

ACTS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Acts chapter 18 as we continue our study through the Word of God. And keep in mind that the Gospel message is now spreading to Europe as Paul is on his second missionary journey to bring this Good News to people who were lost in their sin!

As we closed last time we left Paul in Athens, awaiting Silas and Timothy to join him.

And in Athens he spoke to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, the so-called intellectuals of their day.

They, as well as the other Athenians, and those who came to this area, loved to hear new things, they loved information, but it truly seems that they were not moved by what they heard; they just like to hear new things.

So as Paul arrives, he speaks to these men on Mars hill, sharing with them Jesus Christ. And Paul shared the Gospel message with these men, speaking of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

And we see the results of this message that Paul shared with these men, “**And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter.’**” Acts 17:32.

In other words, they were done hearing and they made excuses why they did not want to hear him any longer or they just made fun of him.

And in the end, “**. . . some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.**” Acts 17:34.

I am sure that Paul was discouraged at this point. He had such a zeal for the Lord and yet, not much fruit here in Athens. And make no mistake about it, we should have a zeal for the Lord, a passion for the Lord and others should see that.

The nineteenth-century bishop, J. C. Ryle wrote in his book, *Practical Religion*,

A zealous man in religion is pre-eminently a man of one thing. It is not enough to say that he is earnest, hearty, uncompromising, through-going, whole-hearted, fervent in spirit. He only sees one thing, he cares for one thing, he lives for one thing, he is swallowed up in one thing; and that one thing is to please God.

Whether he lives, or whether he dies, whether he has health, or whether he has sickness, whether he is rich, or whether he is poor, whether he pleases man, or whether he gives offence, whether he is thought wise, or whether he is thought foolish, whether he gets blame, or whether he gets praise, whether he gets honour, or whether he gets shame, for all this the zealous man cares nothing at all.

He burns for one thing; and that one thing is to please God, and to advance God's glory. If he is consumed in the very burning, he cares not for it; he is content. He feels that, like a lamp, he is made to burn; and if consumed in burning, he has but done the work for which God appointed him . . . This is what I mean when I speak of "zeal" in religion.

- J. C. Ryle, *Practical Religion*, p. 130

It is hard to stop a man who has that kind of zeal, and yet, do you think a Christian can get discouraged, can get depressed, can lose hope in what they are doing? Of course they can! And I think that is what we see here with Paul.

In I Corinthians 2:1-3 Paul tells us of this time as he wrote, **“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.”**

It seems like Paul felt he was put through the wringer there in Athens and, as we will see this evening, he is going to be moving on to Corinth.

Now why am I sharing this with you? Because there are some who will make you feel weak, worth nothing because you are down, you are discouraged. But there is a battle going on and sometimes we see the victory and sometimes we don't. And when we don't, we can easily get discouraged. Charles Spurgeon put it like this,

. . . good men are promised tribulation in this world, and ministers may expect a larger share than others, that they may learn sympathy with the Lord's suffering people, and so may be fitting shepherds of an ailing flock.

- Charles Spurgeon, The Minister's Fainting Fits, in Lectures to My Students: First Series, p. 168

And, as we will see this evening, Paul is going to meet Aquila and Priscilla and they are going to encourage Paul.

Yes, we need to hope in God, trust in His promises to us in His Word, and many times God will use others to bring the encouragement that we need in the situations we are facing.

I know I have said that often, but we need to encourage each other, we need to fellowship and not isolate ourselves. I don't get it why some just go off into their little corner. It is the body of Christ and if you avoid that you are missing out on the blessings that God wants to bring to you.

So as we get into Acts chapter 18, keep in mind that as Paul comes to Corinth and he's discouraged, weary and now he's facing one of the most immoral, ungodly, wildly wicked cities of his day and possibly he became overwhelmed at the enormity of the work and the seeming impossibility of what he was doing. All of this seemed to push Paul into a sense of despair.

And like I have said, there is not a Christian alive that hasn't at one time or another felt this way, where there is a sense of hopelessness that sweeps over you as you're overwhelmed by the size of the task or the impossibility of the situation.

