

At the Name of Jesus

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[0 : 00] Please open your Bibles back to Acts 18 and 19. But it's a long, quite long passage, so we won't be able to read every verse.

So the verses will be on the screen. Well, for more than 100 years, beginning in the 1730s, the Western world was shaken with what came to be known as the Great Awakening.

That's a picture on the screen of what happened during the Great Awakening. So during this time, people from different church backgrounds were working together for the sake of the gospel.

So there were the Armenian Methodists like John and Charles Wesley, Calvinist Methodists like George Whitefield, Congregationalists like Jonathan Edwards, Presbyterians like Gilbert Tennant, Lutherans and Moravians like Count Zinzendorf.

And they were all working together across different churches in partnerships. As a result, the gospel reached the marginalized people of the society that previously were unreached.

[1 : 17] The gospel was preached to the slaves, the Native Americans, and people in prisons. Many missionary organizations were established during this time, including CMS.

And hundreds of popular songs like And Can It Be? Great song. And Amazing Grace were created. And eventually, this movement led to the abolition of slavery.

But despite all these great partnerships between Christians, Jonathan Edwards, one of the leaders of the movement, still called this event a surprising work of God.

Not of Christians, but of God. In this passage, we see how the church grows when people work together.

But above all, it grows when God works and enables His church to grow. In other words, we see here partnerships that enable the church to grow.

[2 : 28] Partnerships between Christians as they participate in the work of God, the work that God is doing in His church. So first, we see Christians working together to disciple each other for the gospel.

So in chapter 18, verse 23... Why can't I operate this? Next slide, please.

Yep. So, verse 23, Paul travels around to strengthen disciples. So we see here that Paul doesn't only work to evangelize and look for new converts.

He also works to strengthen other Christians to maturity. And meanwhile, in verse 24, a Jewish Christian named Apollos came to Ephesus and met Priscilla and Aquila.

So in verse 26, they met Priscilla and Aquila. You might remember Priscilla and Aquila, whom Paul coincidentally met in Corinth at the start of chapter 18, because coincidentally, they were also tent makers like Paul.

[3 : 51] So he stayed with them and had a chance to disciple them. And so they followed Paul to Ephesus in the rest of chapter 18.

But when Paul moved on in his travels, Priscilla and Aquila stayed in Ephesus, which coincidentally enabled them to meet Apollos.

Now, there's this prominent character who came to Ephesus, who met Priscilla and Aquila, which enabled him to be discipled by them.

Of course, the readers should know that these are not coincidences. And so in verse 24, Apollos is described as a native of Alexandria in Egypt.

Now, Alexandria, the ancient Alexandria, was a place where people went for learning. So along with Rome, Alexandria was a place for learning.

[4 : 50] It was the home of the library of Alexandria, which was the biggest, the greatest in the ancient world. And in fact, it's one of the ancient wonders of the world because it was so big.

So a lot of learned people came out of that city. And indeed, Apollos is also described as a learned man in verse 24.

And in verse 25, he's also received instructions in the way of Christ. So he's a Christian. And therefore, he speaks with great fervor as he teaches about Jesus accurately to the Jews in the synagogues.

Now, the term with great fervor there literally means fervent in the Spirit. And indeed, in the book of Acts, when someone has the courage to speak about Christ, they have the Holy Spirit.

It's because the Holy Spirit is in them. And so here is someone here is someone who is learned, knows Jesus, evangelizes to the Jews, and he has the zeal of the Holy Spirit.

[6 : 19] But in verse 26, he met Priscilla and Aquila who heard him teaching and realized that even though his teaching was accurate, it was inadequate because he only knew about the baptism of John the Baptist, not the Christian baptism.

And so what did Priscilla and Aquila do? They invited him to their home and taught him to complete his knowledge.

Imagine meeting someone someone who has a PhD from Harvard University who is a Christian and speaks about Jesus accurately and is evangelizing people as well.

And you, a mere tent maker, notice that their teaching is accurate but a little bit inadequate. so you invite them to come to your house to have a theological discussion.

That's what's happening here. Priscilla and Aquila, two tent makers, discipling Apollos, a learned evangelist from Alexandria.

[7 : 38] And Apollos is willing to humble himself and be disciplined. This passage illustrates the interconnection and interdependence of churches in the early period and of Christians.

Priscilla and Aquila took their time out of their ministry in Ephesus to help someone who would later prove to be an enormous benefit to the churches.

And Apollos humbled himself and accepted their teaching. Here we see Christians working together across different churches and different academic backgrounds not for their own ego but for the sake of the gospel.

Academic knowledge or geographical backgrounds don't hinder people to disciple or be disciplined.

