

Acts 18:23-19:41.

Power to Make a Difference

In Acts 18:23 and following we find a narrative that describes the beginning of Paul's third missionary journey. The first journey, shared with Barnabas, covered a "clockwise arc" from Antioch to Cyprus, and North to Asia minor. The second journey, shared with Silas, Timothy, and Luke, started retracing those steps in a "counter-clockwise arc," starting in Asia minor, and progressed Westward to Macedonia. This third journey may have been inspired by Paul's promise to the Ephesians to return when he quickly passed through on his second journey.¹ This third journey covers a similar track as the second journey, except Paul has an extended visit in Ephesus. It appears that Timothy and Erastus joined Paul on this trip as well as Gaius and Aristarchus, converts from Macedonia.

Acts 18:23-28. *And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. ²⁴And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. ²⁵This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. ²⁶And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. ²⁷And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: ²⁸For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.*

Paul had left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus on his second missionary journey. Here we see the impact that Aquila and Priscilla had on Apollos. Apollos was from Alexandria, and the scripture describes him as learned. Founded in 330BC by Alexander the Great, Alexandria was best known for its intellectual fervor. Its library was the largest in the known world. It was the center of what was to

¹ Acts 18:19-21.

become a religion of intellectual knowledge. Many of the most famous philosophers and mathematicians came from Alexandria.

Apollos was fully confident in his faith in the God of Israel, but his depth of theological knowledge was incomplete. He came to know God through the baptism of John, whose followers had continued to propagate his message throughout the region of Northern Egypt. Still, he taught John's message of repentance, faith, and preparation for the Messiah with fervor wherever he went. Apollos' life changed when he met Aquila and Priscilla. Knowing the full gospel of Jesus Christ, they took Apollos aside and shared with him what was still lacking in his understanding. This must have been a very exciting experience for Apollos, who had such a fervent desire for knowledge. It would bring to completion the open-endedness of John the Baptist's message of preparation as he would now know the Messiah. We know from remaining biblical and historical information that Apollos became a dynamic pastor/leader of the church in Corinth. At least four times when Apollos is later named, the people accept Apollos with the same (or even more) respect as they do Paul.² Like Paul, Apollos had the gift of apostleship combined with a thorough knowledge of scripture and was able to be used by God in a mighty way. Paul had great respect for Apollos.³

What part did Aquila and Priscilla have in the ministry of Apollos? When they heard Apollos' preaching and teaching, they noted something lacking, so they took him aside and offered to teach to him the full gospel. Their tact and consideration won them Apollos' confidence. Then, through Apollos' great potential as a preacher/teacher, their personal witness was significantly expanded.

When you teach others the good news of Jesus Christ, you have little knowledge of the potential expansion of your witness that may represent.⁴

We meet up with Aquila and Priscilla again in 1 Corinthians 16:19

² 1 Corinthians 1:12, 3:4-5.

³ 1 Corinthians 16:12, Titus 3:13.

⁴ I am reminded of a few young men who have entered the preaching/pastoral ministry after hearing the truth in one of my own Bible studies.

1 Corinthians 16:19. *The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.*

We are aware also from other Biblical references that Aquila and Priscilla opened up their home to be the meeting place of a Corinthian church. What does this say about Aquila and Priscilla? Have you ever considered opening up your home for a regular Bible study? This is how churches are most successfully started. A need for an area church facility is indicated by a successful home Bible study. We all agree that all we have belongs to the Lord, and we are stewards of it. However, we often neglect to utilize what God has given us in a way that really expands the work of the Kingdom.

How can you use the things you have for the Kingdom's work? Be attentive to what God is doing around you, listen to the Spirit concerning the opportunities there are for your involvement, and get involved. Be willing to take risks. We find another reference to Aquila and Priscilla in Paul's letter to the church in Rome.

Romans 16:3-4. *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.*

There is very little said about the experiences that Aquila and Priscilla went through when being thrown out of Rome, exiled in Corinth, and then returning to Rome after the persecution ended. We know of two occasions when violence broke out as a result of Paul's preaching when Aquila and Priscilla were there.⁵ It is evident here that they went through some very risky times. God's Word promises that we will never be tested beyond that which we can bear. Few of us have ever been to that point in our ministries, and most have never taken much of a risk at all.

