

DISCUSSION TIME

Acts 18:23-19:10

Chadron Berean Church

I don't think there's a genuine church or genuine Christian out there who doesn't want to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ. There isn't a Christian here today who doesn't long for their family and friends to come to Christ. Truth be told, there's nothing you want more than to see that dad or mom, brother or sister, son or daughter, friend or coworker to know Jesus. But how are most people actually coming to Christ today? For you who really care, that's an important question, isn't it? And that's what we're going to talk about today as we continue our study through the book of Acts. Acts is drilling into us the idea that we are to be Jesus' witnesses (Acts 1:8) who share the gospel of hope and salvation with people. And we are going to look at a few principles to help us be more effective in that, and also some hard evidence that reveals how people are actually coming to Christ today.

23 "And after spending some time there, he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples."

I. PAUL BEGINS HIS THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY. (18:23)

After spending some time at his sending church in **Syrian Antioch**, probably wintering there, Paul leaves again for his **third and final missionary journey**. Careful New Testament chronology indicates Paul likely started this journey in the spring of 53 A.D. and it lasts until the spring of 57 A.D. While most time was spent at Corinth in the 2nd journey, most of Paul's time will be spent at **Ephesus** in the 3rd journey, while revisiting churches established in both the 1st and 2nd journeys. The Church movement is about 20 years old at this point. And just as he did at the beginning of his 2nd missionary journey, he makes a trip to central Turkey to check on those churches and strengthen them. Take note that Paul kept taking time to invest in them in person.

"24 Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was proficient in the Scriptures. 25 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was accurately speaking and teaching things about Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; 26 and he began speaking boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the way of God more accurately to him. 27 And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, 28 for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ."

II. PRISCILLA AND AQUILA INSTRUCT APOLLOS. (18:24-28)

Luke takes us away from the journeys of Paul and gives us a snapshot of **Priscilla and Aquila's** ministry back at **Ephesus**. If you remember from last week, Paul, Priscilla and Aquila were traveling together by ship and had a layover in Ephesus. Paul preached in the synagogue and they wanted him to stay but the Lord's will was for him to return to Antioch. However, Priscilla and Aquila stayed at Ephesus to minister.

And they run into a Jewish man named **Apollos**, who is from **Alexandria** in northern Egypt on the coast. Alexandria was the 2nd largest city in the Roman Empire with a population estimated at 600,000¹ and known for its educational opportunities. It was home to the largest library in the world at the time and home to one of the largest Jewish communities outside of the land of Israel.² It became a hub for **Hellenistic (Greek-influenced) diaspora Jews** who had been dispersed throughout the world that we've become familiar with in Acts. Instead of the Hebrew Bible, they used the Greek translation of Scripture called **Septuagint** (abbreviated LXX), which was proudly translated in Alexandria. Apparently, the Jews occupied 2 of the 5 city districts³ and comprised 1/3 of the entire population.⁴ Jews enjoyed freedom to live and worship in Alexandria until about AD 38 when severe persecution broke out against them.

Apollos is clearly one of the Hellenistic Jews. He is Jewish but has a Greek name. He's named after the Greek god Apollo. He probably carried a Septuagint copy of the Scriptures. He is described as a man who not only knows the Word, he can preach it too, and with passion. He is **mighty in the Scriptures, knows the ways of God, is eloquent, fervent, and bold**. There's only one little problem. He's not up to date. Luke qualifies his giftedness by saying he's **only associated with the baptism of John**.

Similar to Jesus, John had disciples who went out with John's message. John told people to prepare for Christ's coming and pointed people to Jesus, but Apollos probably left the land of Israel before Jesus' death, burial and resurrection so he's somewhat out of the loop still. He hasn't heard the latest podcast or checked his newsfeed. I like how one commentator described him as a man caught in the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant as he ministered among the Diaspora Jewish communities.⁵ So Priscilla and Aquila pull him out from under the rock he's been living under, **privately take him aside and fill him in on the good news**. Take note of that: Priscilla and Aquila took the time to sit down with Apollos and through discussion, help him understand the gospel better. As a result of their investment in him, he became a more effective minister.

