

A More Effective Ministry

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[0 : 0 0] a native of Alexandria came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the scriptures. He had 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, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. Chapter 19, and it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland, or the highland country, and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples, and he said to them, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they said, no, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. And he said, into what then were you baptized? And they said, into John's baptism. And Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the

Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about 12 men in all. And he entered the synagogue, and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

That's our passage for this morning. And the idea that I want to present from this passage is that God uses the people of his church to strengthen his church. And we're going to see it in a couple areas throughout this passage. But before we talk about that, I wanted to spend just a couple minutes to talk about bamboo plants. Seems like an odd thing to bring up, but bamboo plants are pretty cool.

Not only are they the strongest material, most on earth, being stronger even than steel, but they're one of the fastest growing plants in the world. And the interesting thing about bamboo, at least there's a couple different categories. One of them is runners. So how it grows is you have the first shoot will pop up, and it grows for a while, for several months, and then it stops growing. It continues to be alive. Its plants and its branches are there, but it doesn't continue to grow in height. What it does is it takes its energy and it sends it out through its shoots underground, and it sprouts up other shoots, other canes, as it grows. And these can be very far apart.

It could easily be 100 feet away from the two sprouts as they pop up. And so this is why, depending on the type of bamboo that you get, you could have a problem controlling bamboo if you don't keep it in its territory. But the thing about bamboo is the fact that it seems that one of its goals is to strengthen itself. And it does that by, like I said, after it grows for a while, it takes its resources and energy. And instead of continuing to grow, it maintains life, but it sends the rest to the rest of the plant, the group itself. And so while it's not a perfect example of Christian life, because we're not called to grow to a point and then stop, it is really a good example of how we are to take what we are given and the resources that we have and pass those on to others to strengthen them. And that's what we're going to see in our passage today in several different ways.

[4 : 39] So the main idea, God using the people of his church to strengthen his church. Now in saying that, I want to clarify that God does use other means to strengthen each one of us. We know the primary ways that he does that is through his word, through prayer, through the Holy Spirit. So when I say that, I want you guys to know that God just doesn't use one another, but that's where the focus is of our message this morning. So as we're starting out here in verse 24, just to get context about where we are, Paul is just ending his second missionary journey, and he's starting out on his third one.

His goal here is to travel back across areas where he's been before, where he has started churches, and he's looking to encourage those churches, encourage those who believed when he spread the gospel to them the first time, and to hopefully strengthen them in where they are. So he's going back to places like Antioch, that is the smaller Antioch, not the one in Syria, which is where he's being sent from. Iconium, Lystra. But if you think back from our previous sermons, these weren't areas where he was welcomed from the beginning to the end. If you remember, in Antioch, he was driven out. In Iconium, he fled just before he was getting stoned, and at Lystra, he was actually stoned and drunk out of the city. So not really the most inviting of places to be going back to, and yet Paul still knows that that is God's plan for him. So even in the face of knowing what could be coming at him, he realizes that God's calling him to go back and encourage fellow believers in struggling churches. So as we come to verse 24, we see a break that the author gives us, right? We were talking about Paul and his travels, and we break from that story for a time, and it brings us to this short five-verse story about a Jew named Apollos. Now Apollos is from

Alexandria, which at this time is the capital city of Egypt, but not just the capital city, but the educational intellectual center of Egypt at this time. So kind of like Cambridge, Massachusetts is an intellectual center for this area, some could say for a large part of the United States.

In addition to that, they have the largest Jewish population. It is also in Alexandria where we learn that several hundred years before the Septuagint, right, which is the earliest surviving Greek translation of the Old Testament, was created here, or was produced here. So it's no surprise that in addition to that, they have a world-renowned library in Alexandria containing hundreds of thousands of thousands of scrolls. Sorry, I'll try to keep this still.

This was Apollos' birthplace. This is where he had an opportunity to become educated, and he was. God used that opportunity to educate him, and we see how educated and how gifted he was, as Luke describes for us Apollos. Luke says that he was eloquent with his words. He was competent in the scriptures.

[8 : 21] He was skilled in speech, and strong in debate, and teaching from the Word of God. Verse 25 says that he had been instructed in the way of the Lord. That is, the Christian way, the way of the Messiah.

