

The Conversion of Apollos

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[0 : 0 0] So welcome here for this Sunday, August 31st, 2025. My name's Kent Dixon, and it's my joy to be the pastor here. This morning we're continuing in our ongoing sermon series, Acts to All the World, and through this series we've been exploring and will continue to explore the New Testament book of Acts.

Our passage for this morning is found, not surprisingly, in Acts, Acts 18, 24 to 28. So if you have your Bibles, go ahead and turn to Acts 18, 24 to 28.

You can keep your thumb in that spot, and I'll also read it for us. If you don't have your Bible with you, you can grab one from the pew in front of you. Our passage for this morning is Acts 18, 24 to 28, so let's hear that now.

Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. 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.

He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him.

[1 : 2 3] When he arrived, he was a great help to those who, by grace, had believed. For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

So hopefully you remember from our sermon last week that when Paul left Ephesus on his second missionary journey, Aquila and Priscilla stayed behind. Do you remember that?

They came to host a church in their home as well. That's something else we learned. And as we'll be exploring today, Aquila and Priscilla were responsible for converting a man whose name was Apollos, and we heard about that this morning in our passage.

We know that he was a man with great talent and zeal before his conversion, and he served the Lord greatly, especially in Corinth. So our sermon this morning is titled, The Conversion of Apollos.

And we're going to spend some time together getting to know this man better. Also to see the important role that Aquila and Priscilla played in the life and ministry of Apollos.

[2 : 3 2] So this story, this conversion story of Apollos, offers an important lesson or two for us on how we might be more effective in our own evangelistic efforts today.

Does that sound valuable? So let's start by considering who was Apollos. Well, here's some background. Our passage this morning tells us that Apollos was a Jew and that he was born in the city of Alexandria.

So if you know of Alexandria, if you know ancient history, maybe you don't, maybe you think that would be a great way to help you sleep at night, get to sleep at night. Alexandria was and is actually located along the southern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

The city of Alexandria was founded in 331 BCE, or BC if you prefer that, by Alexander the Great, hence the name of the city.

Ancient Alexandria was known as a prominent center for culture and academic learning. And it was also said to have boasted the finest library in the entire ancient world.

[3 : 41] It's quite a feat. Scholars suggest also that the Jewish population in Alexandria numbered in the hundreds of thousands at that time. And in fact, the city of Alexandria became the most important city for Judaism outside of Jerusalem itself.

History also tells us that a group of Jewish scholars gathered at Alexandria to produce a work called the Septuagint. Do you know it? There'll be a test after.

The first Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. That's the Septuagint. And they did this work during roughly the 3rd century BCE. So our passage this morning describes Apollos as learned.

We hear that in the passage. Some other translations use the word eloquent. So we get the sense that he had learned a great deal of the intellectual heritage of his own culture.

And possibly other cultures as well. That's a fair assumption to make. He's described as being well-educated. So we can safely assume by that that he was likely a skilled debater, skilled speaker.

[4 : 53] Someone with an above average depth and breadth of knowledge. So as I was thinking about this sermon, I got the sense in my mind that Apollos was likely a renaissance man of sorts.

Right? Obviously, many hundreds and hundreds of years before the time that that term would have been known. So what about his abilities? Well, regardless of the Bible translation that you used or the descriptive words that you might read in your translation, Apollos can be seen as having been extremely knowledgeable and competent in his understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament.

But more than that, as we read, he had been, quote, instructed in the way of the Lord, the passage says. So Apollos was definitely a follower of Jesus.

So maybe that throws you a little bit. Why are we talking about the conversion of a man who is clearly a follower of Jesus already and was preaching to at least to some extent about Jesus?

We'll get there. So he was enthusiastic and passionate about the faith. And like Paul, his passion and enthusiasm would have likely been contagious to anyone who spoke with him.

[6 : 09] The Bible tells us that Apollos taught accurately. Did you hear that as I read the passage? He taught accurately about Jesus. So his teaching, to whatever extent it was, seems to have been truthful and correct, at least as far as his knowledge about the topic took him.

