

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 20)

Paul is in the middle of the Second Missionary Journey recorded in Acts. Silas and Timothy temporarily stayed behind in Berea, while Paul travelled on to Athens and of course found a group to preach to ...

Acts 17:22-23 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

“You’re looking for something, and I’ve already found it!”

Acts 18:1-6 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

Luke records Paul's ITINERARY, but Paul later records in 1 Corinthians the INSECURITY he felt when entering the city of Corinth (perhaps because of the rejection he experienced when preaching in Athens) ...

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Once again, the Jews refuse Paul's message and oppose his ministry. This is the first time he declares that he is going to turn his full attention to the Gentiles, and he quotes Ezekiel 33:3-4. To have blood on your hands means that you bear responsibility for someone else's destruction because you did not warn them. But to have blood on your head means that you are to blame for your own destruction.

Ezekiel 33:3-4 If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head.

Corinth was a city known across the empire for its wickedness. Later, Paul would write the book of Romans from here, and could look out his window and see chapter one fulfilled right in front of his own eyes. But great wickedness did not stop Paul from having great revival!

Romans 1:22-32 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

But that wasn't the end of the story!

Romans 5:20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

Acts 18:7-11 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

This time, Paul does not leave the city despite persecution, because he has a word from the Lord of PROTECTION (“I am with thee!”) and PROMISE (“I have much people in this city!”). His ministry extended over eighteen months in Corinth, and left behind a powerful church. The Corinthian church was not made up of many mighty and noble people, but of sinners whose lives were transformed by the grace of God.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Acts 18:12-17 And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things.

Luke records this instance of divine protection where God used a pagan ruler to defend an Apostolic preacher! While the Jewish council had prohibited the Apostles to preach, there is no evidence that the Roman government ever did so. While there was some opposition, in cities like Philippi, Corinth and Ephesus the Roman officials were not only tolerant but almost cooperative.

Paul knew how to use his Roman citizenship wisely so that the government worked for him and not against him, and he was careful not to accuse the government or ignore its authority.

Acts 18:18 And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

The “vow” referred to here is from “euche,” the same word used in James 5:15 for the “prayer” of faith. Paul did not shave his head because he was finishing a Nazarite vow (Number 6:18), for the New Testament church did not practice that. Rather, he had just been delivered from the court of Gallio, so he needed to cut (“kiero”) his hair because he was going to prayer. Paul knew that God cared what his hair looked like!

Acts 18:19-22 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.

Paul desired to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost, not because it was necessary to keep the Jewish feasts, but because the city would be full of people that he would be able to preach to! Verse 22 marks the end of his second missionary journey, and he reported back to his home church in Antioch – he had been away for nearly two years for this journey!

Acts 18:23-28 And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

As Paul begins his third missionary journey, Luke gives considerable detail about the time he spent in Ephesus. Because it was such a strategic city, Paul spent three years of his ministry there (Acts 20:31) – the longest he stayed in any city. Ephesus had a large harbor that made it a wealthy city, and a massive temple to the goddess Diana that made it a religious city, steeped in idolatry and the occult. It also had REVIVAL!

Before Paul even arrives in Ephesus, God starts putting people in place for what He wants to do – one of them is an eloquent preacher named Apollos. He knows the Old Testament scriptures well, and he is “fervent in the spirit,” but he has an incomplete message! His message only got as far as John the Baptist and then stopped! He knew nothing about Calvary, the resurrection of Jesus, or the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He had zeal, but he lacked knowledge. Apollos knew about the promises of God, but he didn’t know about their fulfillment.

His message was not inaccurate or insincere, merely incomplete.

But thankfully, he came in contact with Aquila and Priscilla who knew the full revelation of God’s truth for the church. They could have CONDEMNED him for not having full truth, or simply COMPROMISED and accepted him as he was – but that is not the approach the Apostolics took in the book of Acts! Instead, they took him aside and TAUGHT him the Gospel in its fullness! Then, once he received that revelation, they COMMENDED his ministry.

Acts 19:1-7 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve.

Something similar happened once Paul arrived in Ephesus. He found a group of disciples who were perhaps some of Apollos’ early converts, because they also had an incomplete understanding – they had not even heard about the Holy Ghost! Notice what the Apostolics did any time they encountered someone lacking a full revelation of truth – they opened their mouth, started where they were, and preached unto them Jesus!

This passage in Acts 19 sets a Biblical precedent for anyone who has been baptized in any way other than in the name of Jesus, which is the only saving name (Acts 4:12). Verse 5 tells us that they were (re)baptized “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Furthermore, verse 6 once again shows us what the Apostolics expected to happen every time believers received the baptism of the Holy Ghost in the book of Acts – “and they spake with tongues, (and prophesied).”

Acts 19:8-12 And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

1 Corinthians 16:8-9 But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.

“All they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus!”

Notice that once again MIRACLES are happening to draw people’s attention to the MESSAGE – that is the Apostolic pattern!

Acts 19:13-20 Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

“Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are YOU?”

The total value of the occult books that they burned here was equivalent to the total salaries of 150 men working for a whole year! These people had a real conversion that involved real repentance, and God responded.

“So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.”

Watch the pattern in the book of Acts ... when the WORD prevails, the CHURCH prevails ... and it still works the same way today!