And so in verse 27 when Apollos wants to go to Ikea again we see the church in Ephesus working together with him encouraging him and sending a letter to the church in Ikea to welcome him.

We see a great partnership for the gospel don't we? And so in chapter 19 the scene then moves straight away to Paul who by now arrives back to Ephesus but Apollos has already gone away so they don't meet each other.

[9 : 15] But then Paul meets some people who have a similar background to Apollos that is they only know about the baptism of John the Baptist. But then it becomes clear very quickly that their knowledge of Christianity is even way less accurate than Apollos' verses.

In verse 2 they haven't even heard about the Holy Spirit. Now this is strange because if we go back to the gospel of Luke or the gospel of John we might think that the disciples of John the Baptist would surely have known about the Holy Spirit because throughout his ministry John the Baptist over and over again proclaimed about the Messiah who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

So perhaps what they mean in that statement is that they haven't heard that the Holy Spirit is already available now. So maybe what they're saying is we haven't even heard that there is Holy Spirit here now which means that they had not heard about Jesus' death and resurrection as the beginning of the Messianic age and they haven't heard about the event at Pentecost.

So the gap in their knowledge is quite significant. It's not only about baptism like Apollos it's about Jesus' death and resurrection and what it means for the Holy Spirit to come.

They don't know about the center of the gospel. What Paul does is therefore different to what Priscilla and Aquila do to Apollos.

[11 : 06] Paul tells them about Jesus in verse 4 as the fulfillment of John the Baptist and then he re-baptizes them in verse 5.

They've already been baptized by John, now they're re-baptized in Jesus' name because they show that they haven't understood the center of the gospel.

So these two stories are placed back to back to show us the interconnection and the intricate movements of early Christians as they worked together, discipling one another and helping each other move along in their discipleship journey.

something like in a movie where they show us what happens in two places at the same time. This happens, meanwhile another thing happens in another place.

Luke does the same here to show us that the early church grew because different people in different places worked together regardless of backgrounds or starting spiritual positions.

[12 : 20] no matter where they start in their discipleship, whether they start as someone who doesn't even know the promise of the Holy Spirit or as someone who's learned it and is already evangelizing and teaching about Jesus, other Christians help move them along in their discipleship journey.

Hey, mature more. Hey, mature a bit more. So that the whole church, the whole body can mature together and the gospel spreads further.

A friend of mine recently shared about the small groups in his church. So the small groups in his church act sort of like small communities within the bigger community of the church.

So people in small groups are so close even outside of the church that they can serve each other in practical ways like helping each other with moving house or cooking for each other.

And they also intentionally encourage one another to have a mission focus. So for example, one group in that church focuses on reaching the South Asians, their South Asian friends who are usually Hindus.

[13 : 43] so once a month they run an outreach event where they invite their Hindu friends along to go on hikes or go to the beaches. And as relationships deepen, they are invited along to an evangelistic Bible study like Christianity Explored.

So church members in that church help each other to mature and help encourage each other to be missional in their daily lives.

Perhaps we too can work with each other and encourage one another to mature together for the sake of the gospel. Well, while the first factor of church growth in this passage emphasizes partnership, between Christians, the second factor of church growth is completely done by God himself.

In chapter 19 verse 11 to 12, things that touch Paul like handkerchiefs and aprons have miraculous powers that even they can even heal the sick and exercise demons.

things that do. But the start of verse 11 makes it clear that Paul's got nothing to do with it. It says God did extraordinary miracles through Paul.

[15 : 23] Now, ancient Ephesus was a home to witchcraft and sorceries. And so here, God works in a special manner. He displayed his power by accommodating to their limited understanding, that is, through Paul and through the things that touched him.

And perhaps this is also why in verse 6 of chapter 19, when the disciples in Ephesus are baptized, they suddenly speak in tongues and prophesy.

Which is kind of expected, because it's been prophesied by Joel in our first reading, that when the Holy Spirit is poured, people will prophesy. But it doesn't always happen, does it?

And even in the book of Acts, it doesn't always happen. When Lydia is baptized, there's no record of anything interesting happening. When the jailer in Philippi was baptized in chapter 16, he was filled with joy, but there's no record of spectacular miracles.

But here, the context is different. Here, in the middle of all sorceries and witchcraft in Ephesus, God shows his power in extraordinary ways.

[16 : 46] To show people that his power is the greatest. And so, in that context, verse 13 to 16 makes sense.

Here, there are some Jews who tried to exorcise demons using the name of Jesus. So, they've seen Christians doing it, exorcising demons in the name of Jesus, so they want to do that as well.

And they're so used to the witchcraft of the city that they now want to use the name of Jesus as some kind of spell, like Abednego in the name of Jesus.

