

A Willing Learner of Truth

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Preacher: Nigel Anderson

[0 : 00] Now we're going to have a short reading in Acts chapter 18. Acts chapter 18. And we're going to read from verse 24 to 28.

Now, a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the scriptures.

He'd been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.

He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed.

[1 : 06] For he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. And may God add his blessing to that reading from his holy word.

Apollos, this man whom I suppose we don't know much about, but certainly has been given to us in scripture. This man who, as we'll see more closely as we go through the passage, was very much a willing learner of truth.

This man who certainly showed competency, ability to serve. He showed the character to serve his Lord. And at the same time, showed humility in that service.

So come to see this man whom God sent at this particular time to Ephesus. And what lessons we can learn from this relatively brief recording of this, as we're told at verse 4, this Jew named Apollos, this believing Jew who came to know the Lord Jesus as Savior.

As we said, certainly this isn't the only place where we see this name Apollos in scripture. There are other places as well. I think in two other books we see his name. But certainly I'm very struck by the way that scripture so often highlights individuals.

[2 : 26] Individuals who appear just for a short time, who appear maybe infrequently in scripture. And yet these same individuals are used mightily by God. Used at particular times, in particular circumstances, in particular occasions.

In order to serve God. To give God the glory. Now, if you go to the pages of the Old Testament, go to the pages of the New Testament.

You see names that maybe just appear once or twice and that's it. Stay with the New Testament for a moment. Think of the disciples whom Jesus chose.

There are certainly three disciples amongst the twelve whom we hear hardly anything about. Certainly know very little about their public ministries of anything.

And yet these were men whom Jesus chose to serve him. Who would become apostles. Who would carry out the work that God had given them to do in ministry. Go to the book of Romans.

[3 : 28] The last chapter of the Romans 16. Men and women are recorded whose names are only mentioned once. And yet these same names that are recorded on earth are recorded in heaven.

These individuals were called to serve God where God sent them. But of course it's not just the saints of scripture. Not just the saints even of the New Testament that come into that category of what we might call lesser known servants of God.

But of the Lord's people scattered across the world through the history of the church.

Now I've got absolutely no idea how many millions upon millions of people have been converted through the ages. And yet as we know of these millions upon millions, only a very few are actually known beyond their immediate locality.

And known beyond their immediate time when they lived. And yet they were sent. Called to do particular work for God. But that doesn't degrade them.

[4 : 36] That doesn't degrade these countless others whom God chose. That doesn't degrade those whom God saved and rescued and gave particular gifts to. They were used of God.

Sent by God. To serve the Lord Jesus. And bring that even to our own time. I mean God's given different gifts to different servants to do his will.

Different gifts given to people of different personalities. My personality is so different to your personality. Your personality is so different to another. And yet God calling you through your personality to serve him.

Different callings. Given of course through the one calling to serve the Lord Jesus. And God's given all his people gifts to use at different times in the history of the church.

And we might say there are those who have been given these walk-on parts in the drama of the life of the church. These walk-on parts.

[5 : 42] The walk-on parts that serve the Lord Jesus. And one such walk-on parts. And one such walk-on part is this man, Apollos. We might say this lesser known saint in the New Testament.

As we said, barely mentioned in three books of the New Testament. But someone whose witness and testimony for the Lord shines out.

Shines. It shines us even as we read there in the passage. Somebody who is blessed by God. And somebody whom God sent to be used to further his kingdom.

Somebody, as we noticed, who is competent to serve. Obviously we need to think a wee bit of the background first before we launch straight into verse 24.

Because certainly from what we've seen so far in our thoughts in the latter part of Acts. The focus of course has been on the mission and ministry of Paul.

[6 : 42] The Apostle Paul. But then that focus shifts briefly to this fascinating episode in Ephesus. This is the city in modern day Turkey.

This is the city where Paul had gone to after his work in Corinth had ended. Remember we saw Paul in Corinth last week. Well, from Corinth Paul went to Ephesus. But he just spent a short time in Ephesus.

Before going on to the church in Syria. Now, from Syria he'd go back to Ephesus. And in fact he'd spend three years in Ephesus. But during that interim period between his two stays in Ephesus. We're told of a fellow Jewish believer. Somebody from the Egyptian city of Alexandria. And this man appears. We don't, humanly speaking, we don't know why he came from North Africa to Ephesus, to Turkey.

Maybe it was business that brought him there. I mean, Alexandria was one of the great trading ports of the world at that time. And it was Ephesus to a lesser extent. But God in his wisdom had sent this man to Ephesus.