It also says that he was fervent in spirit, and he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus. In some translations, that fervent in spirit, that spirit has a capital S.

And so there's some question, is that fervent because the spirit was with him, or did he have just a personality that was very fervent and strong?

But I think in either case, there is a power of the spirit that is needed in order for him to be passionately teaching and accurately teaching the things concerning Jesus.

That's something that we don't, outside of the work of the Holy Spirit, we do by ourselves. But in all of that, there's something missing from Apollos' teaching.

[9 : 31] Verse 25 says that he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. Now, we don't know exactly here what Apollos is lacking.

Luke doesn't let us in on what he's missing, nor does he let us in on what Priscilla and Aquila talked to him about. Most likely, Apollos was unaware of the ascension of Jesus, and maybe the giving of the Holy Spirit of Pentecost, those things that happened late that he just didn't know about.

But as you can imagine, not knowing about how the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost would be a big thing to share when you are encouraging believers, when you're wanting to talk about the gospel and its effect in a Christian's life.

But the fact that Luke doesn't tell us exactly what is missing, it seems to indicate that that's not really the point of the story, but rather that he was taught something which was hindering his full potential.

In gospel proclamation. So the baptism of John was one of repentance and turning to God. Apollos knew that. He knew the Old Testament.

[10 : 46] He knew Jesus was the promised Messiah. He knew of Jesus' life and his teachings. And that's what he was boldly proclaiming in the synagogue.

And in doing this, that's when Priscilla and Aquila take notice. They hear him. And I love, I really love verse 26 because it's so, it's so concise.

It's so smooth and clean. It's so loving and Christ-like. We have Priscilla and Aquila who have been doing ministry with Paul up until this point, but then they remain as Paul continues on.

And they're just, they're just lovers of other Christians and wanting to do what God calls them. They hear what Apollos is saying and they pick up on something that's missing.

Now, at this point, a couple things could happen. If we were to put ourselves in their situation, a couple things could happen, right? They could have just ignored it. They could have just not bothered with it.

[11 : 52] But that wouldn't have helped Apollos. It wouldn't have helped them, actually, as God seeks to use them to strengthen others. And it wouldn't have been a help to the larger church body as well.

They could also complain about his teaching amongst themselves. And we can do that at times, right? Ah, remember that Paul, that lead teacher we had back at Corinth Community Church?

He was so good. I mean, this guy is good, but, like, he's missing some stuff. We do that, right? We pick those we like and those we don't like. But that's not what took place.

That's not what was here. They saw an opportunity to come alongside him and teach him. And they did it in a way that was loving. They respectfully take him to the side.

I imagine they invited him over their house after a time at the synagogue one day. And they share with him, they explain to him the way of God more accurately.

[12 : 56] Luke said in the previous verse, he said that Apollos spoke and taught accurately. And then Priscilla and Aquila explained to him the way of God more accurately.

This is a beautiful picture of how God uses his people to strengthen his people in gospel accuracy. And that's our first point this morning is gospel accuracy and how God uses that, uses us to strengthen one another.

It's also a reminder to us to be humble that even when we think we know about something, there's always room for growth in our knowledge.

And not to come to a spot where we just think we have arrived. There's always room for growth. So Apollos was strengthening by becoming more gospel accurate.

But that's not all that takes place here. And that's the cool part about how God works is it's not just the one main thing, but it's a lot of other things.

[14 : 03] Kind of like the bamboo that sends sprouts out while it's growing. There's more going on. It might be under the surface you don't know about. But Priscilla and Aquila, they grew in their care for one another just by them reaching out.

By them feeling that the Spirit wanted them to say something, they didn't hold back and they reached out and cared for Apollos. It also, as you know, helped Apollos become more accurate in his teaching of the gospel.

And then adding to that in verse 27, it says that the broader church body was strengthened by his increased ability to show Christ in the scriptures. And.

So. As they correct him, he's eager still. And notice how he's not like knocked back by this correction. He's he's encouraged by it.

He he absorbs it. He he quickly just moves on. But in a way that is helpful to the church, he wants to cross over to Achaia and they don't know him.

[15 : 13] So the people where he's at send letters to say, hey, this guy is coming. Can you encourage him? And and so they do. But what happens is he also blesses them because he comes alongside other brothers and sisters who have been.

