

Getting the Gospel Right

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- [0 : 0 0] Alright, let's turn our Bibles to Acts chapter 18, 113, 1113. There should be an outline as well to follow along.
- I'm sure some of you crypto traders would have seen this news recently. But I read two or three weeks ago that there was a \$10.47 million mistake made by a crypto company.
- Anyone heard about this story when it came out? Yeah, a few of you did. Isaac, yep, training away there. Apparently one of the employees in Bulgaria, rather than key the amount of \$100 for a refund, accidentally typed in the bank account number instead.
- So you know your bank account numbers, they are sort of 10 to 12 digits. And so as a result of this momentary slip of concentration by this Bulgarian worker, a 41-year-old Victorian mother found herself \$10.47 million richer.
- Now of course we would have heard nothing of this, had it not been the fact that she then tried to hang on to the cash, even attempted to get on a plane to Malaysia to abscond with the money.
- [1 : 1 9] Now in case you didn't already know, it's actually illegal to keep money that doesn't belong to you. So if that ever happened to you, fellas, just make sure you don't try and keep it.
- I mean some of you may already have \$10.47 million in those accounts anyway, so no big deal. Now the reason I'm bringing this up as an example is to show you that sometimes what we think to be a small error, easily made, can have a big consequence in life.
- For this Bulgarian worker, it was typing a set of numbers into one field instead of another that had major consequences. Of course, made worse by the actions of the recipient.
- Well, in a similar way, what we see in our passage today is that it's important to have a right understanding of Christianity. Sometimes, you know, Christians are being told that they're just too dogmatic, they're creating unnecessary division over what might appear to be detail.
- But as we'll see tonight, getting the gospel right, that is the good news of Jesus clear, has a huge impact on our lives.
- [2 : 3 8] Now what we have here tonight in our reading are two case studies. In both, the beliefs of the people were initially NQR. Not quite right. Remember those stores?
- Some things were, but not everything was. And so it was important for them to be corrected. Case study number one involves Apollos.
- And so beginning in verse 24, we read, Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man with a thorough knowledge of the scriptures.
- Ephesus is where Paul had left Priscilla and Aquila. Paul then, if we read in verse 23, he had gone back to Antioch and he is actually on his way back.
- But he hadn't arrived in Ephesus yet. So we discover Apollos as a Jew to be as someone well-versed in scriptures. That is the Old Testament. He was also a gifted speaker.

[3 : 36] Now to know only the baptism of John means that he was only baptized, he was only baptized by John.

He wasn't baptized by any of Jesus' disciples and not in his name. Nevertheless, we read that Apollos knew who Jesus was. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, the Lord Jesus.

And he taught Jesus accurately. And yet, he was NQR. Not quite right. Not everything was right. Because in verse 26, When Priscilla and Aquila heard him speaking in the synagogue, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

Now, we don't know what the details of the thing that he didn't know adequately was, but it's obvious, isn't it, that something was lacking. He did teach Jesus accurately, but there was something that was not adequate that needed to be corrected.

Now, this was quickly fixed up, though, because when he then wanted to go to Archaea, the disciples in Ephesus, verse 27, were glad to commend him. And on arriving there, he proved a great help to the believers.

[4 : 53] For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. And in this regard, I think he was actually following in Paul's own example.

Remember, Paul himself was really good in refuting and arguing in public, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. Here, Apollos was doing just that, and being a real asset to the church in Corinth.

Now, next we want to go on, and I want you now to compare what is in case study number two. Here, Paul encounters 12 men in Acts chapter 19, verse 1.

And as I read it again, I'd like you to see if you can pick out the similarities and the differences with Paul. So we read, Paul said, John's baptism was a baptism of repentance.

He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

[6 : 14] When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about 12 men in all. So some key details here.

Firstly, it's evident that like Apollos, these 12 men only knew John's baptism as well. However, unlike Apollos, these men did not know the Lord Jesus, nor the Holy Spirit.

Now, I imagine that most likely what happened was that they had left Jerusalem and Judea soon after receiving John's ministry. Now, if you remember, John was in the region, baptizing in the Jordan River, calling people to repent and to prepare for the coming Messiah.