[7 : 56] Just as God directs the movements of his people at all times. Even our present time. And does so to further the work of the gospel. As God has led you.

As God leads all who are his. As God sends you. As he directs you. In order to allow you to use your gifts to serve him.

And whatever Apollos' reason. Certainly initially for leaving Alexandria to go to Ephesus. There's no doubt that he had been given gifts. To do the work that God had called him to do in that city.

We're told, as we said in verse 24. He was an eloquent man. Competent in the scriptures. In other words, he was great at communicating.

He could communicate the word of God. We're told he was eloquent. In other words, he had a gift for speaking. And not just speaking. But he had that gift to think before he spoke.

[8 : 55] He could think before he uttered the words in public. He had something important to say. And he said it well. But he wasn't just eloquent.

He was competent. We're told competent in the scriptures. And the word literally in the original language is. He was powerful. He was powerful in the scriptures. He'd grown in his understanding of what he read in the word of God.

Or what he'd heard through God's word. We're told he'd been instructed in the way of the Lord. So he could communicate his understanding clearly. Now yes, he had deficiencies in that understanding that we'll think about later.

But what he had grasped, he was able to do so clearly and with power. And it's that combination of eloquence and competence in the word of God that we can say are the hallmarks of the work of ministry.

And gifts that the church should recognize when a person is called to the ministry. God gifts to his people these gifts to further the work of the kingdom.

[10:07] To build his church. To preach the word. To teach the word. And as we'll see with the Paulist. Not just to preach and teach the word. But to live the word.

I mean the pastoral ministry is not just something that a person feels that he ought to do. Feels that he has a call to do. There's got to be that call from God. And that call that's made evident in a person.

Who's got certainly a measure of the gift of eloquence. And the gift of competence. He's able to understand God's word and communicate it clearly. And of course these gifts were seen supremely in the Lord Jesus.

In his work. In his ministry. Because no one greater than Jesus spoke with such eloquence. And no one better than Jesus could speak with such power and such conviction and such understanding. Because Jesus' ministry. That ministry revealed the grace of God. And those who serve the Lord Jesus serve in following Jesus.

[11:17] Following that path of service. And not for self-glory. But for the glory of God. And everyone who proclaims the word of God begins with God.

He must increase. I must decrease. Peace. Now I know that not all of you are pastoral ministers. Or not all of you have that call to become a pastoral minister.

But there are lessons. General lessons for each one of us. And what we see here in Apollos. And I think the first thing we have to say is to give thanks to God.

To thank God for those whom God has sent to do particular works of ministry. Give thanks to God even for the students that you read about in the previous edition of our denominations record.

A large number of students who are going into the ministry. Give thanks to God for these young men. These are men who have been gifted for full-time service.

[12:16] Some of them are going to go to settled congregations. Others are going to do the work of church planting. Give thanks to God for these young men whom God has called and the gifts that are evident in them.

But then secondly, pray that God will continue to raise up men for the ministry. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples. The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few.

Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest. Are you praying? Are you praying that God would raise up more men for the work of ministry?

Are you praying that for generation after generation, that these generations will be blessed through the continued work of men who have been equipped for ministry?

Are you praying that when our church is up and down the land, some have become vacant even in recent days, that God will continue to bless these congregations through men who have been called to serve?

[13:25] Are you praying for children, for grandchildren? Are you praying that for the generations to come, that they'll sit under the ministries of faithful men, men who are able to handle the word of truth correctly?

Because the church of the present day is the church of the past, even there in Ephesus. The church needs men such as Apollos, eloquent and competent in relation to God's word.

But it seems like this emphasis on pastoral ministry, certainly the emphasis on gifts, isn't just referring directly to the work of what we call pastoral ministry, preaching ministry, but to all ministries in the church.

There are ministries in teaching our children. Sunday school, creche, little jewels, Bible class. There are the ministries in leadership and office bearing.

The ministries of prayer. There's the ministry of financial giving. There's the ministry of encouragement, and pray that God would send those who have that gift to encourage one another.

[14:34] There's the ministry of practical help in so many different aspects of the work of the church. Even the technology that's enabling the service to be broadcast through the gifts of those whom God has blessed in that work.

And so give thanks to God for the breadth of the ministries that God has given his church, even this congregation, and pray that God will raise up more, more people, many people, with these many and varied gifts that help to build the church of the Lord Jesus, their own land and across the world.

But it's not just gifts per se that equip a person for the work of the kingdom. As we said, it may well be pastoral ministry, it may well be other ministries in the work of a church.