Notice that they don't even know who Jesus is, in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches. But it doesn't work. They get defeated instead.

God here shows that his power only works through his real followers. Showing that God's power is not something that we use to benefit ourselves.

[17 : 56] God's power is like water from a fountain that has to be drunk either straight from the source or we can use the water to benefit others only if we attach ourselves to the fountain like a pipe to draw people to the fountain.

there is a pastor in America that teaches people to shout or to pray or to claim in the name of Jesus I command money to come to me.

I hate to break it to you but in the name of Jesus doesn't work that way. Especially if his name is used selfishly for ourselves. But instead of asking for God's power to be displayed like that why not ask for this?

I've got a friend who lives in Indonesia and goes to a church there and one day he heard that a family at church needed money to rebuild their house that had been burnt down but this friend of mine had no money so he prayed to God and that night that very night he received a call unsolicited call from his friend outside of church telling him that he felt moved to give him a certain amount of money randomly and so after receiving the money he gave it all to the needy family and the family went how do you know that this is precisely how much we need to rebuild the house I call that a miracle that's how God's power works God's power is given and displayed not for our own selfish ambition but to build the church to help us mature to help non

Christians come to him that's why he displays his power in Ephesus and that's what happens in verse 17 to 20 as a result of the spectacular events that God does in Ephesus in verse 17 people are seized with fear and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor in verse 18 to 19 people come and burn their scrolls of witchcraft and in verse 20 the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power in the city where witchcraft was everywhere God's power display resulted in increased commitment and decreased idolatry David

[21 : 05] Platt is an American pastor who used to be a missionary and he says that in most places where he's done mission the pattern of conversion is almost always the same people come to know the power of Jesus people believe in Jesus they get baptized and then they call David to their homes to burn their idols all of them and then David challenges them to think of ten people around them that are not Christians and choose one person who is the least likely to kill them if they tell them about Jesus and pray and tell them about Jesus when people really see God's power they leave their idolatries behind and they commit to

Jesus and they tell others about Jesus so here in this passage we see the work of God as he uses miracles spectacular events the partnerships of Christians and also the ordinary faithful preaching of the word as displayed by Paul in verse eight to ten which we don't have time to cover but all this together contribute to the growth of the church the gospel is proclaimed and more people are saved perhaps two points of application will be beneficial first for the sake of the gospel perhaps we can keep an eye out for people that we can help progress in their journey of discipleship if you see someone who just became a

Christian or who is younger in their faith why not offer to meet up one-to-one regularly to read the Bible together why not offer to mentor them in their journey of discipleship and also perhaps if you hear someone making a comment that's a bit biblically inadequate accurate but a bit biblically inadequate during Bible study or if you hear me preaching something that's biblically inadequate why not invite them to your house for a meal and discuss it with them and if you think who am I to disciple others or to correct others well think of Apollos and think of Priscilla and Aquila tent makers who disciple this scholar from Alexandria regardless of educational background we are called to disciple one another for the sake of the gospel and related to that

I think we should also humble ourselves when we receive encouragement to improve in our discipleship just like Apollos he didn't say oh who are you tent makers I'm this great scholar from Alexandria you can't tell me anything well no he humbled himself and received their instructions I always appreciate it when some of you come to me after a sermon and encourage me or sharpen something that I've said or offer constructive criticism sometimes it's not easy to accept criticism but I appreciate it nonetheless thank you for doing that you know who you are let's work together and help each other mature in Christ the Christian faith is not an individual thing there's no you do you here we work together because we are all parts of the same body and the whole body must mature to become like the head

Christ second let's pray pray for God to do his work through us pray for him to do a surprising work like Jonathan Edwards says pray for miracles to be shown so that people might believe when they see pray for hearts to be changed when they hear the gospel pray that God might give us courage and the boldness that Apollos displays and the zeal of the spirit that he has pray that God might use the ministries here at HDD to bring more and more and more people to Christ in fact let's pray boldly why not pray you know just as the church in Ephesus grew greatly and miraculously despite

the spiritual battles that were going on against the witchcraft and sorceries why not pray that the churches in

[26 : 46] Melbourne might grow miraculously and greatly so that everyone in Melbourne will know the greatness of Jesus despite all the idolatries and immoralities that are currently happening in the city why not pray God what you did through Paul what you did through those people in the great awakening do that again so let's pray now Lord Jesus in your name there is power there is comfort and above all there is salvation so we pray that you will give us through your spirit the boldness to proclaim your great and mighty name to the people around us so they too might experience your power your comfort and your salvation in that most powerful name full of grace

Lord Jesus Christ we pray Amen