Now, of course, at the time, Jesus, sorry, John himself did not know who the Messiah was, did not know it was Jesus. Because if you remember later on, even when he was in prison, he had to send his disciples to confirm, asking Jesus whether he was indeed the one.

And so these 12 men, having not heard about Jesus, probably because they had left the city or Judea, were deficient in their faith. They needed Paul to explain to them that Jesus was the Messiah that they had been preparing for, that John had told them to wait to come.

[7 : 36] But having repented, when John baptized them, these men were ready for the Messiah. That is, when Paul then now teaches them about Jesus, on hearing it, they were ready to believe, and therefore were baptized by Paul, this time in the name of Jesus.

And then when Paul places his hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit. And what happens here is that God is giving them the tangible signs of the Spirit through the gift of tongues and prophecy.

Now, we need to be clear here that these gifts are not mandatory. That is, you don't have to speak in tongues or prophecy to prove that you have the Spirit. Rather, there are one possible means by which God can demonstrate that someone has the Spirit, because they are gifts.

Gifts are not mandatory. So while on the surface, both Apollos and the 12 men lack knowledge, and both only had the baptism of John, yet this is the key difference, isn't it?

On the one hand, Apollos knew the Scriptures and Jesus, so he was already a Christian and a disciple of Christ when he meets Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus. This wasn't the case with the 12.

[8 : 50] And we know this because it's only after Paul reveals Jesus to them and they believe that they received the Holy Spirit. And as the Bible says, the Spirit is given to all who are Christians.

Only Christians have the Spirit. And so these 12 men only became Christians after meeting Paul in Ephesus when they heard about Jesus and put their faith in him.

Apollos, on the other hand, was already a Christian. All he needed was to be taught further to have a better way of understanding God. So it's worth realizing that actually it's not the baptism that makes the 12 disciples of Jesus.

Rather, baptism in the name of Jesus is what Paul performs to publicly signify. It's an outward sign, as we were saying earlier, that points to them already being Christians.

And this is the time that they become Christians, so it was appropriate for Paul to baptize them at this point. Because up to now, they knew only repentance. And although that's good, that's not enough.

[9 : 58] That merely puts them in a state of readiness to receive the good news. But they had to hear the good news itself in order to become Christians. So faith in Jesus, that is responding rightly to the good news, is the crucial requirement that makes someone a Christian.

And then afterwards, the Spirit is also given at that point. Now, of course, you may then ask, why is it that if faith is the thing that makes them a Christian and they receive the Spirit, why is it only at the baptism or even afterwards when Paul puts his hands on them that they receive the Spirit?

You know, wouldn't they have had that just, you know, I don't know, 10 or 15 minutes before when they believed? Well, I think the better way of reading this story is to see that while these steps are sequential, they're all really part of the single event, right?

Because they happen so close together. It's similar, for example, to a wedding ceremony. One or two of you may have been part of one recently. But when it comes to the actual formalities, there's actually a few steps to go through, right?

First, there's the promises and the vows. Then you exchange the rings. Then I, or a celebrant, will pronounce them husband and wife. And then afterwards, they have to do the paperwork, sign the register.

[11 : 20] Now, if I ask you, what is the actual point at which the couple is married? I mean, what would you say? You know, some people would say, no, it's really when the vows are made.

As long as they promise to each other, you know, yep, they're married. But if you think about it, no one ever stops at those vows, do they? Everyone goes through, right up to the declaration and the signing of the paperwork.

Because everything that follows is a confirmation and the sealing of those vows. And so if you think about it, it's not just the vows because nobody just does the vows and then, okay, that's it, you're married, don't have to do anything else.

No, because everything else confirms seals is the one package, isn't it? Even the signing of the register so that the government knows that this is a legitimate and official marriage.

And so even though the individual steps are sequential in time in the ceremony, we see it as one single event, don't we? And so likewise, the conversion of these twelve men at Ephesus is a single event, even though spaced out in time, albeit, as I say, probably over a matter of a few minutes.

