

At the Name of Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 October 2023

Preacher: Ricky Njoto

[0 : 0 0] Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that we can, every single week, we can enjoy your word. So we pray that as we dig deep into your word, that you might open our eyes and open the eyes of our hearts and let us be touched by your glory, which will change us every day to be more like Jesus.

In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen. Well, for more than 100 years, beginning in the 1730s, the Western world was shaken with what came to be known as the Great Awakening.

So there on the screen, you can see a picture of what happened during the Great Awakening. So open field preaching and people from different classes of the society came to listen to the gospel.

So during this time, people from different church backgrounds were working together for the sake of the gospel. So there were Armenian Methodists like John and Charles Wesley, Calvinist Methodists like George Whitefield, Congregationalists like Jonathan Edwards, Presbyterians like Gilbert Tennant, Lutherans and Moravians like Count Sintendorf.

And they were all working together across different churches, different church backgrounds in partnership for the sake of the gospel. And as a result, the gospel reached the marginalized people of the society that previously were enriched.

[1 : 4 5] So the gospel was preached to the slaves, to the Native Americans, to people in prisons. And many missionary organizations were established during this time, including CMS.

Hundreds of popular songs like And Can It Be, great song, Amazing Grace. These songs were created during this time. And eventually, this movement led to the abolition of slavery.

But despite all these great partnerships between Christians, Jonathan Edwards, one of the leaders of the movement, still called this event a surprising work of God.

Not of Christians. It was a surprising work of God. In this passage, we see how the church grows when people work together, when Christians work together.

But above all, it grows when God works and enables His church to grow. In other words, we see here partnerships that enable the church to grow.

[2 : 5 6] Partnerships between Christians as they together participate in the work that God is doing in His church. So first, we see Christians working together to disciple each other for the gospel.

In chapter 18, verse 23, Paul travels around in different cities to strengthen disciples. So we see here that Paul doesn't work only to evangelize and to look for new converts.

He also works to strengthen other Christians to maturity. And meanwhile, in verse 24 to 26, a Jewish Christian named Apollos came to Ephesus and met Priscilla and Aquila.

You might remember Priscilla and Aquila, whom Paul coincidentally met in Corinth at the start of chapter 18. Because coincidentally, they were also tent makers like Paul.

So he stayed with them and had a chance to disciple them. And so they followed Paul to Ephesus in the rest of chapter 18. But when Paul moved on in his travels, he left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus.

[4 : 19] Which coincidentally allowed them to meet Apollos. So there's this prominent character who came to Ephesus and Priscilla and Aquila were able to disciple them.

Of course, the readers should know that these are not coincidences. So in verse 24, Apollos is described as a native of Alexandria in Egypt.

So the ancient Alexandria was a place where people went for learning. Along with Rome, Alexandria was a place where people learned. It was the home of the great library of Alexandria, which was one of the biggest in the whole world.

And in fact, I think it's one of the ancient wonders of the world. And so a lot of... I think I have a picture there. Yep.

So a lot of learned people came out of that city of Alexandria. And indeed, Apollos is also described as a learned man.

[5 : 41] And not only generally learned, but also in the knowledge of the scriptures there in verse 24. In verse 25, he's also received instructions in the way of Christ.

So he's a Christian. And therefore, he speaks with great fervor as he teaches about Jesus accurately to the Jews in the synagogues.

Now the term with great fervor there literally means fervent in the Spirit, in the Holy Spirit. And indeed, in the book of Acts, when someone has the courage to speak about Christ, it's because they have the Holy Spirit.

And so here is someone who is learned, knows Jesus, evangelizes to the Jews accurately about Jesus, and he has the zeal of the Holy Spirit.

But in verse 26, he met Priscilla and Aquila, who heard him teaching, and realized that even though his teaching was accurate, it was inadequate, because he only knew about the baptism of John the Baptist, not the Christian baptism.

[6 : 59] So Priscilla and Aquila invited him to their home and taught him and completed his knowledge. Imagine meeting someone who has a PhD from Harvard University, who's a Christian, and speaks about Jesus accurately, and is evangelizing people as well.

And you, who's a tent maker, notice that their teaching is accurate, but a little bit inadequate. So you invite them to come to your house to have a theological discussion.

That's what's happening here. Priscilla and Aquila, two tent makers, discipling Apollos, a learned evangelist from Alexandria. And Apollos is willing to humble himself to be disciplined.

This passage illustrates the interconnection and the interdependence of churches and Christians in the early period.

Priscilla and Aquila took their time out of their ministry in Ephesus to help someone who would later prove to be an enormous benefit to the churches.

[8 : 21] And Apollos humbled himself and accepted their teaching. Here we see Christians working together across different churches and across different geographical and academic backgrounds for the sake of the gospel, not for their own ego.

And so in verse 27, when Apollos wants to go to Achaia, again we see here the church in Ephesus working together with him, encouraging him and sending a letter to the church in Achaia to welcome him.