So, wait a second, what do I mean by that? Well, we know that Apollos taught about the baptism of John, only the baptism of John, our passage says.

So what does that mean? Well, that's not referring to an account of John the Baptist's own baptism, just to clarify that. So he wasn't just speaking about, yes, John was baptized, that's why we call him John the Baptist, and this was his ministry, and no, more than that.

So he was teaching about what John taught the significance of baptism to be when he preached about it. Okay, so what does that mean? Well, we get the sense that from all of this, Apollos' knowledge of Jesus may have been somewhat limited at his time.

So maybe he was aware of only how John spoke about Jesus as the coming Messiah. Maybe Apollos did not preach about Jesus and Jesus' ministry and his commissioning of the apostles and all of those things.

[7 : 31] And so scholars suggest that when John baptized people, it really had to do with their repentance from sin and looking ahead to the coming Messiah.

Now, remember, John's ministry largely predated Jesus' ministry, right? So John was foreshadowing and proclaiming the coming Messiah.

So being baptized by John at that time was a recognition of a person's repentance, their desire for their own spiritual cleansing, and also a commitment to follow God's law in anticipation of the Messiah's arrival.

Does that make sense? You see the difference between maybe what Paul would have been preaching versus Apollos. So Acts 18.25 suggests that Apollos, knowing only the baptism of John, was technically correct in what he preached, right?

Jesus was the Messiah. That was proven to be. But really, he had an incomplete understanding. Makes sense because of where he fit in the timeline. He had an incomplete understanding of the gospel.

[8 : 44] His knowledge of the death and resurrection and mission and message of Jesus Christ was limited to what he had learned through the disciples of John the Baptist.

But despite some of the ways that his message might have been a little bit deficient in some ways, he began to speak boldly in the synagogue at Ephesus, our passage tells us.

And there were two people that we know who heard him preaching. We've already met these two. So let me give us a quick reminder and summary of what we've learned about Aquila and Priscilla, their background.

Just revisited a bit as reminders. Husband and wife, Jews expelled from Rome. And Paul had stayed with them in Corinth because they shared both a faith and a vocation.

They were all tent makers. They traveled with Paul from Corinth to Ephesus and they stayed there with him. They stayed there after Paul left. And as we heard already this morning, they ultimately hosted a church in their home in Ephesus.

[9 : 54] And then we learn in Romans 16, verses 3 and 4, that they eventually risked their lives for Paul at some point. And now, as you know, some of you know, we're going to be looking at Romans in the new year.

So they eventually risked their lives for Paul in some way at some point. And so we know that coming up in Romans. They're also mentioned in 2 Timothy 4.19, which was Paul's last letter shortly before his death.

So they were significant people to Paul. And so here they appear again in our story today. So we've learned that Aquila and Priscilla attended the synagogue.

And as Jews, they would have had that privilege, right? That was their right. That was their privilege to do that. But do you see that method of ministering that they probably picked up from Paul, perhaps?

And they used that opportunity to be in the synagogue, to listen and teach and whatever they did there, as an evangelistic opportunity. We know from our passage this morning that they heard Apollos speak there at the synagogue.

[11 : 01] They were listening to him as he debated, as he spoke. And there's nothing in our passage at all to suggest that they didn't listen respectfully. Because many people had listened to Paul and other apostles when they spoke.

And we know that generally people were respectful when they were addressed by them. And it's worth noting that after hearing Apollos speak, they didn't publicly call him out, right?

Maybe they had some concerns, but they showed respect for someone who they considered to be a fellow minister as they interacted with him. And it's clear in our passage as well that they were seeking to have a private and constructive dialogue conversation with Apollos.

So just as Paul often did when he interacted with people, it seems their goal was to explain, to reason, to guide, to persuade.

Healthy communications indeed, right? Very minimal conflict and showing mutual concern and respect. So we read that they explained the way of God to Apollos more adequately, our passage says.

[12 : 15] Or maybe even more accurately is a fair way to put it. So that seems to suggest that what Apollos had been saying was, as we talked about, at least somewhat accurate, right?