[12 : 29] But like the vows and the promises in marriage, it's their faith in Jesus that's the key. Without that, then nothing else that follows really matters.

Even the baptism becomes just an empty sign, isn't it? Because there is no faith that it is a confirmation of. And so God, I think, knowing that all this was going to take place, chose the act of Paul putting his hands on the men to be the moment where he publicly attests to these men's conversion, giving them the visible sign of the Holy Spirit that is, that of tongues and prophecy.

Now, on the other hand, did you notice that Apostle himself wasn't baptized again, was he? When Priscilla and Aquila took him aside to teach him more, he was already a believer at that point in Jesus.

He had already been instructed in the way of the Lord, as I said, taught accurately about Jesus. So, I would argue that actually he had already received the Spirit before he arrived in Ephesus.

And yes, even without baptism in the name of Jesus. Because, as I said, it's faith in Jesus and not water baptism that makes you a believer and a recipient of the Holy Spirit.

[13 : 47] Now, could Apollos have been baptized as well? Possibly, but it wasn't necessary. And I would argue even that it wasn't absolutely necessary for Paul to baptize the twelve men either.

It wasn't necessary, but I think Paul taught it appropriate to do so, to signify publicly that this was the point at which Dave believed in Jesus and therefore became Christians.

That gone from mere repentance and readiness to knowing and believing in the Messiah. From merely receiving John's ministry and message to receiving Jesus' ministry and message.

And we know that it's Jesus' ministry that is the more important and crucial one. and then God used the baptism as a visible sign to show that they indeed have been truly saved.

And so, that's how we ought to see baptism today as well. It's not the water baptism that makes you a Christian. This right that Edith and Delaney had gone through is not a guarantee of your salvation.

[14 : 53] Instead, believing in Jesus and persevering in faith, that is the key to which, that is the key to whether you're saved or not. So, some of you may have been baptized by your parents as an infant.

Some of you may have even been baptized yourself as your own volition many years ago. That's all great. That's all acts of faith and obedience at the time. But the more important question is, do you still believe in Jesus that he died for your sins so that you can be forgiven by God?

So that you can be restored in relationship with him and have eternal life? Your answer to this question now is the more important thing that determines your salvation, not whether you've been baptized or not in the past.

So, likewise, Edith and Delaney weren't saved today just because they were baptized. What they're doing today is to publicly affirm what has already happened to them prior, that is, faith in Jesus and their continuing faith in Jesus.

So, if you see the questions that we ask them today involve them repenting, that was the message of John the Baptist, turning to Christ, putting their faith in him, and then we all affirm the Apostles' Creed together to be a summary of what we believe about Jesus.

[16 : 17] And also, when we heard their testimony, it was clear, isn't it, that it was at some point earlier in their lives that they became Christians, that they put their trust in Jesus.

It was at that point that they were saved. Today, what they're doing is publicly declaring, just like the signing, the register, and the marriage, so that we witness publicly their faith in Jesus.

So, to the question, do you need to be baptized to be saved? The answer is, no, you don't. but, the question then I put is, if you're a Christian, and you're not baptized yet, well, why not?

Because, if you do truly put your faith in Jesus, then there should be no hesitation to publicly declare your faith in him. God will use that occasion for his glory, and may even strengthen your faith as a result.

But remember, baptism is not some threshold you need to meet, that you've got to be good enough, or committed enough. No, baptism is a witness to the faith that you already have in Jesus, that you're putting your trust in Jesus so that you might have forgiveness for your sins, and then resolving to live for Jesus, obeying him, and putting that faith into action.

[17 : 39] Now, I spent a bit of time talking about baptism today, because we've had a few, a couple, but also because I think the passage lends itself quite nicely to understanding what baptism is and isn't.

But I think there's a bigger message out of this passage as well, and that is our third point in the outline. What other insights can we gain from our passage today? Well, I have two.

The first is to say that I think it's okay, or rather we learn that it is okay, that we don't get everything right about the scriptures. In fact, nobody can, right?