And here Paul had come to this point, yet the Lord stepped in and encouraged Paul by helping him to get his eyes back on God. Hopelessness and despair result when we take our eyes off of God and get them on the problem. We must force ourselves to keep our eyes on God and by faith trust Him to do the impossible through us. And like I have said, there is a couple that will come alongside Paul and encourage him in the work.

With that as our background, let's begin reading in Acts chapter 18, beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

ACTS 18

VERSES 1-3

Now it was a fifty-three mile walk from Athens to Corinth, the capital of Achaia.

And Corinth was an important commercial center located on the isthmus of Corinth, which connected the Peloponnesus or the peninsula of Southern Greece with Northern Greece.

You see, to sail around Greece was some 200 very difficult, very treacherous miles. So they would often place ships on rollers and they were pulled the 4 or so miles to the Adriatic Sea to get to Italy.

Now, if Athens was the intellectual center, then Corinth would be the center of wickedness. Now that may seem harsh, but that was the reality of the situation.

Make no mistake about it, Corinth was a city with a reputation for loose living and sexual immorality. In fact, Corinth was so wicked and so well-known for its wickedness that the name itself became a synonym for licentiousness!

In classical Greek, to act like a Corinthian meant to practice fornication, and a Corinthian companion meant a prostitute.

Also, in this city was a temple that was dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. This temple had 1,000 temple prostitutes who would come out at night and offer themselves to men as an act of worship to the goddess Aphrodite, besides making money to keep the temple operating.

Also, homosexuality was rampant in Corinth, and like today, if you had money, you could buy almost any kind of immorality, you could buy almost any kind of wickedness you wanted.

That is what Paul was stepping into; a hornet's nest of wickedness and evil, but that is not going to stop Paul from shining the light of Jesus Christ to these people who were living in darkness!

How could this city become so wicked? One of the reasons the city had become so bad was because it was the center of the major trade routes going from east to west and north to south, which meant that sailors, traders and caravans were constantly traveling through Corinth.

It became a convenient place for wild drunken entertainment and immoral behavior.

Now, in verses 2 and 3 of Acts chapter 18 we see Paul hook-up with Aquila and Priscilla.

We don't know how they came together, maybe because of their common trade, tent making.

Also, it doesn't say when they got saved but as you read through the Scriptures, it truly implies that they are saved. But we don't know if they were already saved when Paul meet them or got saved while spending time with Paul, but whatever the case, they were saved.

I also believe that this was a God-ordained meeting as Paul needed some encouragement, especially now coming to this immoral city after being in Athens and not much fruit there!

Now the reason this couple fled to Corinth is because “**... Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome . . .**” Acts 18:2.

We know from history that in 49 A. D. Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome.

The reason he did this is given to us by the Roman historian, Suetonius. And he said of this event, “as the Jews were indulging in constant riots at the instigation of Chrestus, [Claudius] banished them from Rome.”

Chrestus differs by only one letter from the Latin Christus or Christ. Because of that, Suetonius, writing some 70 years after these events, may have wrongly assumed that Chrestus or Christ was in Rome instigating these riots. Or, what I believe, is that the followers of Christ were causing trouble. The light of Christ was shining upon their immoral lifestyles and they did not like it. And thus, the expulsion of the Jews from Rome!

Bruce puts it this way in regard to the expulsion of the Jews, “dissension and disorder within the Jewish community of Rome resulting from the introduction of Christianity into one or more of the Synagogues of the city.”

As unfair as this seems, God used it to bring Aquila and Priscilla to Corinth to meet up with a man named Paul!

VERSES 4-6

Paul supported himself and, on the Sabbath, as was Paul's practice, he shared Jesus in the Synagogues to the Jews and the Greeks who were seeking the God of Israel. It is as he said in Romans 1:16, "**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.**"

As Silas and Timothy catch-up with Paul, it seems like Paul is energized, he speaks with more boldness now than before they arrived. What happened?

When Timothy came, he brought news about how the Christians in Thessalonica were remaining steadfast in the faith. This brought Paul great joy, spurring him on in ministry or as Luke tells us, "**... Paul was constrained by the Holy Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.**" Acts 18:5.