He had a chunk of the message and they believed it was correct. But then Priscilla and Aquila took it a step further. They picked up on his insufficient understanding of Christian truth.

They recognized a need there. And the Bible actually doesn't say, you probably noticed, our passage doesn't give specifics, right? Luke doesn't have a list of, well, there's a little light on this, a little light on that, a little light on that.

It doesn't say, right? There's no detail. But one strong possibility is that he had no knowledge of Pentecost, right? The coming of the Holy Spirit. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

And that's a fairly big piece of the ministry of God's work in his people throughout time, especially in the early church. Another theory that I read is that Apollos may have been unaware of Christ's great commission, right?

[13 : 20] To his apostles, to all of us as disciples. The ongoing ministry and mission that he gave people who claimed to be his followers.

He may not have known that. He may not also have known the founding of the New Testament church, right? He may not have known that. That this church of Christ was growing rapidly.

And primarily, there was this huge shift towards the Gentiles. Pretty critical. So Priscilla and Aquila possessed a really comprehensive understanding of the gospel, of Christian doctrine.

And most likely, teaching that they picked up from Paul. So then, as we talked about a little bit already, they gently and respectfully passed this along to Apollos.

As I said a moment ago, they saw him as a fellow minister, right? So they wanted to respect him. They wanted to encourage him. They wanted to help him learn and grow.

[14 : 22] And they sought to build on what he already knew by conveying truth that he did not know yet. So they filled in the blanks for him with missing information.

They built him up and encouraged him in his faith. And they helped this very gifted minister to more fully develop his Christian theology. The conversion of Apollos.

So I touched on this a little bit ago. It was a different sort, right? His conversion came as he developed a more complete understanding of the truth of Jesus and the gospel.

So it's not that he went from a man who knew nothing of Christ. But he went into a more complete understanding. Aquila and Priscilla were successful in leading Apollos to a more accurate understanding of the way of God.

That was their role. And that's what they did. So with that understanding, this highly, highly educated and fervent, clearly, passionate Jew from Alexandria became Apollos the minister.

[15 : 31] Apollos was endorsed by believers at Ephesus, we heard in our passage this morning. They sent word ahead to the believers in Corinth to welcome him. Right? That happens a lot in the New Testament.

Someone paves the way for someone else to be welcomed by a different faith community of Christians. And we learn that Apollos greatly helped the people who were already there and who already believed.

Right? So again, it seems like he came along and encouraged as he had been encouraged. Helped people deepen and broaden their understanding of the faith as had been done for him.

Our passage also noted that Apollos vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

That's the quote from the passage. Sounds a bit like Paul there, doesn't it? In fact, Paul himself wrote in 1 Corinthians 3, 5, and 6 that he, Paul says, I planted, Apollos watered.

[16 : 36] I see some nods. People know that passage. So interesting, right? There's some crossover, some cross-pollination there. But, as happens, eventually a problem developed.

And it developed among the believers at Corinth that involved Apollos and Paul. And you may know it. Sometimes people, I've heard it spoken about in sermons in the past and doesn't really get dug into very much.

But, so this conflict seems to have stemmed from what one commentator I read referred to as preacheritis. Interesting way to look at it. So, some of the believers felt connected and loyal to Paul as their spiritual mentor, as their teacher, as their friend, as their shepherd.

And others felt that way about Apollos. And the passion and commitment to these two men even came, in some circumstances, at the exclusion of other apostles.

Paul himself. Even Peter. So, it's interesting that Apollos first established a small church in Ephesus. We know that. And later, Paul came to lead that church.

[17 : 52] Then, Apollos became the leader of a church in Corinth, which Paul had established. See, again, that cross-pollination of their ministries. Their ministries crossed paths, even though we don't really know how often they met in person.

But, whatever the case, Paul suggested that this fierce loyalty people felt to a given person was actually an inappropriate fixation.

Because both men were equal ministers of God. There's no hierarchy. There's no tier system there. Ultimately, Paul also made it clear the two of them were just men, like any other.

Certainly, they had a calling from the Lord to do what they did. But, they were only men. So, you can read more about this whole issue in 1 Corinthians 3.

