

“Trust God to Build His Church”

Acts 18:18-28

Last week we were in Acts 18:1-17 and we saw how God greatly encouraged a discouraged Apostle Paul by growing His church. Jesus promised Peter in Matt. 16 that He would build His church and gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Even though we know that verse and believe it in our head, when we feel like our church/ministry isn't growing that we can see we too can get discouraged. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians after having been there the first time, he wrote in 2:3,

³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling

Chased out of Thessalonica and then Berea by angry Jews who reject Jesus as Messiah, then walking around Athens and seeing the exact opposite; philosophers worshipping all kinds of gods – all but the true God – he was obviously discouraged as he came to Corinth, one of the most decadent cities in the ancient world. Yet what does God do? He sovereignly orchestrates through persecution in Rome for a spiritually mature Jewish couple (Aquila and Priscilla) – who were also tentmakers like Paul – to join Paul in the work, arranges for Timothy and Silas to rejoin them and allows Paul to be part of leading Crispus the synagogue ruler and his family to Christ – which angered the Jews so much they took Paul to court. Which backfired when the Roman proconsul Gallio threw them out of court. The Jews then beat up Sosthenes, the new synagogue ruler, who somehow also gets saved! So God indeed is building His church and Paul learns another lesson in trusting God.

Then Paul gets to do something he has not been able to do yet; he stays in one place “for some time” (v.18) which we know was 1 ½ years according to v.11. But now in v.18 and following he is on the move again.

Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken. ¹⁹ They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. ²¹ But as he left, he promised, “I will come back if it is God’s will.” Then he set sail from Ephesus. ²² When he landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.

In these 5 verses Paul travelled over 2000 miles ending his second missionary journey. While Luke wraps this up quickly it does tell us a lot about how we can trust God to do the work of building His church that Jesus promised. Paul learned as we need to learn and relearn in serving God to

Humbly Entrust God’s Ministry to God **(18:18-23)**

All ministry is God’s work. We plant seeds and water the plants but God causes the growth. Actually, where do we get that verse? In 1 Cor. 3:6 in the context of Acts 18. The Corinthians argued about who was a better leader: Paul or Apollos. Look at 1 Cor. 3:1-9

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³ You are still worldly. For since there is

jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? ⁴ For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?

⁵ What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸ The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. ¹⁰ By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it.

Nothing good happens aside from the grace of God. So Paul leaves Corinth and by the time the chapter is over we see Apollos taking leadership in Corinth and Aquila and Priscilla looking after the work in Ephesus. Paul is entrusting God to do His work through others. That takes humility to realize it's not about you and me. It's God's work. So Paul models for us in leaving the work to others to

Thank God for the way He works (v.18)

How does he show us that? V.18 says before Paul sailed from Cenchrea to Ephesus he had his hair cut off to fulfil a vow. That must have been a Nazarite vow that we read about in Numbers 6:1-21. A Nazarite vow was a special dedication of your life to God for a specific period of time where you didn't cut your hair, didn't drink or eat anything from a vine (Grapes, wine) and stayed away from a deceased body (family included). Once that time was fulfilled you came to the temple, presented a burnt offering, sin offering, grain offering and fellowship offering as a sign of thanking God for accomplishing whatever it was you wanted God to do in that time frame. You also shaved off your hair [which signifies all of you] and placed that under the fellowship offering where it was burnt up with that offering. The fellowship offering was your final offering that showed you were at peace with God and one another.

Paul most likely took the vow, as he entered Corinth, praying that God will give him a successful ministry and thanking God when he left. Either way, Paul was thankful to God as we see here in 1 Corinthians recognizing that any 'fruit' we achieved was only by the grace and power of God. Whether it was Apollos or Aquila or Timothy, Silas, Barnabas or himself, Paul's concern was God's glory. That requires humility – an honest assessment of oneself that recognizes our gifts and others' gifts are due to the grace of God.

Paul could then leave others to replace him because he had also most likely

Trained others to replace him (vv.19-23)

Paul taught Timothy to do as he did:

^{2 Tim. 2:2} And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

Paul's pattern was to disciple and select elders to take over after he left. We see him leaving Corinth in Aquila and Priscilla's care. We see Apollos taking over in Corinth when Aquila & Priscilla leave and many other examples. Why could he do that confidently? Because it was God's work not his. Later Timothy will takeover in Ephesus, Titus in Crete and so on.

Ephesus must have been difficult to leave because how many places did Paul go to that wanted him to stay? But somehow sensing God's leading to return to Antioch which he had been away from for at least 2 years, he left Ephesus vowing to come back if God willed (which God will). Luke gives us no break between Paul's 2nd and 3rd journey and Paul returns through Galatia in v.23 making his way toward Ephesus which we will read about next week in Ch. 19.

At this point Luke introduces for us a new character in the life of the church, Apollos. Dr. Luke describes Apollos in Acts 18:24 as a Jew from Alexandria, a learned man with a thorough knowledge of Scripture. Alexandria was probably the second largest city of the world at the time. It was a major port city at the mouth of the Nile River in Egypt. Alexandria was best known as an intellectual center. It was a university city and at one time housed the world's largest library. Apollos was "a learned man". That word means he was skilled in literature and arts. He was intelligent and used his knowledge wisely. Apollos combined his knowledge and ability to speak with his "thorough knowledge of the Scriptures [literally reads 'powerful in the Scriptures'] for the glory of God.