And Paul answered back by writing I Thessalonians from Corinth. And listen to what he said in chapter 3 of I Thessalonians, "**But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you - therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?**" I Thessalonians 3:6-10.

I can't tell you how often you have encouraged me in the work and I was strengthened. I can't tell you how often my wife does the same for me.

And I believe, as Silas and Timothy came back with the good news of what was happening in Thessalonica, Paul was encouraged, he was strengthened in the faith.

Folks, we do need each other, don't be the Lone Ranger out there! We can encourage, strengthen each other and even correct each other when we are going down the wrong path. Fellowship is needed!

I like the way Warren Wiersbe put it regarding what these men did for Paul, how they encouraged him. He wrote,

Everyone agrees that Paul was a great Christian and a great missionary evangelist, but how much would Paul have accomplished alone? Friends like Aquila and Priscilla, Silas and Timothy, and the generous believers in Macedonia, made it possible for Paul to serve the Lord effectively. His Christian friends, new and old, encouraged him at a time when he needed it the most.

Of course, this reminds us that we should encourage our friends in the work of the Lord. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "God evidently does not intend us all to be rich or powerful or great, but He does intend us all to be friends." "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" is the way Paul expressed it (Gal. 6:2). Humanly speaking, there would have been no church in Corinth were it not for the devotion and service of many different people.

- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, NT*, pp. 379-380

It is as Paul said in Hebrews 10:24-25, **“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”**

And in Proverbs 17:17 we are told, **“A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.”**

The blessings of friendships!

Now as Paul shared in the Synagogue that Jesus is the Messiah, they accused him of blaspheme. That tells me that Paul was preaching that Jesus is Almighty God because you can really only blaspheme God!

And thus, Paul doesn't continue forcing the issue; they didn't want to hear of Jesus anymore, so he leaves the Synagogue.

When people have made up their mind, there is no use continuing on, as Jesus said in Matthew 7:6, **“Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.”**

We need to understand that it is not our responsibility to see people saved, as hard as that may be. Remember, back in Mark 16:15-16 Jesus said to us, **“... ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.’”**

You see, our responsibility is to share Jesus, it is then up to the individuals to receive it.

And so we read here that Paul sees the door closed to the Jews at this point, so he moves on to the Greeks or the Gentiles to share with them the love of Jesus and the forgiveness of sin.

That is an important lesson for us to learn. If people don't want to hear, move on until they are ready.

Paul, in speaking of the Jews, said this in Romans 11:11, "**I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.**"

In other words, as they see God blessing the Gentiles, the Jews might become jealous and return to God, receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior!

That too can happen as people see what God is doing in our lives and they desire to have what we have – ***JESUS!***

VERSES 7-8

God's timing is amazing. We see here that God brought this God-fearing man name Titus Justus into Paul's life.

Now some feel that his full name was Gaius Titus Justus and that he was the "**Gaius my host**" referred to in Romans 16:23. And it could very well be!

So Paul is sharing Jesus in the house of Titus Justus, which is located right next to the Synagogue! Go figure. What an awesome location because it gave him continued contact with the Jews and Gentile proselytes; and as a result, even the chief ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, was converted! It was the ruler's job to see to it that the synagogue building was cared for and that the services were held in a regular and orderly manner. And now he is saved!

And Paul tells us in I Corinthians 1:14 that Crispus and Gaius were one of the few that he baptized.

We are also told that many others came to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior, which I'm sure got the Jewish community in an uproar. And let me ask you this, do you think they are going to be happy about what Paul was doing and the converts that came to Christ?

Of course they are not going to be happy. In fact, they are going to bring Paul in front of the Roman authorities, but before we see that happen, let's read on and see what God is going to do first!

VERSES 9-11

Think about this for a minute. Why would the Lord tell Paul to not be afraid? I think the reason is simple, he was afraid.

Paul must have seen the anger of the Jews heating up, the opposition against the work he was doing growing stronger and he was starting to get fearful.