But, Paul was clear that he in no way blamed Apollos for having done anything wrong in this situation. Right? He didn't take the opportunity to say, Well, I'm actually your pastor.

[18 : 56] He's not. And, I think sometimes we get the impression that Paul denigrated Apollos a little bit. Like, ran him down. But, that's not the case, according to Scripture.

Paul recognized him as a minister and a co-worker through whom the Lord also worked. No less so. He included Apollos and Cephas, Peter, as also serving the church on an even playing field with anyone else called by God.

So, Paul was clear in his message that none of these leaders, including himself, were people in whom others should boast. Right?

I could go on a side tangent of pastors and ministers around the world who clearly have a following. Now, does the following of that individual align with God's calling and God's ministry and God's work in the world?

I don't know. I'll leave that one open to you. So, the last mention of Apollos in the Bible comes in Paul's letter to Titus, in Titus 3.13.

[20 : 05] And it says, Do everything you can to help Zenos, the lawyer, and Apollos on their way, and see that they have everything they need. Paul was always looking out for people with whom he served, always trying to make things easier for them to do their work.

So, Apollos was on his way through Crete, where Titus was, at this time, at the time of this mention. And clearly, Paul still considered him to be a valuable co-laborer and friend.

Some scholars believe that Apollos eventually returned to Ephesus to serve the church there. And so, it's possible that he did, but there's no biblical confirmation of that.

Also, some have suggested that Apollos may have been the unknown author of the book of Hebrews. I heard a couple hmms.

That also struck me as a hmm myself. So, maybe you didn't know that. Maybe you had attributed the authorship of Hebrews to someone. It's generally believed that the author is unknown.

[21 : 13] But, some commentators do say that it may have been Apollos. Again, there's no conclusive biblical support for this. And I would say the author of Hebrews remains unknown to us.

But, what we do know in all of this is the successful conversion of Apollos. This different kind of conversion by Aquila and Priscilla.

Their approach and the steps they took are worthy of being modeled by any of us. When we consider sharing the truth of Jesus with someone. What do those steps look like?

Well, acknowledging the faith and understanding of those we are seeking to guide, mentor, or teach. Remember, starting, as Paul often did, starting with what people knew.

Right? Not making assumptions. Not being unkind that they maybe didn't understand to the degree you expected them to. But being compassionate and seeking to guide them from the point they were at.

[22 : 14] Building on their faith, then, as we seek to teach them, as our passage said, the way of God more accurately. Right? People who are seeking the Lord in their life will generally have a pretty good start.

A pretty good idea. And so, we don't want to make assumptions that we then overlay our understanding. But work with them from where they are, where they're at, what they understand.

And, I think this is really important, doing so privately whenever possible. You've heard me say before, the best way, I believe, to get someone to attend your church, or to encourage someone to follow Jesus, is to begin with a relationship.

Right? If someone comes up to me and says, well, first of all, I'm a pastor, so they will. But if they say, you know, Kent, I'd like to tell you about Jesus. And here are the six steps you need to follow to be saved.

So, I don't know you. I have no relationship with you. So, I appreciate that you're trying to convey truth. But I think the most effective way, and scholars say this, is start with a relationship.

[23 : 26] So, I believe there's a great deal, I hope there's a great deal that we've learned this morning, from these examples of humility and trust that we've seen in Apollos, and Aquila, and Priscilla.

Friends, are you able to be humble and open? Willing to let others explain the truth of the faith to you? So that you maybe have a better grasp of it than you do right now.

Have you ever sensed God calling you to explain the gospel and the truth of God to someone else? Do you feel you have the confidence, the tools, or the skills to do that?

God has laid it on my heart to help you with that, so stay tuned. Do you trust the Holy Spirit to give you the words when the opportunity presents itself? Or, do you wring your hands and let the moment pass you by?

You've heard me say it many, many times. What have you got to lose? May God grant us a spirit of humility as we seek to grow, not only in our knowledge of Him, but as we seek to share more complete picture with others of what it means to seek, trust, and obey in their own lives.

[24 : 46] Amen? Amen.