So here we see how different Christians across different backgrounds working together for the gospel.

And so in chapter 19, the scene then moves straight away to Paul, but we see the same thing happening. Paul arrives back to Ephesus, but Apollos had gone away to another city.

But then Paul meets some people who have a similar background to Apollos. That is, they only know about the baptism of John the Baptist. But then it becomes clear straight away that their knowledge of Christianity is even less accurate than Apollos'.

[9 : 51] In verse 2, they haven't even heard about the Holy Spirit. Now this is strange, because if we go back to the Gospel of Luke or the Gospel of John, we might think that the disciples of John the Baptist would surely have known about the Holy Spirit.

Because throughout his ministry, John the Baptist over and over again proclaimed about the Messiah who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. So perhaps what they mean in that statement is that they haven't heard that the Holy Spirit is already available now.

Maybe they're saying, we haven't even heard that there is Holy Spirit here now. Which means that they had not heard about Jesus' death and resurrection as the beginning of the Messianic age or the event at Pentecost.

So the gap in their knowledge is quite significant. They had not heard about the start of the Messianic age by Jesus and what it meant for the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

They don't know about the center of the Gospel. What Paul does, therefore, is different to what Priscilla and Aquila do to Apollos. Paul tells them about Jesus in verse 4 as the fulfillment of the ministry of John the Baptist.

[11 : 26] And then he rebaptizes them in verse 5. These two stories are placed back to back to show us the interconnection and the intricate movements of early Christians as they worked together, discipling one another and helping each other move along in their discipleship journey.

Like in a movie where they show us what happens in two places at the same time. This happens in this place. Meanwhile, that happens in another place. Luke does the same here to show us that the early church grew because they worked together across in different places regardless of backgrounds or starting spiritual positions.

No matter where they start in their discipleship, whether they start as someone who doesn't even know the promise of the Holy Spirit or someone who's learned it and is already evangelizing and teaching about Jesus accurately, other Christians help move them along in their journey.

Be mature. Be more mature so that the whole church, the whole body can mature together and the gospel spreads further.

A friend of mine recently shared about the small groups in his church. Now, the small groups in that church act sort of like small communities within the bigger community of the church.

[13 : 08] So people in a small group are so close even outside of the church that they can serve each other in practical ways like helping each other with moving house or cooking for one another and they also intentionally encourage one another to have a missional focus.

So for example, one group in that church focuses on reaching the South Asian people, their South Asian friends who are mostly Hindus. So once a month that group, not the church, that group runs an outreach event where they invite their Hindu friends along to go on hikes or go to the beach and as relationships deepen, they are invited along to an evangelistic Bible study like Christianity Explored.

So, church members in that group help each other to mature and to encourage each other to be missional in their daily lives.

Perhaps we too can work with each other and encourage one another to mature together for the sake of the gospel.

people. Well, while the first factor of church growth in this passage emphasizes partnership between Christians, the second factor of church growth is completely done by God himself.

[14 : 51] In chapter 19 verse 11 to 12, some handkerchiefs and aprons that touched Paul have miraculous powers that they can even heal the sick and exercise demons.

But the start of verse 11 makes it clear that Paul's got nothing to do with it. It says, God did extraordinary miracles through Paul.

Now, ancient Ephesus was a home to witchcraft and sorceries. And so, here, God works in a special manner.

He displayed his power by accommodating to their limited understanding, that is, through Paul and his belongings and the things that touched him. And perhaps this is also why in verse 6 of chapter 19, when the disciples in Ephesus are baptized, they suddenly speak in tongues and prophesy.

Which is kind of expected because it's been prophesied by Joel in the Old Testament in our first reading, that when the Holy Spirit is poured, people will prophesy.

[16 : 11] But it doesn't always happen, does it? And it doesn't always happen in the book of Acts either. When Lydia is baptized, for example, there's no record of anything interesting happening.

When the jailer in Philippi was baptized in chapter 16, he was filled with joy, but there's no record of spectacular miracles. But here, the context is different.

Here in the middle of all sorceries in Ephesus, God shows his power in spectacular ways. to show people that his power is the greatest.

And so, in that context, verse 13 to 16 makes sense. Here, there are some Jews who tried to exorcise demons using the name of Jesus.

So, they've seen Christians doing it, they exorcised demons in the name of Jesus, and so they won't do it as well. But, they're so used to the witchcraft of the city around them that they now want to use the name of Jesus as some kind of spell, like Abednego and notice that they don't even know Jesus.

[17 : 35] Notice what they say. In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out. but it doesn't work. They get defeated instead.

God here shows that his power only works through his real followers. The name of Jesus is not some kind of incantation. This event shows that God's power is not something that we use to benefit ourselves, to gain power for ourselves.

God's power is like water from a fountain that has to be drunk straight from the source. Or we can use the water to benefit others only if we attach ourselves to the fountain like pipes to draw more and more people to the source, to the fountain.

to the fountain. There's a pastor in America that teaches people to shout, in the name of Jesus I command money to come to me.