He was imprisoned in Philippi. Run out of town in Thessalonica and Berea. He encountered indifference to his message in Athens, and now this.

And as he lay in bed one night, God tells him “**Do not be afraid.**”

Of this one writer put it like this. He wrote,

There had been culture shock in Athens, and now Paul experienced moral shock in Corinth. Its sweat and perfume and grit smothered Paul's righteous soul, and now he became depressed. Remembering his past experiences, he knew what could happen to him in Corinth, and the apostle, as great a servant of Christ as he was, became discouraged, fearful, insecure. Even though there were some spiritual bright spots in Corinth, he needed a lift.

In the midst of Paul's despondency, God ministered to him through a vision bearing words of refreshment – great words for those who are beginning to wonder if they should give up the battle. When we feel the unrelenting persistence of evil, when we sense that the forces of darkness are sending troops to defeat us, when we feel that our finest hour is about to give way to our lowest, there is an antidote for our hopelessness. What did God tell Paul?

“Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” (vv. 9-10)

This marvelous message from heaven can bring rejuvenation to our souls.

- R. Kent Hughes, Acts – The Church Afire, p. 240

I like that! And what we see God doing in the life of Paul, He wants to do in our lives as well – encouraging us not to give up but to forge ahead in the work He has called us to do.

We see here that the Lord is encouraging Paul to continue speaking forth the Gospel message for God is with him. And even though the opposition may come against him, they won't succeed in their mission, but God's work will!

And like I have said, what encouraging words for not only Paul, but for each of us – don't be afraid – continue in the work – God is with you – the enemy may try to stop you, but they won't succeed!

May we remember that! Now, as Paul hears these words of encouragement, notice what he does in Acts 18:11, **“And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”**

Notice, Paul did not give up but continued on in the work, staying in Corinth for 1½ years!

How can we have that boldness, that confidence in what God has called us to do? In Hebrews 4:16 Paul tells us, **“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”** As you commune with God He will give you that boldness!

Also, in I John 4:17-18 John tells us, **“Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”**

His love towards us expels all fear that may torment us. Again, it deals with communion with God and trusting in God and out of that will come the boldness to stand for God!

Also, did you notice what Paul gave them? He read them the latest book on how to be ***PURPOSE DRIVEN!*** He put on some skits, a few puppet shows. He told some great stories and told some very funny jokes.

What do you mean that is not what he did? You are exactly right. He taught them the Word of God and that is so needed today in churches!

And people may tell you, “But people are not interested in the Word of God any longer. You have to do other things to attract them to church and then keep them coming!”

That is so wrong. Notice the warning that Paul gave to Timothy, **“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”** II Timothy 4:2-5.

In other words, “Timothy, you give them what they need, not necessarily what they want. You preach the Word of God to them and it will be exactly what they need!” And that is true today as much as it was true in Paul’s day!

Spurgeon, over 125 years ago, wrote, “A time will come when instead of shepherds feeding the sheep, the church will have clowns entertaining the goats.” What he warned the church about is upon us because they church closed their ears to the warning! We need to wake up. It may not be popular, but it is what is needed – ***THE TEACHING OF GOD’S WORD!***

And thus, we see Paul, probably from the fall of 50 A. D. to the spring of 52 A. D. he was in Corinth teaching them. And that is still the greatest need in the church today!

VERSES 12-17

In approaching Gallio, the Jews of Corinth tried to stop Paul’s preaching work in the entire province. But remember what the Lord said to Paul, **“... ‘Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.’”** Acts 18:9-10.

Now Gallio was the brother of Seneca who was the famed Roman philosopher and the tutor of Nero. Of his brother, Seneca said that he is “an intelligent person who hatted flattery, and was blessed with an ‘unaffectedly pleasant personality.’”

Now this probably took place toward the end of Paul’s stay in Corinth because that is when Gallio was appointed proconsul of Achaia (approximately 51 A. D.). Thinking the new proconsul would be friendly to them, the Jews brought Paul before him at the judgment seat or the Bema Seat in the marketplace at Corinth.