Verse 27 tells us the brethren encouraged Apollos to go to **Achaia**, the province in southern Greece, and 1 Corinthians (1:12; 3:5) reveals in that he did in fact have a strong ministry in **Corinth** and Paul considered him a **fellow worker**. Paul would say that he planted in Corinth, Apollos watered, but God caused the spiritual growth there. I find an encourage principle here:

Share what you know about Jesus.

A lot of times we think we can't teach anything or share the gospel unless we know *everything*. No one would ever teach the Bible or share Jesus if we all did that. You don't have to know everything to share Jesus or the Bible with people. You need to know the gospel and you be getting a better grasp on your Bible, but you don't have to have the Bible memorized from cover to cover and have a pat response to every question like some of those gifted apologists out there. Just keep pointing people to Jesus the best you can and keep growing like Apollos.

"1 Now it happened that while Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. 2 He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "On the contrary, we have not even heard if there is a Holy Spirit." 3 And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." 4 Paul said, "John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. 7 There were about twelve men in all.

III. PAUL INSTRUCTS JOHN'S DISCIPLES. (19:1-10)

Paul arrives at **Ephesus**, another large city around 250,000, and he runs into a group of about **12 disciples of John** who are even less aware of the progress of God's program and revelation in Christ. John said he baptized people with water who had repented of their sins and were preparing to receive Messiah, but when Messiah came He would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. Well, these individuals have repented and been baptized by John but they don't have any indication of born again faith by the Spirit. And it seems that they might of even missed that part. Remember, Acts is a transitional book so we should expect to find incomplete forms of faith during this time. It's an interesting time period where the apostles, by their spiritual authority and miracles, are making this massive transition into a new age clear.

So having obviously believed the message of Jesus after Paul's witness, **Paul baptizes them in the name of Jesus**, a way of identifying with the Jesus and the Church. Baptism symbolizes our identification with Jesus death, burial and resurrection to new life, with have our sins washed away by the cleansing of the Holy Spirit, and with the gospel and Church movement. And if you'd like to be baptized too, come talk to me and we'll get that taken care of. But just as the other apostles did in Acts 8, so Paul, the apostles to the Gentiles, by his apostolic authority, **lays his hands upon them** and they receive the Holy Spirit, evidenced by their speaking in **tongues** and **prophesying**. It was a miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

We've talked about this sort of thing enough by now that I don't feel the need to do a deep dive into it other than to say I understand **tongues** to be **real languages** that were spoken without learning them. They're not a secret prayer language or something everyone did. In Acts 2, diaspora Jews from all over the world came to Jerusalem and heard the disciples speaking in their own native tongue or language. Acts 2:8 says, "*How is it that we each hear them in our*

own language to which we were born?” Tongues were also interpretable, and no one was to use the gift in the church services unless it was interpreted so people could be edified by what was said (1 Cor. 14:27-28). Every now and then you come across a teaching that says tongues are necessary for salvation. First, their idea of what tongues is, is different from the biblical tongues, and second, Paul says in 1 Corinthians not everyone speaks in tongues (1 Cor. 12:30-31). In fact, tongues was last on his list of gifts to really desire and it’s a rarely record event even in Acts. It’s mentioned 3 times in Acts, signifying the salvation of a new people group (Acts 2:3, 4, 11; 10:46; 19:6). While the tower of Babel in Genesis divided the languages, so tongues made it clear God is gathering from all nations (not just Israel) a people for Himself.

A second major issue with this text that needs clarification involves **Spirit baptism**. This passage has been used as a proof text in some Pentecostal circles to teach a false doctrine called the “second blessing” or “full gospel”. The idea is that you can be a believer, but only through earnest seeking or obedience can you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. So those who teach this look at believers on two different spiritual planes: those with and without the Spirit. But remember, Acts is a transitional book and Luke is describing in narrative story format what happened and much of it is not the norm for today. God was authenticating His apostles’ authority to establish the transition into the New Covenant through various signs and wonders. If we’re honest, there’s no pattern in Acts. Some receive the Spirit before water baptism and some after, indicating this can’t be used as a proof text for baptismal regeneration either – the idea that water baptism is required for Spirit baptism/salvation.

