned man” who had been well-taught in the Scriptures, which at this point would be what we call the Old Testament. At some point in his life, Apollos became a follower of Jesus Christ (“the way of the Lord”). Apollos was now in Ephesus making a name for himself as a charismatic preacher and expert teacher. The phrase, “he knew only the baptism of John” (18:25) does not imply that Apollos’ belief in Jesus as the Messiah (which had been prophesied in the Scriptures) was not genuine, but that he did not fully understand the baptism that Paul now preached and practiced. The baptism of John the Baptizer was a baptism of repentance, signifying that one had been cleansed from sin, foreshadowing what Jesus would do on the cross for all who believe. The baptism Apollos did not fully understand was first and foremost about Jesus. This baptism is a symbol of the believer’s participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Key Concept: We can start telling others about Jesus with the knowledge we have and learn more as we grow in our faith.



Class Interaction, Discussion/Application:

What does Luke's description of Apollos tell us about the character of this man?

Was it necessary for Apollos to know everything about the gospel before he started preaching about it? Why or why not?

What do you think is most important to know about the gospel before we start sharing it with others?

II. Discipling Apollos 18:26

Commentary:

Like Paul, Apollos found an audience in the synagogue. Synagogues were the Jewish "worship centers" of the day. After the Jews were exiled from Judah to Babylon (586 BC), and the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, Jewish religious leaders tried to maintain their faith in distant lands by establishing synagogues, where the Scriptures were taught on the Sabbath and where rabbis trained small groups of "disciples" in the law of God. Any Jewish man was allowed to go to the podium of a synagogue, open the scrolls, and read the law. On this particular Sabbath, Apollos read from the scrolls and spoke "boldly" about how Jesus Christ was the Messiah who was prophesied about in the Scripture. Priscilla and Aquila were in attendance on that day. Apparently, they recognized that while Apollos was a gifted speaker and a bold evangelist, he still needed further instruction in the in the truth of the gospel. Apollos demonstrated the heart of a true disciple of Jesus by submitting to their instruction. He understood that there was so much more he needed to know.

Key Concept: True disciples of Jesus understand that learning about the gospel is a lifelong commitment.

Class Interaction, Discussion/Application:

What does this verse teach us about Apollos' character and his spiritual maturity?

Why would it be important to teach him the difference between the baptism of John and the meaning of baptism in Christ?

What are some of the ways we can build up our faith and knowledge in order to be a more effective witness for Jesus?

III. Empowering Apollos 18:27-28

Commentary:

After a period of discipleship with Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos was prepared to leave Ephesus and proceed with his ministry. Apollos was gifted by the Holy Spirit to be an evangelist. He was particularly skilled in apologetics, using logical arguments from Scripture to prove the truth of the gospel. Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, a region in Greece. The church in Ephesus not only encouraged him to go, but they also wrote a letter of recommendation on Apollos's behalf to the church in Achaia. Once he arrived, Apollos used his Spirit-given gift, and his training by Priscilla



and Aquila, to debate his Jewish opponents about the truth of Jesus as revealed in the Scriptures. His courage and skill were an encouragement to “those who by grace had believed” (18:28). Apollos continued to minister among the people in Achaia and was a recognized leader in the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4; 4:6, 6:12). He and Paul labored together in Corinth and in Crete as well (Titus 3:13).

Key Concept: All disciples of Jesus can and should use their gifts to proclaim the gospel and strengthen the church.

Class Interaction, Discussion/Application:

Apollos was an apologist and he debated with the Jews about the gospel. Can we argue someone into having faith in Jesus? Why or why not?

What can we do to encourage gifted people in our church to use their gifts to share the gospel?

What is your spiritual gift? How can you use your gift to proclaim the gospel to the lost?