And these unbelieving Jews presented their case before Gallio as they said, “**This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.**”

But Gallio didn’t see it their way. You see, at this point they saw Christianity as just another sect of Judaism and Judaism was officially tolerated by the Romans at this point.

He basically tells them that this is not a matter of Roman law but of your own Jewish law and therefore they needed to deal with it themselves, not Rome! And Gallio closes court and drives them out! I guess you can say, “*Separation of church and State!*”

This was an important decree by Gallio because what he said became law in the land, he was setting a precedent for others to follow.

Thus, as Longenecker put it, “If Gallio had accepted the Jewish charge and found Paul guilty of the alleged offence, provincial governors everywhere would have had a precedent, and Paul’s ministry would have been severely restricted. As it was, Gallio’s refusal to act in the matter was tantamount to the recognition of Christianity as a *religio licita*.” (Those words mean; permitted religion, approved religion)

My pastor put it like this in regard to what this man did. He wrote,

I have read and heard Bible expositors condemn this man Gallio in no uncertain terms. He is pictured as an unfeeling typical judge of that day. I want to say something for the defense of Gallio. I thank God for him, and I personally think that he took the right position. I'll tell you what I mean by that. He is probably the first person who made a decision between church and state. Gallio said that if the matter was concerning religion or about some religious thing, then they should take it and handle it themselves. He was a Roman magistrate and he was concerned with enforcing Roman law. But when the case did not involve Roman law, he would not interfere. He told them to handle religious matters themselves. He adopted a "hands off" policy. I like Gallio. He separated church and state. He would not interfere with Paul preaching in the city of Corinth. Corinth was a city of freedom, including religious freedom. Since the issue had to do with religion, he asked them to settle it themselves.

Now I want to say this: I wish the Supreme Court of the United States would adopt the same policy. I wish they would adopt a "hands off" policy when it comes to matters of religion. What right does a group of secular men have to come along and make a decision that you can't have prayer in the schools? If a community wants prayer in their school, then they should have prayer in their school. If they are not having prayer in school, then the state should not force prayer in school. We claim to have freedom of speech and freedom of religion in our land.

The unfortunate thing is that our freedoms are often curtailed. They are abused and misdirected. Under the guise of separating church and state, the freedom of religion is actually curtailed. If we are going to separate church and state, then the state should keep its nose out of that which refers to the church.

If this man Gallio were running for office, I would vote for him. I think we need men with this kind of vision. It says Gallio cared for none of those things. Of course not! He is a secular magistrate. He is not going to try to settle an argument about differences in doctrine. That's not his business, and he'll stay out of it. I would vote for him.

- Pastor Phil Ballmaier, Acts 18:12-16

And you would think that the case is closed, but not exactly. The Jews took Sosthenes, the ruler of the Synagogue and they beat him.

Now I know, in some of your Bibles it says, "**Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes**" when it really should read, "**Then they all took Sosthenes.**"

You see, it would not make sense to me if the Greeks, the Gentiles took Sosthenes and beat him and Gallio did nothing about it because he already ruled this was not a matter for Rome to deal with.

To me, it seems like angry Jews took Sosthenes, who now is ruler of the Synagogue after Crispus became a Christian, and beat him up for losing this case before Gallio.

Because it was a Jewish matter, Jews fighting against Jews, Gallio looked the other way; it was a matter of their law and not his!

Interestingly enough, in I Corinthians 1:1 Sosthenes is mentioned as being saved, which may have happened after this beating, as his fellow Jews hated him, but the Christians reached out to him in the love of Christ! It is a possibility.

VERSE 18

Paul now leaves Corinth, he is not kicked out, and he travels some 8 miles from Corinth to Cenchrea, which was the eastern harbor of Corinth and he is going to sail to Ephesus, then to Syria and eventually he will reach Jerusalem for one of the feasts.

In Cenchrea Paul takes a vow and cuts off his hair, a Nazirite vow found in Numbers chapter 6, which speaks of dedication unto God.

Then in Jerusalem he would cut his hair again and burn it on the altar in the Temple in Jerusalem. This time of consecration or dedication unto the Lord could last for a week, a month, several months; it was whatever you decided to do, whatever you decided to devote to the Lord.