It says helped those who through grace had believed. So a picture of a group of young Christians who who believed. But then they're they're they're they're face to face with the Jewish crowd that is very much against what they have believed and accepted.

And then Apollos steps in and he's this strong voice that is refuting them in public, showing that through the scriptures that the Christ is Jesus.

And so this is very much a welcomed addition to their church at this time. So from Priscilla and Aquila to Apollos to the larger church body of Christ, we see this strengthening taking place.

Really, it's it's the living out of the Great Commission that we read from Matthew 28. Go, therefore, make disciples. That is teaching one another.

[16 : 27] Colossians 3 16 says, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom. That's exactly what they do. So we need to be teaching and growing in our gospel accuracy.

Now, before I move to the next section, I just want to point something out because I want to I want to bring it to your attention because I think Luke strongly brings it out to our attention.

And that's this. If we if we look if we step back and look at Acts, the book of Acts as a whole. So from chapter 13, right when Barnabas and Paul are called out by the Holy Spirit from then all the way to the end in chapter 28, Paul is mentioned either he's doing the action or the action is happening to him in every passage.

So for 16 chapters in every story, Paul is doing something or something is done to him. That is, except for this section, these five verses, Paul is not involved with.

It's all about Apollos. And so there seems to be a special intention that Luke brings out for this passage. And I think it is. I think it's for a couple of things.

[17 : 41] The first one we've talked about, and that is this teaching that we see from Priscilla and Aquila. It's a unique situation, but an opportunity that Luke wants to bring us in on to see how the church can strengthen and teach one another.

And then secondly, I think Luke brings this out because he wants to point to Apollos. Take a few verses and point out Apollos. Why? Because Apollos is used greatly for God.

He's just not mentioned a whole lot. So we hear a lot about Paul. But Apollos was gifted greatly by God and used by God in teaching and apologetics and encouraging believers.

And so it's helpful for us to see that there were other God-placed personalities in the early church besides Paul at this time. And it's helpful for us to see that ministry that goes on.

We know that Apollos did some great work, even though Paul doesn't mention him because, or I should say Paul does mention him, but in very small little bits.

[18 : 54] But what he says is big, I think. Listen to 1 Corinthians 3, verses 6 to 7. This is when Paul is dealing with divisions in the church.

He says, And encourage and grow a large number of believers.

So as we move to now, chapter 19, we come into another story where Apollos, we leave behind and we join Paul again.

Paul's making his way into Ephesus. And as he does, he comes across a group of disciples, around 12 of them.

12 guys that don't quite get the gospel. That sounds a little familiar, right? Luke calls this group disciples. But Paul uses this, or Luke, the author, uses this to describe that they are disciples of John the Baptist.

[20 : 30] They're not disciples of Jesus. And we know this because of the next few verses. Paul witnesses somehow. Somehow, he perceives somehow, something from this group as he comes into their presence.

I don't know that situation. Did he just walk into the town and he sees a group of 12 guys talking and he senses something is missing? I'm not sure how that looked like, but we can imagine.

And so as he approaches this group, he begins to ask them a couple questions. In verse 2, Paul says, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?

And they said, No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. Now, the wording here can throw us off a little bit. So just to clarify, it doesn't mean that they've never heard of the Holy Spirit at all.

Because the Spirit is referred to many times in the Old Testament. And John the Baptist, whom they're followers of, had also preached about the Messiah.

[21 : 32] That would come and that would baptize with the Spirit. We see that in Luke 3, verses 15 and 16. It says, As the people were in expectation and awe were questioning in their hearts concerning John the Baptist, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them saying, I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming.

The strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. So what they meant by saying that is not that they hadn't heard of the Holy Spirit at all, but that they had heard of the Messiah's prophecy, but they didn't know that it was fulfilled.

They didn't know that the Spirit had come and been poured out on his people. Next, in verse 3, Paul asked them, And to what then were you baptized?

And they answered, And to John's baptism. They had believed in a Messiah that was coming, and that they should repent, but they didn't know who that was, who that Messiah was going to be, or if he had even come.

They didn't know of this new kingdom that Jesus preached about, that he was ushering in. They didn't know of being baptized into his life, and into his death, and being resurrected, being brought out of the waters of baptism into new life.