I was recently thinking, while driving up Interstate 85 of the risks of life. There was a very large sign at the entrance of a rest area that pointed out the various law enforcement agencies that were actively engaged in protecting visitors there. This has probably come as a result of increasing assaults at rest areas. This implies that there is a level of risk associated with stopping in a rest area, or

⁵ Acts 18:12-17; 19:23-41.

anywhere alongside the road. We take risks every day from the point that we get out of bed. Every trip in the car is a risk. We pay little attention to those regular risks we take every day, but give a lot of attention to any risks that are not in our routine. If ministry is not part of our regular routine, we may be oversensitive to those risks. There were many risks associated with the mission trip that my wife and I took to Belarus two years ago, several of which we were very aware of. However, it was easy on a mission trip, knowing of the prayers that were lifted on our behalf, to turn any anxiety concerning those risks fully over to God and let Him deal with them rather than worry about them ourselves. We found ourselves freed up to be continually engaged, and to go into what some considered risky situations without hesitation. It is not so easy to turn risks over to God in our regular routine. Somehow that "24-7" philosophy of mission engagement that is experienced on a mission trip does not carry over into our daily lives.

What are some of the risks that we may encounter by living out our faith on a regular "24-7" basis? Telling others of God always carries a level of risk. Driving a car always carries a much more serious level of risk. Why are we so hesitant to do one, yet eagerly willing to take on the other? The risks of sharing Christ are for us little more than embarrassment, rejection, and the possible (but not likely) loss of acquaintances. Many around the world do this at the risk of their lives or profoundly distressing imprisonment. All of life carries risks, so we should not be preoccupied with the risks associated with engagement in God's work in the world around us.

There are some good pointers for us in the work of Aquila and Priscilla that can be observed in the light of our missionary calling. (1) do not work alone. Team up with others. (2) expand your ministry by leading others to personal faith, teaching them the truth so that they can replicate your witness, (3) invest what you have in Kingdom work, and (4) be willing to take risks when called upon to do so.

Acts 19:1-10. *And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, ²He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. ³And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto*

John's baptism. ⁴Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. ⁵When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. ⁷And all the men were about twelve. ⁸And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. ⁹But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. ¹⁰And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

Paul's recorded ministry in Ephesus starts with his finding 12 disciples of John the Baptist. John's ministry was one of preparation of the way for the coming Messiah through repentance. John would baptize his disciples "unto repentance." This is the only recorded example of the "re-baptizing" of John's disciples, though the practice was probably fairly routine. We see in these few verses that Paul spent over two years at Ephesus. As was his pattern in earlier evangelistic efforts, Paul started to reach the city through the courtyards of the synagogue and after about three months of bold testimony those in the synagogue started speaking out against Paul and the doctrine of what they considered a deviant sect. So, Paul left the synagogue, having been faithful to his promise to take the gospel to the Jews first, and started teaching daily in a private lecture hall. From this venue the gospel was heard by people from around the region of Asia. Consequently, the church in Ephesus that was started prior to Paul's arrival and ministered to by Aquila and Priscilla became one of the larger and more influential churches in the first century.

Acts 19:11-12. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: ¹²So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

Ephesus was a center of commerce for the entire region. The city was located on a river near the Mediterranean Sea, and at the intersection of major roads that connected Greece, Asia Minor and points East and South. This enabled Ephesus to grow large and wealthy. Located in Ephesus was the ancient temple to Artemis, or Diana, the goddess of fertility. It was the largest temple that had ever been built to a pagan god, and one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The Ephesians were very superstitious and had great respect for their magicians and workers of black arts. Consequently, they were hungry for religious instruction. Their ignorance and fervent religious practices had produced a society that was rampant with evil. The spirit of evil was everywhere. The sick state of the people was fertile soil for the gospel, and as people were presented with the good news of Jesus Christ, the evil spirits were driven from many people. Though the reference to handkerchiefs in this scriptures could lead one to think that the handkerchiefs themselves had power, it was the faith of the people that brought them to Jesus Christ, and His healing touch. However, one can see they tendency of the people to combine the truth and power of the gospel with their own mysticism, and the temptation to attribute the changing power of the Holy Spirit in their lives to Paul or these cloth trinkets. Still, the changes in people's lives was seen as miraculous, since there was no other way for these people to be freed from the bondage to Satan. These are the same types of miracles that were characteristic of Jesus' ministry and that of Peter.