The New Testament letters that teach clear systematic doctrine tell us one receives the Spirit of God the moment they believe (Eph. 1:13-14) and there is no such thing as a genuine believer who doesn’t have the Holy Spirit in them (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13). Paul said, “*Did you receive the Spirit when you believed?*” indicates that that is what is normal. Christians can be carnal (walking by the flesh/sin nature) or Christians can be spiritual (walking by the Spirit/divine nature), but all Christians have the Spirit and all are complete in Him (Col. 2:10). So a simple witnessing principle for us might be:

Share a clear gospel message: salvation by grace through faith in Christ.

What people need is not a second blessing or water baptism to be saved. This text shows us it’s not even enough to repent of sin alone and be moral people as John’s followers did. **Faith in Jesus** as their Savior from sin is required. When we stand before God and He asks us why He should let us into heaven, we can’t point to our good works or religious works. We can only point to Jesus’ cross and empty grave. We trust in His work for us. Paul writes to the **Ephesians in 2:8-9**, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand so that we should walk in them.*” So good works should be the fruit of salvation, but they are not the root, the basis of it.

8 And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, **having discussions and persuading** them about the kingdom of God. 9 But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took the disciples away with him, and had **discussions** daily in the school of Tyrannus. 10 This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”

IV. PAUL’S MINISTRY CLIMAX AT EPHEBUS. (VV. 8-10)

Paul’s time at Ephesus is what we could call the climax of Paul’s ministry. God used him powerfully and influentially here. It says he spends 3 months **having discussion/reasoning** in the synagogues with the Jews, but when they turn on him, he takes his disciples to a **lecture hall** or some sort of instructional center called the **school of Tyrannus** where they could **discuss/reason** in peace. Tyrannus is probably the owner or the philanthropist behind the school that Paul utilizes for 2 years. There is an old tradition which records that Paul used this lecture hall during the siesta hours when no one else was using it, so about between 11am – 4pm.⁶ But from here, all of **Asia**, that is western Turkey, heard the good news and churches were planted and strengthened. These churches would likely include Colossae, Hierapolis, Laodicea and maybe even the 7 churches of Revelation. Since it was a port city, the gospel was advancing far and wide over sea and land. Next time, Lord willing, we’ll continue to study this ministry here.

But like I said at the beginning, there’s not a Christian soul who doesn’t want to reach the lost. We long and pray for our loved ones to have a relationship with Jesus. So how are most people coming to Christ today? In his recent book *God’s Growing Church*, subtitled *How People are Actually Coming to Christ Today*, Gary McIntosh’s research over the course of ten years indicated that about **60%** of people come to Christ through **family and friends** (number is down in recent decades).⁷ About **17%** percent said a **church staff members** led them to Christ, be it a pastor, Sunday school teacher, small group directors, or some other church lay leader that had an extended period of influence on them (number is up). And about **11 %** said someone **other than** these led to them Christ like through diverse settings like evangelistic messages on tv or radio, an event or campus ministry. Do you want to lead others to Christ? Think about who led you to Christ and how?

The research shows most people who came to Christ through a consistent, trusted relationship with another person. That is the **#1 dynamic**. The closer the relationship, the more likely to come to Christ because so often we see that you can only speak truth as deep as our relationship stands.⁸ There’s a reason why one missionary called relationships “the Bridges of God.” However, within that relationship, the **#1 method** that persuaded them to trust in Christ was simply **conversation about spiritual things** with that trusted person.⁹

I quote McIntosh, “*Instead, people said that it was simply conversation; they just had a spiritual conversation with a family member or friend or staff member. It seems as though people are coming to faith through natural conversations and discussions.... just talking among friends, about life and sports and spiritual things. And through that conversation they come to*

*understand what Christianity is and what commitment to Christ is, and some people just all of a sudden say, "I believe." It's not that they necessarily pray a particular prayer or something. Some do, but at times they just say, "I've thought about this, we've talked about this, and I've come to believe it."*¹⁰ Evangelism through conversation with a trusted person.