But it's not just, you know, even the gifts of competence, eloquence. There's something else that's crucial in any ministry, in any work, and that's character.

It's character. As we see here with Apollos, verse 25, And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus.

[15:49] Yes, this man had eloquence. He had competence in the scriptures. But he had godliness. Godliness in his armor. He's a man who knew the Lord.

Even though us were told, and we'll again explore this a wee bit more detail in a moment, we're told he only had known the baptism of John, John the Baptist. He hadn't been baptized in the name of Jesus, which, again, we'll look at more closely in a moment.

But the point's this. This man had character. He had a character that was suited for the work that God had given him to do. How do we know that? Well, we're told he was fervent in the spirit.

In other words, he was a spiritual man who was on fire for the Lord. I mean, literally, he was hot in spirit. Somebody also said he was on the boil for the Lord.

And put it like this. He had that combination of light and heat. You know, so crucial in any ministry, in any work of service for the Lord. He had light.

[16:54] He understood God's Word. But he also had heat. He had that drive, that determination, that fervency to declare the name of the Lord Jesus.

He was on fire for the Lord. It's that attitude, the same attitude that you read of elsewhere in Scripture. Remember, after Jesus rose from the dead, and Jesus was on that Emmaus road, and there were two followers who were with him.

And Jesus spoke to them, spoke to them about himself. And we're told in Scripture that the response was this. Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scripture?

That burning, that being on the boil for the Lord. And it's that measure of heat and light, that fervor for the truth of God's Word, that fervor for the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

It's got to be accompanied by sincerity, the sincerity of our godly character. And again, pray that that will be the case in the ministries of the church across our land, that the men whom God calls, and men and women whom God has called in all the different ministries of the church, that they'll be blessed with that fervency, that being on fire for the Lord.

[18:17] That, if you like, the combination of gifts and godliness, and that enabling by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because without that power, any preaching, any teaching, any act of ministry, well, there's just no accord at all.

Because yes, the Word of God can be communicated, can be communicated, you might even say eloquently, but can be communicated without the power, the power of God behind that Word.

That's what Paul said to Timothy when Paul spoke about false teachers. He said of people in the latter days, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.

You can have human eloquence, but no understanding of Scripture. You can have sermons that are preached, but without Jesus at the center. But not Apollos, which we're told here, he taught accurately the things concerning Jesus.

We're told he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. He was on fire for the Lord, with sincerity, with truth. I mean, he was so enthusiastic for his Savior, for Jesus, that he preached Jesus.

[19:35] Jesus was at the center of his life. And so he communicated Jesus where God sent him, and look where God sent him. It was in a lion's den, the lion's den of the synagogue, in that place in Ephesus.

And there he is, in a place that didn't really want to hear the name of Jesus as Messiah, as the promised Christ. But there he is, showing courage in that place of worship.

God had given him boldness. God had given him courage in that environment that wouldn't receive the Lord Jesus as the promised Christ. Of course, that's been the case in all ages.

Those whom God has sent with courage, with boldness, even in these places where we might say figuratively, the lions wait to pounce on. But even the age that we're living in just now, that requires boldness from the Lord's people to go where God sends you to tell others of the Lord Jesus.

And whether it's a minister in a pulpit, whether it's a Christian in the home, whether it's a believer in the workplace, you're going to need courage to stand for Jesus.

[20 : 51] You know, the present spirit of the age, the zeitgeist, the spirit of the age, the sort of cultural spirit of the age, well, that's changed just so dramatically.

Even in the last, well, my notes here, I've got 50 years, but probably even less. Even the last 10, 15 years, the spirit of the age has changed so much. I mean, even a century ago, we're thinking of the First World War.

In that time, Christianity certainly was largely unchallenged even in our own land. Then over the course of that century, Christianity becomes one option amongst many, but still accepted as a valid religion.

But in our 21st century, increasingly as you're seeing, Christianity, true Christianity, is now seen as abhorrent, as dangerous, as totally out of touch with society.

We're now deemed the bad guys of Western civilization. And these times call for the Lord's people to cry out to God, to raise up men and women, people to stand for truth, people like Apollos, to have courage, to witness boldly for the Savior, to speak about Jesus, teach Jesus, to witness for Jesus, and to do it in a world that says no to the earth Savior.

[22 : 18] But to do that, what God commands, not with arrogance, not with any kind of look at me attitude, but in humility. Humility of spirit.

