

In the passage we read today Luke interrupts his story of the missionary journeys of Paul to talk more about Priscilla and Aquila and to introduce Apollos. It is evident from reading this passage and the verse preceding this, that the Lord intended for there to be a major breakthrough for the gospel at Ephesus. First of all Paul had visited the city at the end of his second missionary journey.

Then Aquila and Priscilla decided to stay there, set themselves up in business, and cultivate the ground until Paul returned. Now comes Apollos of Alexandria, gifted, eloquent, scholarly, and convinced that Jesus was Saviour and Lord.

Apollos was born at Alexandria [two pics], which was located on the Nile delta in Egypt. It was the second largest city in the Roman Empire and was famous for its Lighthouse on the narrow island of Pharos, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Alexandria was also famous for its museum and library that had over 700,000 volumes.

In New Testament times, Jews made up about one third of the population of Alexandria and it was here that the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into the Greek Septuagint version.

In Verse 24 we are introduced to Apollos, “born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.” The city was the main administrative centre for the area and was the hub connecting the Greco-Roman world with Asia. There was a huge Temple to the Greek fertility Goddess Artemis there and 1000 temple prostitutes. The temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the World and was very important in the economy of the city.

It was to that city that Apollos came to share what he knew about God. We’re told he was educated and eloquent, and had a thorough knowledge of the scripture – the OT!

Apollos was excited about those things that he did understand about Jesus. He was passionate, he “spoke with great fervour”, literally this means “burning or boiling hot.”

This verse says that he “had been instructed in the way of the Lord; . . . though he knew only the baptism of John.” I don’t know exactly what Apollos knew and did not know, but it is clear that he had a limited knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

Some of you perhaps do not know the story of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement. John was raised in the home of a minister, Samuel Wesley and his godly wife Susanna. He attended Charterhouse School and Oxford and became a double professor of Greek and logic at Lincoln College, Oxford. He was subsequently ordained into ministry of the Church of England.

While he was at Oxford he helped to form what was called “the holy club,” a group so nicknamed by the other students because they seriously attempted to cultivate their spiritual lives. Finally he accepted an invitation from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to become a missionary to the American Indians in Georgia, where he failed miserably. Forced to return to England he wrote, “I went to America to convert the Indians; but, oh, who shall convert me?”

Not all was lost, because in his earlier travels he had crossed paths with a group of Moravians whose living faith deeply impressed him. So upon his return to London he sought out one of the leaders and to use Wesley’s words was ‘clearly convinced of unbelief, of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved.’

On the evening of May 25, 1738 Wesley went to a meeting at which Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans was being read. He said while it was being described the change which God works in a heart through faith in Christ that felt his “heart strangely warmed.” He went on to say “I felt I did trust in Christ and Christ alone, for my salvation.....”

Prior to this event he knew more theology and was more dedicated than most believers, but he was lost.

Hundreds of thousands of people profess some type of belief in Christ, display reverence for God, go to church on Sundays, contribute to the offering, sit at the Lord's table and admire the ethical teaching of the Lord – but are as lost as John Wesley before that evening. They have no fire, no passion, no life because they do not have Christ.

Verse 26 says, “He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.”

It was as he was teaching in the synagogue that Aquila and Priscilla had the opportunity to hear him speak. I really don't know who I am the most impressed with Aquila and Priscilla or Apollos.

Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, was an educated man, he was an eloquent man, knowledgeable in the Scriptures, but lacking full understanding of the things of God. Please note: that didn't stop God using him. He used what he knew – we so often don't speak because we say we don't know enough; we don't have all the answers!

Notice what Aquila and Priscilla did and did not do.

This verse says “they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. They opened their hearts and their home to this young preacher. They did not embarrass him in public but lovingly completed his theological picture in private.

This verse also reveals the humble attitude that characterized Apollos. Although cultured and well educated, he humbly sat at the feet of these tentmakers to learn about Jesus. He was clever enough to know he did not know it all and to know that learning is a life-long process. The Bible is complete but our understanding of the Bible is far from complete and we need open minds that we may continue to learn. We see that bible knowledge and the ability to communicate well are not enough in themselves – they need to be coupled with a relationship with God and Spiritual power in order to proclaim truth and produce fruit.

Can you recall someone, a pastor or Sunday School teacher or friend who challenged you to go further than you would have on your own?

Who do you have in your life that gave you needed encouragement? Is there someone in your life in whom you have noticed a gift that needs acknowledging and encouraging.

Charles Swindoll asks the following; “Who taught Martin Luther his theology and inspired his translation of the New Testament? Who visited Dwight L. Moody at a shoe store and spoke to him about Christ? Who was the elderly woman who prayed faithfully for Billy Graham for over twenty years? Who financed William Carey's ministry to India? Who helped Charles Wesley get underway as a composer of hymns? Who personally taught G. Campbell Morgan, “the peerless expositor,” his techniques in the pulpit? You probably don't know do you?” Swindoll goes on to write, “Had it not been for these unknown people – those nobodies – a large chunk of church history would be missing. And a lot of lives would have been untouched. But they were people just like you and me and God used them to encourage and empower others and as a result church history was changed. God use you to empower others.”

Let me give you three steps to empowering someone for Christ.

1. Pray and ask the Lord to lead you to someone who needs some encouragement. They are all around you. You may not even need this step because you already know someone. Just as Aquila and Priscilla did in the life of Apollos. God has someone you could encourage.
2. Look for unrealized potential in people around you. Aquila and Priscilla did not reject Apollos because he didn't know everything.
3. Take the time to make an investment in the life of someone who needs empowerment. Decide right now how you are going to encourage someone! Make a plan for carrying it out.

In verse 27 we are told, “When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.”

Apollos was one of the best communicators of his day, made better because of the investment of one couple of devoted tentmakers.

Conclusion

Don't underestimate the influence you can have. Let me close with the illustration of the life of Hugh Latimer. He was very much like Apollos he was very knowledgeable about the Bible, he could speak with great eloquence and he had considerable influence because he was a bishop, but he was lost.

There was a young monk who knew Latimer and admired him. This monk, was known as “Little Bilney, because he was so short. He did not have much education. No one thought very much of him. But Bilney was saved and he wondered how he might have an opportunity to share the gospel with Hugh Latimer. So he prayed and he finally hit upon an idea.

Priests were required to hear the confessions of any one who wanted to confess their sins. So Bilney went up to Latimer and asked Latimer to hear his confession. Latimer said that he would and so they went into the confessional and Bilney confessed the gospel to him. He told him how he was a sinner and been unable to save himself, how Jesus had died for his sins and how by faith he had been saved. That was what he confessed to Latimer, in that way Latimer for the very first time heard the gospel and he was saved. That was an important moment in the English Reformation.

Latimer was eventually martyred for his faith, by being burned at the stake. On the day of his death he sought to strengthen the man who was to die with him. He said, “Be brave Master Ridley and play the man. We shall this day, by the grace of God, light such a candle in England as, I trust shall never be put out.”

You will never know this side of eternity the dividends that your investment in someone's life will make.