Aquila and Priscilla will come along and hear Apollos and while recognizing his giftedness they also realize there's a lot of truth about Jesus that he was unaware of. How will they help Apollos grow in the Lord while he is helping others grow in the Lord? Aquila and Priscilla model for us the need

To Humbly Encourage Others to Grow Spiritually **(18:24-26)**

Aquila and Priscilla are excited about Apollos who was quite knowledgeable about the Old Testament and an effective speaker when it came to sharing God's Word. But they also recognized he needed more training. He only knew of John the Baptist's teachings and was unaware of the Holy Spirit's outpouring at Pentecost most likely. In order to "*explain the way of God more adequately*" to Apollos, Aquila and Priscilla want to do so in a way that encourages him and not discourage him and 'put out the Spirit's fire' as Paul puts it in 1 Thes. 5:19. How then did they humbly do that?

They affirmed his giftedness (vv.24-25)

Apollos had been instructed in "the way of the Lord" (message of salvation) which means someone taught him about God's Word and he spoke with "great fervour". It literally means he was "bubbling up on the inside". He had a passion for God and a passion to tell others what He knew about God! Aquila and Priscilla invite him to their home, welcome him and there obviously encouraged him in what he was doing. They took him aside privately where he would be more inclined to listen. He learned a great deal already which means he's already listened to others so hopefully he will listen now too.

Apollos, a Jew from Egypt now living in Ephesus, had not heard everything about Jesus nor the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He knew clearly that Jesus was the Messiah that John the Baptist had been proclaiming and was showing others from the Old Testament that Jesus was the Christ and was probably sharing some of the things that Jesus taught about. But he was missing some other key truths.

What he did know from God's Word he shared with others. He knew who Jesus was. This is encouraging to all of us. It means none of us has an excuse not to share the gospel. If you are just saved, you know more than the person who isn't.

Aquila and Priscilla are able to speak into Apollos' life because they affirmed him and wanted to

Add to his maturity (v.26)

He had some knowledge and was already teaching and preaching, but he needed to add to his maturity. In 2 Peter 1:5 Peter commands us to

add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We all need to mature spiritually in our faith. Not one of us has all knowledge. All of us are not fully spiritually mature yet. This is how we stay effective and productive in the knowledge that we have. Apollos was willing to listen as Aquila and Priscilla taught him things he didn't know yet. And if we're going to grow and increase in effectiveness then we

Must Humbly Listen to the Wisdom of Others **(18:26-28)**

We won't grow if we don't close our mouth. And even when our mouth is closed sometimes we're not really listening because we're waiting for that other person to stop talking and catch a breath so we can say our 2 cents. Like Apollos let's

Admit we're incomplete in Christ (v.26)

Paul wrote in Phil 1:6 that God is faithful and will complete the good work He is doing in us which is conformity to Christlikeness. In Col. 1:28 Paul said

²⁸ We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

The word means 'complete' or fully mature (which some translations reflect. We're spiritually immature; we're incomplete. We're still lacking some Christ like qualities, attitudes and knowledge. We need the knowledge so we can know what we're missing.

We should be impressed with Apollos' willingness to grow. When two people he didn't know well approach him and tell him that there's some things you need correction in, he listens and follows God's Word even more. If you and I want to have an effective ministry for Christ then when we read God's Word and see that there is something we need to correct or change, or sin we need to repent of, then let's do it. Let's not rationalize it away, let's admit our incompleteness in Christ and desire to be more like Christ.

Apollos with all his knowledge had a teachable spirit. He wanted to grow and learn more about God. When he was confronted with God's Word about an area where he fell short on, he changed his ways to God's Word.

Apollos had a burden for people. He wanted to use his gifts and go to Achaia to encourage the brothers there. The believers in Ephesus, probably didn't really want to see him go, but saw God's greater purpose and the need in Achaia. He greatly helped those believers grow in their faith and he "vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ." God used his great knowledge of the OT to present to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. By

being willing to learn and be corrected Apollos grew even more passionate about helping unbelievers know Christ and believers grow in Christ.

He stayed excited about sharing Christ (vv.27-28)

Apollos shows us a good example of a balanced burden for the people of God to grow and those who don't know Christ to hear the gospel. In order to do that you really have to care about people.

Apollos was passionate about seeing others grow in Christ. That passion came from his desire and excitement about growing spiritually himself. A sign of our own spiritual maturity is our desire to see each other grow too. And his willingness to be corrected so he could grow came from his passion for knowing what God's Word says so he could become more like Jesus.

My wife and I walk almost everyday somewhere between 6:30/7:30 in the morning. Lately we've had some really nice warm sunny mornings. After you've been outside for awhile and you come inside the brightness of the sun affects how you see everything else. Yet it doesn't take long once you're out of contact with the sun that you adjust to the darker environment.

The more contact we have with the Word of God affects how you see everything else around you in life. You'll see things through the eyes of God. The lack of time in God's Word will mean the darkness of the world becomes our dominant view.

Apollos had 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,*

When Aquila and Priscilla taught him things he didn't know, he humbly accepted the correction knowing he wasn't complete in Christ yet. That gave him more boldness to share what he knew with others. Spiritual growth is not complicated. The more we allow God to speak to us through His Word, the more we see our incompleteness and Lord-willing we'll hunger to grow even more. And we'll be excited to learn and grow together and share these truths with those who don't even know they are lost.

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