On a positive note, 65% of people in the United States consider themselves Christians.¹¹ So there's a good chance most people aren't totally turned off by it either. A lot of people are just like the people in our text today. They have a little truth, they just need more information. They need someone to sit down and explain the gospel to them.

One of the things we see Paul do in Acts, over and over, is he **reasoned** with people. Like in verse 8 and verse 9, Paul was **reasoning** or having **discussion**. He enters into **dialogue**. We should what kind of dialogue or discussion it is. This discussion is not imposition. He is not imposing his views on them without their willingness to listen. These are not quick encounters. These are not emotional pleas or cold calling. These are not passive-aggressive posts on Facebook. By God's grace he is not combative and defensive. It is respectful discussion about spiritual matters that seeks to persuade others reasonably to reach a verdict about the person and work of Jesus Christ and gain a real appreciation for the gospel.¹² I think if we really want to reach people, we need to get better at fostering relationships and spiritual conversation.

Share truth patiently through persuasive discussion.

I know this isn't what we want to hear. We want to hear people coming to Christ through preachers on the radio or tv. We would much rather send someone a gospel tract or book in the mail with a letter. But the research indicates in recent decades an almost complete absence of people being led to Christ through some sort of rote gospel presentation like the *Four Spiritual Laws* or the *Romans Road*, unlike decades in the past. That tells us times have changed. The culture has changed. It's a post Christian culture. We need to be in respectful, thought-provoking discussions.

I think I've told you the conversion story of Dr. Rosaria (Champagne) Butterfield before. Rosaria was a far-left professor and militant, policy-writing, pro-abortion and gay rights activist. When Promise Keepers came to her city (a men's ministry that used to fill football stadiums with men and boys to disciple them), she wrote an article in the newspaper talking down the idea of men and fathers. If you were to ask her today how she became a Christian, she would say she became a Christian as a result of 500 dinner conversations with Pastor Ken and his wife, Floy Smith. After reading the newspaper article she wrote, Ken decided to invite her over for dinner. She accepted their invite to dinner not because she wanted to learn more about Christianity, but because she was writing a book on how the Bible had no application in the secular world and wanted free research from a man who knows the Bible. She wanted ammo. But every meal they had together, another brick came down in her worldview and every meal they build up trust. They never had any fiery conversations about Romans 1. Just patient conversation and through it she began to ask harder questions that her worldview couldn't answer and began to see her life

getting better with Christians in it. They cared about her enough to sit down and discuss spiritual matters with great patience.

You know, what we're talking about is really why we're having the shootout event this afternoon. Not only is it a great time of fellowship for us as a church, it's also what we could call a "halfway event". It's an event designed to invite people to who might be nervous about coming to a worship service but might joyfully accept an invite to be part of a fun church gathering and get a taste of its community first and see what we're like. So I want to challenge you to invite a friend to these events when we have them and keep discussing spiritual matters with those you love.

¹ Foreman, B. A., Eds. Beitzel, B. J., Parks, J., & Mangum, D., *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 360.

² *Ibid.*, 369.

³ *Ibid.*, 376. "By the first century, the city had been partitioned into five districts, each named after the first five letters of the Greek alphabet. Two of these were settled principally by Jews, and the other quarters had a sprinkling of Jews as well (In Flaccum 55)."

⁴ Steven Ger, *Acts: Beginning in Jerusalem...*, 227.

⁵ Darrel L. Bock, *Acts* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 592.

⁶ Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome: Studies in Acts* (), 151.

⁷ Gary L. McIntosh, *God's Growing Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 93.

⁸ Rosaria Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert, The Engagement Project*, Tour 07.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁰ Biola Magazine Staff, *How Are People Actually Coming to Faith Today?* October 31, 2016, <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/biola-magazine/2016/how-are-people-actually-coming-to-faith-today>

¹¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>

¹² McIntosh, 57.