Again, some have a hard time with this because they see Paul under the Law.

I don't see it that way. First of all, to keep the Law you had to cut your hair in Judea, which Paul did not do, he cut his hair in Cenchrea.

Secondly, people consecrate themselves to all kinds of things today, so there is nothing wrong in giving some time to the Lord, dedicating yourself to Him, consecrating yourself to Him.

And when you read Paul's letters, he does not say we need to follow the Law for our salvation, but it is based upon grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

In fact, Paul tells us in Romans 12:1-2, **"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."**

I think you get the point, our lives need to be dedicated, consecrated unto the Lord, and to take some time for fasting and praying, seeking God's direction isn't wrong, it is often needed!

VERSES 19-21

As they arrive in Ephesus, a place that Paul wanted to preach in earlier but the Holy Spirit prevented him, as Acts 16:6 tells us, **“Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.”**

And now we see Paul speaking forth the Gospel message to the Ephesians and it looks like there was great fruit born out of this. In fact, they wanted him to stay longer but he could not!

And Paul leaves Aquila and Pricilla in Ephesus and he sails on even though, like I have said, the Ephesians want him to stay.

Why did Paul have to leave so quickly? Because he wanted to make it to Jerusalem in time for a feast day, but he does tell the Ephesians that he will be back if it is the will of God for him to do so.

We make so many plans in our lives and we tend to leave God out or we make them and then we ask God to bless them instead of going to Him first to be guided by Him.

James puts it this way in James 4:13-15, **“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’”**

How true that is, if it is God's will, He will allow us to accomplish His work.

Now let me also say this. When Paul says, “**I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem**” he is not saying that he and the early Christians felt obligated to observe the Jewish feasts.

Think about the heart of Paul for his Jewish brethren and to be in Jerusalem for a feast day, this time Passover, would give Paul an opportunity to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to many more people, including key Jewish leaders from throughout the Roman Empire who would come for this feast!

Paul taught clearly that the observing of religious feasts was neither a means of salvation nor essential for sanctification.

VERSE 22

Paul lands in Caesarea, which ends his second missionary journey and then he goes *UP* to Jerusalem for the feast and then he goes *DOWN* to Antioch, his home church.

Remember, Jerusalem is elevated so you always go up to Jerusalem and as you leave, no matter which direction you go, you are always going down from Jerusalem.

VERSE 23

We don't know exactly how much time Paul spent back at his home congregation in Syrian Antioch, but perhaps it was as long as a year.

And like we saw in his second journey, on his third missionary journey he also visited the churches he established and strengthened the believers.

Luke does not describe this journey in detail because his main purpose is to get Paul to Ephesus. He wants to share with his readers the marvelous ministry God gave to Paul in that strategic city so steeped in idolatry and the occult.

So we now begin Paul's third missionary journey as he goes back to the areas of Galatia, Phrygia and the city of Ephesus.

You see, it was God's will for Paul to return to Ephesus!

VERSE 24-25

As Paul did his work in Galatia and Phrygia, this man named Apollos came from Alexandria to Ephesus.

Of this man, Boice tells us, "Apollos was a well-educated and also a well-traveled man. We can imagine that in his youth he had gone to Jerusalem, especially if he had an interest in the Old Testament, and while there had come under the influence of the preaching of John the Baptist."

Keep in mind that Alexandria was the second most influential city in the Roman Empire at that time.

This city was founded by (and named after) Alexander the Great, and it boasted a university with a library of almost 700,000 volumes. It was the center for education and philosophy.

The population of Alexandria (about 600,000) was quite cosmopolitan, being made up of Egyptians, Romans, Greeks, and Jews. At least a quarter of the population was Jewish, and the Jewish community was very influential.

And we can clearly see that Apollos knew the Scriptures and he was a follower of John the Baptist.

Because of that, I don't believe Apollos was saved at this point. The interesting thing is what he did know he felt compelled to share with others, his faith in what he knew was real and he wanted others to have what he had.