I hate to break it to you but the name of Jesus doesn't work that way. Especially if his name is used selfishly for ourselves. Now instead of asking for God's power to be displayed like that, why not ask for this?

[19 : 08] I've got a friend who lives in Indonesia and goes to a church there and one day he heard that a family at church needed money to rebuild their house that had been burnt down.

But this friend of mine had no money so he prayed to God and that very night he received a unsolicited call from his friend outside of church telling him that he felt moved to give him a certain amount of money, randomly.

So after receiving that money he gave it all to the needy family and the family went how do you know that this is precisely how much we need to build the house?

I call that a miracle. That's how God's power works. God's power is given and displayed not for our own selfish ambition but to build the church to help us mature and to help non-Christians come to him when they see his power.

And that's what happens in verse 17 to 20. as a result of the spectacular events that God does in Ephesus in verse 17, people are seized with fear and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.

[20 : 45] The result is not that Paul gains money or Paul gains power. The result is that Jesus gains glory. glory.

In verse 18 to 19, people come and burn their scrolls of witchcraft. And in verse 20, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

God's power display resulted in increased commitment and decreased idolatry. David Platt is an American pastor who used to be a missionary.

And he says that in most places where he's done mission, the pattern of conversion is almost always the same. People come to know the power of Jesus.

People believe in Jesus. They get baptized. They call David to their homes to burn their idols. And David challenges them to think of ten people around them who are not Christians and choose one person out of that list who's the least likely to kill them if they tell them about Jesus.

[22 : 05] And pray for them and tell them about Jesus. When people really see God's power, they commit, they leave their idols behind, they destroy their idols, and they tell others about Jesus.

Jesus. So here in this passage, we see the work of God, not Christians, the work of God as he uses miracles, spectacular events, and he uses the partnerships of Christians, and also in verse 8 to 10, he uses the ordinary faithful preaching of the word as displayed by Paul, which we don't have time to cover.

But all of these factors together are used by God to increase the growth of the church. The gospel is proclaimed and more people are saved.

Perhaps two points of application will be beneficial. First, for the sake of the gospel, perhaps we can keep an eye out for people around us that we can help progress in the journey of discipleship.

If you see someone who just became a Christian or who is younger in their faith, why not offer to meet up one-to-one to read the Bible regularly with them?

[23 : 44] Why not offer to mentor them in their journey of discipleship? people? And also, perhaps if you hear someone making a comment that's a bit biblically inadequate, accurate, but a bit biblically inadequate, during Bible study, or if you hear me preaching something that's biblically inadequate, why not invite them to your house for a meal, or offer to buy lunch and discuss it with them, have a theological discussion.

And if you think, who am I to actually correct these people? Who am I to disciple and mentor other Christians? Well, think of Priscilla and Aquila, tent makers who disciple Apollos, this great scholar from Alexandria.

And related to that, I think we should also humble ourselves when we receive encouragement to improve in our discipleship. Like Apollos.

Apollos did not say, hey, who are you tent makers to actually correct me? I'm this learned man from Alexandria. No, he did not say that. He humbled himself and said, well, he didn't say anything in the text, but he humbled himself and accepted their teaching.

I always appreciate it when some of you come to me after a sermon and encourage me or sharpen something that I've said, sharpen my thinking, or offer constructive criticism.

[25 : 30] criticism. It's not always easy to accept criticism, but I appreciate it nonetheless. Thank you for doing that.

Let's work together and help each other mature in Christ. The Christian faith is not an individual thing. There's no you-do-you here.

together. We work together because we are all parts of the same body. And the whole body has to mature to be more like the head that is Christ.

Not just the hand maturing or the foot maturing. The whole body must mature. So let's work together.

Second, let's pray. Pray for God to do his work, his mighty work through us. Like Jonathan Edwards says, it's a surprising work of God.

[26 : 33] Let's pray that he works surprisingly through us. Pray for miracles to be shown so that people might believe. Pray for hearts to be changed when they hear the gospel.

Pray that God might give us courage and the boldness that Apollos displays. pray that we have the zeal of the spirit.

Pray that God might use the ministries here at HTD to bring more and more and more people to Christ. In fact, why not pray boldly?

You know, just as the church in Ephesus grew greatly and miraculously, despite the spiritual battles that were going on against sorceries and witchcraft, why not pray so that the churches in Melbourne might grow miraculously and the whole population of Melbourne might come to know Jesus as their Lord, despite all the idolatries and immoralities that are happening in this city.

Why not pray, hey God, what you did through Paul, what you did 300 years ago in the great awakening, do that again through us.

[27 : 53] In fact, let's pray now. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, in your name there is power, there is comfort, and above all there is salvation.

So we pray that you will give us through your spirit the boldness to proclaim your powerful name to the people around us so they too might experience your power, your comfort, and your salvation.

In that most powerful name, full of grace, Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.