Because that's exactly what we see here in the case of Apollos. His being humble and service. You see, read that in verses 26 to 28. Just look at verse 26 again.

We're told he began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately. So we've seen how Apollos had these qualities, these gifts.

He had eloquence and competence. He had humility, as we'll see here in a moment. He had godliness. But, in his case, and in the case of every person who seeks to follow Jesus, he had the character of humility.

He had that humble nature to follow the Lord Jesus. as Jesus, as Jesus, of course, the ultimate man of humility. Jesus, who left the glory of heaven to come to earth. Jesus, who made himself nothing.

[23 : 29] The coming is the form of a human. The coming in the form of a servant. And in Apollos' case, as he follows the Savior, Apollos has humility.

And it's seen in his being a willing learner of truth. He's somebody who was willing to be given constructive help, willing to be corrected in whatever deficiencies he had in relation to his understanding and teaching and his knowledge of Jesus.

I mean, look at the passage. He's, well, we're told of this Jewish Christian couple, Priscilla and Aquila. We met them last week in Corinth. And evidently, they'd traveled from Corinth to Ephesus. And they'd been in the synagogue to hear Apollos preach. But there'd been something in Apollos' preaching that was deficient. Something that wasn't quite right when he was saying about Jesus or not enough saying about Jesus.

But it's the response of Apollos that's so helpful here. When Priscilla and Aquila take him aside, take him privately, he doesn't object to them.

[24 : 44] He doesn't react with some kind of arrogant fury. Look who's telling me what I'm supposed to know. This is a Priscilla and Aquila. These tent makers. These people from Italy. How should they have the, how should they correct me and my theology?

You know, you can just picture the scene. I mean, Priscilla and Aquila, that couple, that Jewish Christian couple, they've heard Apollos. They've invited him to where they're staying.

And all the way from public view, they're not doing this publicly, they're doing it privately, we're told they speak to him more fully about the way of the Lord. And it may well have been that he hadn't grasped fully or even knew much about Jesus' death and resurrection.

We're told he only knew the baptism of John. But whatever deficiencies he had about the way of the Lord, his response to his being instructed more fully shows that, yes, he accepted the intervention of his fellow believers.

And he continued in the work of ministry that we read there in verse 27. And we're told he wished to travel to Achaia. That's the region where Corinth was situated. And when he arrived at that region, he helped those who believe.

[26 : 03] Through grace, he helped those who believe. For he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. I mean, Apollos had been helped to

understand Jesus more fully.

And now Apollos is helping others to understand the Gospel. He's now been given this greater knowledge than he had before about the Lord Jesus. So he's taken on board what he's been instructed in.

And in humility, he's shown that he's a willing learner. And he's actually more useful there in the Corinth area than he was in Ephesus. He doesn't have any kind of false humility.

He's showing real humility. humility. And in that real humility, showing greater service for the Lord. And for any believer, any believer who's working in any kind of ministry at all, have that willingness to learn.

Be willing to be taught and whatever deficiencies you have, whether it's in your understanding of Scripture, whether it's in your character even, in your work, be that humble servant.

[27 : 19] Yes, accept instruction. Accept correction. And do it with gladness and joy that God has placed before you such people to help you. None of us are the finished article.

We're all learners and will be until we reach glory. As Scripture tells us, often it's the wounds of a friend that are used to help a believer to deepen his faith and to help him in his conduct as a Christian.

But it's often the quiet word in private. That quiet word taking a believer aside, helping him, correcting his thinking, correcting even wrong practice.

So be a willing learner of truth. Don't take offense if you're corrected or instructed, but rejoice that you have the friendship of the Lord's people who are willing to come alongside you because they're coming alongside you in love.

And for the furtherance of God's kingdom. So yes, as we close the service, give thanks to God for those who do work humbly in the work of the Lord.

[28 : 28] Give thanks to God for those who are willing to teach and willing to be taught. But above all, give thanks to God and rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Jesus who's gifted you to do what he's sending you to do, to do his bidding, to serve him, to serve him wherever God sends you in the work of the kingdom.

Amen. And let us pray. Our Lord, our God, our Heavenly Father, you who have shown to your people your everlasting love, even your sending love, even your equipping love, your equipping grace, Lord, send your people.

May they be willing to be sent, willing to be taught, willing to be instructed, willing to do your will. Hear us, Lord, as we come towards the end of the service.

Forgive anything, Lord, being said amiss, thought amiss, proclaimed amiss. But Lord, bless, we pray, the proclamation of your word for your praise and for your glory.

[29 : 38] We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.