[23 : 09] And they didn't know of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. So, in a sense, we are seeing that Pentecost hadn't caught up with them.

To their response of being baptized into John's baptism, Paul says this in verse 4.

John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is Jesus. So, building on what they know, Paul gives them gospel knowledge that they are missing.

And on hearing that, they are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. The message that they had heard and believed from John was now fulfilled.

They were waiting for the Messiah, and they're now just been told that that Messiah is Jesus the Christ. And so, we see here that God is using his people, Paul in this case, to bring strength to this group of disciples through gospel knowledge.

[24 : 28] Gospel knowledge that they were lacking. So, the Spirit was already at work in their heart. They were seeking him, which means that the Spirit was working, right?

But there was a missing knowledge part of their gospel that they needed. And that's where Paul met them. Next, we see something interesting happen, though.

In verse 6, it says, When Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.

They repented. They believed in Jesus. They were baptized. At this point, the Holy Spirit is already dwelling inside of them. So, what takes place when Paul lays his hand on them is not Paul giving them the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit coming on them in a visual, public display, similar to what we saw at Pentecost.

It's also something that isn't normative for believers to experience. experience. And I know there's some denominations that might teach that, that salvation doesn't come until there's this outward display of the Holy Spirit in someone's life.

[25 : 47] So, it's not normative, but we do see it happen in the New Testament a couple times, but it's for specific reasons. Here, we have a group of Baptists, John the Baptist, followers of him.

But John the Baptist was a forerunner of the Messiah, Jesus. Once Jesus comes and fulfills that gospel, then the message of salvation is complete and they no longer need to be John the Baptist, right?

They're followers of Jesus. So, this mini Pentecost is like the larger one that we saw in Acts 2. And it was meant to demonstrate visually, publicly, that there are particular groups that when the people in those groups, groups like the Gentiles, Samaritans, the John the Baptists, when those people believe in Jesus Christ and are baptized, they are followers now not of what they previously followed, but of Jesus Christ.

And so, this large separation that was very difficult culturally at this time, the Holy Spirit moved in on and allowed these things to visually happen so that we understood accurately what God was doing in his church and in his people.

We talked about this, Sean brought this up in passages before, where we see the Jews struggling with these Gentiles who say they are part of the church, and it is that proof of the Holy Spirit that comes on them that silences the crowd as they realize they are now part of the church, even though they are Gentiles by birth.

[27 : 35] They've been brought into the family of God, united with Christ through the Holy Spirit. In the last couple verses of our passage, we see Paul going into the synagogue as he is accustomed to doing, and for three months, that just sounds like a long time, for three months, he goes back and he is reasoning, he's persuading the Jews trying to about the kingdom of God.

The RSV translation says that he argued and pleaded with them, trying to show them from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the one who has inaugurated or brought in the kingdom of God.

But after three months, verse 9 says that they became stubborn and continued in unbelief. They stopped listening. They were done. They became obstinate, even.

They were refusing to hear anymore. The discussion actually turned nasty. I'm sure you guys have been in those conversations where you're trying to make a point with something and the wall just comes down on the other side and they're not listening to you.

And as you continue, the conversation turns nasty. And that's what happens here. In the synagogue, in front of the congregation, in front of these new believers, they start slandering and bad-mouthing, saying evil things about the way, the way of the Christian believer.

[29 : 16] So Paul, knowing that this atmosphere is becoming toxic, he leaves the synagogue. And you can imagine at this point, he's saddened because the Jews are his people.

He's wanting to convince his people about the kingdom of God. And yet, it ends in this argument, this evil, bad-mouthing that they just don't want to hear anymore.

And so he leaves. He knows that God's mission for him, even though not successful in the synagogue, is not done. So his failure in the synagogue doesn't mean God sees him as a failure, he still has a mission for him to do.

And so he continues on. Paul changes from the synagogue trying to reach the Jews to a public hall trying to reach the Gentiles.

It says that he begins reasoning and debating daily in the hall of Tyrannus. And again, Luke doesn't give us any information about Tyrannus or even what this hall is, what it's used for.

[30 : 29] Was Tyrannus a, actually the name itself means tyrant? Did his parents give him that name? Was he a teacher and his students gave him that name?

