

Derek French:

Today we return to our studies in the book of Acts. Something that's so important in gospel work is that those who come to faith in Christ need good Bible teaching and Christian fellowship if they are to grow in likeness to Christ, mature spiritually and to become useful in his service. It's not surprising, then, to discover Paul visiting some of these new churches to bring them encouragement as he starts his third missionary journey.

We're in Acts chapter 18 and we have the help of Gerard and Phillippa Chrispin again, and Phillippa begins by reading verses 23 to 28, and then Gerard will explain them for us.

Phillippa Chrispin:

*'After he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.'*

*Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue.*

*When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.'*

Gerard Chrispin:

'The lazy man does not roast what he took in hunting,' says an Old Testament proverb. Why bother hunting for food and then lose, through laziness, what you have gained? The apostle Paul is definitely not lazy. After visiting Caesarea and Antioch, he moves on over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening the disciples. He plans to 'roast', in planned Bible teaching and caring discipleship training, what has been 'taken in hunting' through his preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Only by personal trust in Christ can any sinner know sins forgiven, eternal life and peace with God. Only by being strengthened by God's spirit through biblical discipleship in fellowship within a Bible believing church can a Christian grow in spiritual life and meaningful service for Jesus Christ.

So Paul plans to visit and strengthen new churches and Christians through God's grace and through his word. But what has been 'taken in hunting' through sharing of the gospel? As we follow Paul on his third missionary journey, let's review briefly how the gospel of forgiveness and eternal life has spread through the preaching of God's word.

In Acts 1:15 we start with 120 church members. About three thousand Christians are added at Pentecost in Acts 2:41, followed by daily conversions in the growing church in Acts 2:47. The number of men converted reaches about five thousand in Acts 4:4 and in Acts 5:14, multitudes of men and women are increasingly added.

In Acts 5:16, sick people living in cities surrounding Jerusalem are all healed, as are those tormented by unclean spirits. Some who experience physical healing will also rejoice in receiving new life in Christ. All those delivered from unclean spirits must surely be saved spiritually from sin's power and punishment. The number of disciples multiplies in Acts 6:1 while in Acts 6:7 the word of God spreads, again causing numbers of disciples to multiply greatly in Jerusalem with a great many priests becoming obedient to the faith.

All at Lydda and Sharon turn to the Lord in Acts 9:35 and there are many new believers at Joppa in Acts 9:42. The Holy Spirit falls on all who hear the word through Peter at Caesarea in Acts 10:44. A great number believe and turn to the Lord in Antioch in Acts 11:21, while in Acts 11:24 a great many people are once more added to the Lord, again in Antioch. God's word grows and multiplies, surely indicating that sinners are turning to Christ in Acts 12:24

Almost all of Antioch in Pisidia comes to hear God's word on the Sabbath after many Jews and converts to Judaism trust Jesus Christ in Acts 13:44. Again, a large number of Jews and Greeks believe in Jesus in Acts 14:1. Chapter 16 records the birth of the Philippian church, after people trust Jesus in different situations. Many Greeks and leading women come to him in Thessalonica in Acts 17:4. The same chapter logs the conversion of many Greeks and prominent people in Berea in verse 12. Believers join together with Paul in

verse 14. There is much more blessing to come as we journey from Acts 18:23 to Acts 28:31. Much more 'spiritual hunting' will follow!

First, meet Apollos. He appears by name ten times in the pages of the New Testament. He is a Jew born in the renowned Egyptian port of Alexandria, on the Nile. This city is the home to a large Jewish community and later features significantly in the life and witness of the early church.

An eloquent speaker, Apollos is also 'mighty in the Scriptures'. His belief in God from his background in Judaism marks him out as a disciple of John the Baptist. He rightly regards repentance as essential in order to know and walk with God. It prepares a sinner's heart and enables him to place his faith in Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord.

We will note Paul's emphasis in the next chapter that 'John indeed baptised with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is on Christ Jesus'. Even before he comes to understand the life changing good news of Jesus Christ, Apollos' instruction 'in the way of the Lord' channels his fervent spirit to empower him to speak and teach accurately what he has learned about God from the Old Testament and through 'the baptism of John'.

That is why he now speaks boldly in the synagogue. Imagine how uneasy those superficial and religious hypocrites feel when Apollos speaks out. Yet this is even before he comes to know Jesus. It is unsurprising that his name soon becomes bracketed in 1 Corinthians with Paul, a real man of God, who commends him as an equal.

They are both examples of how God changes the lives of those who come to Christ. Sharing a real burden to preach the gospel with others, they labour together for the Lord. But what produced in Apollos this dramatic change which heralds loudly that even being sincerely religious cannot save a lost sinner and that we all need Christ to save us? The question is not whether you are sincere or religious, but do you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour?

A godly married couple, Aquila and Priscilla, hear Apollos 'speaking boldly in the synagogue' in Ephesus. They discern that he has not yet really grasped the heart of the gospel message, despite teaching accurately what he has learned of 'the things of the Lord'. They simply take him quietly on one side and explain 'the way of God more accurately.'

Having left Rome with 'all the Jews', at the command of Claudius Caesar, Aquila and Priscilla enjoy close fellowship and friendship with Paul. They travel with him at times, and even risk their lives for him. Their open home hosts meetings of their local church. Much blessing to others comes through this caring and committed Jewish couple, who love and serve their Lord. Their wide experience makes them ideal people to establish Apollos in his personal faith in Christ by God's grace. Just as Apollos is now helped by them, he helps others to believe in Jesus through grace, as he uses the Scriptures to show that 'Jesus is the Christ'.

Having been helped to yield to Jesus Christ, Apollos now wants to cross from modern Turkey (then Asia Minor) to Achaia (on the Greek mainland) en route to Corinth. The man who has so recently been helped by others, now becomes a great helper of others. He is already experiencing the truth of the words of the Lord Jesus that 'it is more blessed to give than receive.' How does this help come for those who believe? How else but 'through grace'? God's 'grace' is always the only way that anyone ever can help anyone else spiritually come to believe in Christ!

Not only does Apollos share this message of grace with new believers, he also takes part in public and vigorous debate with Jewish people who attack the fact that the Lord Jesus is the Christ, and therefore also the eternal Son of God. Apollos is a shepherd who comes not only to care for the sheep, but to deal with the wolves as well. Paul's burden to strengthen the new Christians is already shared by Apollos.

Have you considered what an important job the Christians have done who wrote from Ephesus to Achaia and possibly to Corinth? They encouraged their brothers in Christ on the other side of the Aegean Sea, near where it meets the Mediterranean Sea, to warmly welcome their new brother and potentially powerful gospel servant. Because they help each other, the cause of Christ benefits. That is always so when Christians encourage one another and seriously exalt Jesus by sharing His word with others.

So, as Paul makes plans to share the gospel, honour His Saviour and bless other churches and Christians, God is already raising Apollos to do the same.

Is Jesus so real to you that you want both Christians and non-Christians to be blessed? Or have you yet to grasp that Christ died to save you, and lives to be the Lord and Saviour whom you need to trust? Romans 14:9 says, He 'died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord'. Is He your Lord and Saviour?