No one's perfect in their understanding of scriptures. Even Apollos, gifted as he was, with such a thorough understanding of scriptures, do you notice, still had to receive further teaching from Priscilla and Aquila.

Now, does that mean Priscilla and Aquila were perfect? No. It just meant that they understand something better than Apollos, and therefore took him aside to teach him about it. And they did that graciously and gently, did you not see?

[18 : 43] So we need to extend this same grace to one another as well, isn't it? Because we all come from different backgrounds. Some did not grow up in churches, some are not Anglicans, not that Anglicans are the best anyway, but some of us have been taught better through our time than others.

All of that is still God's grace to us, isn't it? Nothing to make us proud or nothing to make us think that we're better than others. So I would say let's be generous when we correct one another.

And on the flip side as well, let's not be defensive when we're being corrected either because none of us are perfect. In fact, our reading in Proverbs today stressed in it that whoever heeds life-giving correction, notice correction is actually life-giving, will be at home among the wise.

And those who disregard discipline, that is correction, despise themselves, but the one who heeds correction gains understanding. So correction is actually a good thing that God's giving to us because we're not perfect, are we?

Being right doesn't make you a better Christian. So there's no reason to be arrogant or proud. But on the other hand, just because you have things to learn, you shouldn't feel inferior or intimidated to speak or to say things just because you think, oh, other people are better than me.

- [20 : 04] No, that's not the attitude we should have. Collectively, let's show grace to one another, but let's also collectively be humble enough to continue to want to grow and learn. Because the flip side, the second point I make is that it's actually important to work at understanding scriptures correctly.

And in particular, it's important to get the gospel right, to understand the good news of Jesus. Because look at Apollos, he used what he learned from Aquila and Priscilla, didn't he, in verse 28, to then go publicly and refute the error that was in Corinth, to prove from scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

Likewise, when Paul met the twelve, he thought it important, he made the effort, didn't he, to reveal the good news of Jesus to them. Why? Because for them, it was a life and death decision, wasn't it?

Knowing Jesus wasn't some small detail where, you know, if you get it wrong, it doesn't really matter. No, failing to know Jesus and who he is and what he's done is an error that has a huge impact.

saved because without knowing him and believing in Jesus, none of us can be saved. So what we know of Jesus is crucial.

- [21 : 21] Jesus is not just a good person to follow as an example. He's not just a good teacher to help us to live our lives. No, if you look at it, Apollos was adamant, wasn't he?

Jesus is the Messiah. That is his God's chosen Savior. Jesus is the one who saves us.

Not just teach us, not just inspire us. And so, that is the good news for us as well, that Jesus has come to save ourselves because we cannot save ourselves.

We need to trust in his work for us on the cross. He's not good enough just to be an inspiration for you. It's not good enough just for him to be a source of wisdom.

Yes, he's all those things, but the crucial detail is that he is our Savior. He's able to save us because he satisfied God's righteous requirement.

- [22 : 20] He was perfect and therefore we can trust in him. His death on the cross was enough. And that's why God raised him from the dead, to prove that what he did on the cross was effective.

Well, I'm going to conclude with what Paul himself declares in Romans 1, verse 16 and 17. For he said that he's not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

And here in Acts, we see him do exactly that, didn't he? He was not ashamed to proclaim the gospel because he knew that no other name but Jesus is the one to save because Jesus is God's chosen Messiah.

And so, whether you're here today yourself or you have friends or family that don't know about Jesus, it is important, isn't it, for them to know him and to understand the good news correctly.

Not just some vague idea about Jesus and Christianity, but actually who Jesus is, what he's done for us on the cross, and how believing in him for the forgiveness of our sins is the way to salvation.

- [23 : 37] That is not a small detail. It's a big, big matter. Worth more, dare I say, than \$10.47 million.

Let's pray. Father, help us to understand correctly the message of the gospel, who Jesus is and why he alone saves.

Open our eyes and the eyes of those we speak to so that they can see and we can see why it really matters. And help us to be humble so that we don't think we know everything, but help us to search out and listen to the truth, to understand the scriptures that you have given to us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.