We don't know. At the end of verse 9, some manuscripts add in that this time of reasoning happened every day between the 5th and the 10th hour.

That would have been from 10 a.m. in the morning until 4 in the afternoon. Paul was able to dialogue and reason with those that came into the hall.

So through God's provision in ways we don't know about, this Tyrannus allowed his lecture hall, this rented facility, out to Paul the evangelist.

So it feels a little similar to what we have here, right? For some unknown reason, the Cambridge Community Center has allowed us to rent this gym for a time during the day for our worship of God but also gospel proclamation.

[31 : 40] And Luke says in verse 10 that this continued for two years. Two years Paul shows up and teaches and argues and points to the scripture and encourages so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

So God provides the means by which his people could be strengthened through gospel outreach. And that's our third point from this passage is how God uses gospel outreach to encourage and to strengthen his church.

So again, God uses the people of his church to strengthen his church. And we saw in this passage in areas of gospel accuracy and gospel knowledge and in gospel outreach.

Those are what we see in the passage but there are other ones. Again, looking back to the bamboo plant and how it spreads out and we don't know all the ways where things are growing, there are other things that happen as those areas are giving to by the people of the church.

As those are done well, then there are other things that happen. There's encouragement for one another. There's love for one another.

[33 : 09] There's compassion for the hurting. There's generosity for the needy. There's a care for the lost. There's a concern for those who are hurting and struggling.

There's thoughtfulness towards those who are outside. Like Priscilla and Aquila, like Apollos, like Paul, they allow themselves to be used by God in order to strengthen the people of God.

And we also know that through that they themselves are strengthened. It's not just I give my everything to others, but God strengthens us in that. So the question that this passage leaves for us then is how do we do that?

Now it's hard to get into specifics because each one of us that's going to look different for. Each one of us are not gifted like Apollos. We're not like Paul.

We may be more like Priscilla and Aquila. We're all gifted uniquely. We're also each placed in different parts, different jobs, different schools, different families, but placed there for a purpose that we could allow ourselves to be used by God to encourage someone else, to strengthen someone else.

[34 : 37] And whatever the gifting, whatever the location, the formula for that is still going to be the same. And that is submitting to God, allowing his plan to be our plan and not the other way around, and then allowing him to use us, to strengthen someone else, to encourage someone else.

So we have examples in this passage. We have these three sets of people who are great examples of that. And there's nothing, it's actually helpful to look at them and what they did as an example.

But our ultimate example that we look back to is Jesus Christ. Right? He submitted to the Father. He submitted to God, which meant he gave up his throne and came here to earth to die for us.

That's what he did when he submitted to God. God. And he allowed God to use him to strengthen his church. And by strengthen, I mean that strengthen us in our brokenness, in our sin.

Strengthen us in that place where we could not have strengthened ourselves. Jesus reached in and strengthened us when we could not strengthen ourselves.

[35 : 55] He's the example. He's the author of our salvation. He's the one that we look to. for how do we do that? How do we be like Christ?

So, if you are this morning are a believer in Christ, then I want to encourage you to continue to look to him as our example.

If you're not a believer this morning and you hear this passage, then I want to encourage you to read more and to learn more about Jesus Christ and what he did on the cross because without Jesus Christ and our belief in him, we remain broken and in our sin.

And that also means that we are separated from God and we will remain that way until judgment. So, God uses us, each one of us.

I say he uses the church, but you know that that means he uses you and he uses me to encourage you and me. That's how God works. So, as we close, let's allow God to use us.

[37 : 10] Use us to strengthen others and use us to strengthen his church. Let's close in prayer. Lord, we are thankful for the strength that you gave to Paul and to Priscilla and Aquila and to Apollos.

We're thankful for the examples that we see of them in the Bible. Lord, we know that you call us to be examples for you.

You call us to look to Christ, to submit and to have a life that's oriented towards what you are trying to accomplish and not what we're trying to accomplish.

It's about your church, your glory, and your work. So, God, we pray that you would humble us in areas where we are holding on to that glory for ourselves and not letting it go and allowing you through us to strengthen one another like the plants of a bamboo group, a plant, a collective that grows larger and stronger as it seeks to care for and sends its resources to one another.

Lord, help us to be like that. Teach us, Lord, we ask. May you be glorified. In your name we ask. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.