Talk about passion, may we have that kind of passion with the truth that God has given to us through His Word!

Now what was Apollos preaching about? What was the message of John the Baptist all about?

According to Luke 1:13-17 we are told, **“But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, “to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,” and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”**

And in Luke 3:3-6 we read of John, **“And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.””**

John was preparing the people to receive the Messiah, a repentance of sin, a turning back to God, but that won't save you.

Yes, you need to repent, but you also need Jesus, the Savior, for without Him, you will die in your sins!

It is as Paul said in Hebrews 6:1-2, **“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.”**

So at this point, Apollos is not saved!

Remember what the Lord said in Jeremiah 29:13, **“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”** That is what Apollos is doing and the Lord will reveal Himself to this man.

But how will He do that? Let's read on and see.

VERSE 26

So as Apollos is preaching in the Synagogue Aquila and Priscilla heard what he had to say, and they understood that he was missing something important, the coming of the Messiah!

And I like what they do. They did not cause a commotion, they did not publicly put Apollos down, they didn't cause confusion with the Jewish unbelievers.

But as they listened to what Apollos was saying, when he was done, they took him aside and shared with him Jesus, they corrected his error!

There are those that have a passion for God but their knowledge of Him is limited and thus, we can share with them the love of Jesus, the truths of Jesus so as they speak they can do so with the knowledge of God according to the Word of God.

After Apollos gets this information, what do you think he will do? Let's read on and see.

VERSES 27-28

Now armed with the fullness of Jesus, that He is the Messiah, the Savior of the world, Apollos wants to cross the Aegean Sea to Achaia and as Acts 19:1 tells us, specifically going to Corinth to share Jesus with them.

Now this is great, the church in Ephesus sends letters with Apollos to share with the people in Corinth, encouraging them to receive Apollos and the message he has for them. And, according to I Corinthians chapter 1, it seems like Apollos had a very fruitful ministry there in Corinth.

As we continue on with Paul's third missionary journey next time, we will pick-up our study with Paul arriving in Ephesus and some very interesting and for some, very controversial things regarding this church in Ephesus, were they saved or not?

I realize that ministry, the Christian faith is not easy, and we can get discouraged, depressed, down in the dumps at times. Let me share this with you to encourage you in the work that God has for you. We are told,

Some of us may be discouraged and fear an uncertain future. Some of us are seeing encouraging things happen but are afraid they will not last and hard times will return. The Lord has a message for us:

“Do not be afraid. Stop borrowing trouble. Look to me! I love you. Keep ministering. Keep caring. Keep speaking my name. Inactivity will only imprison your fears. Believe that I am with you and that I will give you all the protection you need. Believe that your life will bear fruit – I promise.”

According to an ancient story, when Leonides, the noble hero of the Spartans who defended Greece from the Persians, was in battle against thousands of invaders, one of his men said to him, “General, when the Persians shoot their arrows, there are so many of them that they darken the sky.” Leonide replied, “Then we will fight in the shade.” Paul continued serving the Lord and fighting the battle, regardless of his feelings, no matter what circumstances he saw on the horizon. We must do the same.

- R. Kent Hughes, Acts – The Church Afire, p. 244

Remember what Paul said in I Corinthians 15:58, **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”**

The Amplified Bible puts it like this, **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be firm (steadfast), immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord [always being superior, excelling, doing more than enough in the service of the Lord], knowing and being continually aware that your labor in the Lord is not futile [it is never wasted or to no purpose].”**

And remember what Paul wrote in Hebrews 10:24-25, “**And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.**”

We need the encouragement of the Lord in our lives as we read His Word and we pray.

But, may we not negate fellowship, the gathering together as a body of believers, as some do.

Paul says that this is so important because as we do we encourage people, we stir them up in love and good works, just as Aquila and Priscilla did with Apollos and look at the fruit that was born in his life because his heart was stirred.

And the thing is, as you stir others in love and good works, your heart will also be stirred and who knows what God wants to do through you as you live for Him!

Remember, your work or labor in the Lord ***IS NEVER IN VAIN!***