Some think that the day of miracles is over, but casual observation of the types of miracles we see here include much of what we see today. When a Christian shares the gospel with a lost person, and that person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, a miracle takes place. The lost person was under Satan's control, and his evil spirit formed the context for that person's life. Salvation brings freedom from the curse of Satan's evil control, and just as we see the casting out of demons in the first century church, the same demons are cast out today by saving faith in Christ. Today's Christian is no less empowered by the Holy Spirit than those of the first century, and the ministry of Christians in this world is characterized by miracles every day.

Acts 19:13-17. *Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. ¹⁴And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the*

priests, which did so. ¹⁵And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? ¹⁶And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. ¹⁷And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

Again, Ephesus was a hotbed of pagan religious activity, and those who were thought to have closer ties to the gods were revered by the people. Most were charlatans who profited from their business. They would charge a price for their services. Verse 13 describes "vagabond Jews," Jews who practiced the magical arts. Upon observing the real miracles of Paul's ministry, they sought to make a profit by replicating the same miracles by incantation. It was common for such incantations to include the names of all of the gods who might be able to assist them, so these Jews simply added the names of Jesus and Paul.

The historian, Josephus, has compiled a list of all of the Jewish chief priests, and Sceva is not in his list, and is not mentioned anywhere else in the scriptures. This reinforces the opinion that this was a "vagabond" group, including a self-proclaimed priest. The people would respond favorably to someone who had access to the Holy of Holies, and he with his seven (note the enumeration) sons had a lucrative exorcism business going.

However, what happened when they actually tried to use the names of Jesus and Paul in a real exorcism? The evil spirit answered them by pointing out that they lacked the power of their words. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that defeats Satan, not the incantation of words. When the scripture states, "Call upon the Name of the Lord and you will be saved," it is not referring to an incantation, it is referring to placing one's faith in all of who Jesus is. This is done only through the power of the Holy Spirit. Those who used the name of Jesus in vain had no power against that of the evil spirit, and the results for them was immediate. The one with the evil spirit literally beat them up, tearing off their outer garments, sending them running from the place. This act of tearing of the clothes was significant to the very-modest culture of the Jews. It was the greatest humiliation that they could experience.

When the people of Ephesus learned of this event, a fear (and respect for the true God) swept through the area. These seven men were respected in their arts, and were proved to be attempting to appropriate the power of God for their personal gain. All who would be tempted to do the same would now be discouraged to do so. The ministry of true Christians, and the opportunity for the true gospel to be preached was enhanced.

Acts 19:18-20. *And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. ¹⁹Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.*

As a result of the beating of the sons of Sceva, many believers came forward to confess their evil deeds, and those who were practicing the evil arts brought their scrolls of incantations and burned them publicly. A drachma is about a day's wages, so if we assume an average modern commoner's wage to be about \$10/hour, the value of these texts was about \$4,000,000 in today's economy. Such an event would have a powerful impact in the community, one far greater than the embarrassment of the Scevas alone could have achieved. It is interesting to observe the sovereignty of God in such circumstances. It was selfish and evil motives that led the Scevas to their confrontation with Satan, and Satan's response that destroyed the Sceva's work, yet the event served to greatly increase the penetration of the gospel into the region. This further illustrates the impotence of Satan when confronted by the power of God.

Acts 19:21-22. *After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. ²²So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season.*

At first glance, it might appear that Paul is referring to a quick trip back to Jerusalem, but Macedonia and Achaia is in the opposite direction. Paul is retracing his steps from the second missionary journey, a trip that will take him much further away from Jerusalem as he goes into what is modern day Greece. We can see here that Timothy and Erastus were with him on this journey, as he

sent them ahead into Macedonia. It is likely that, since they may have been in Ephesus more than two years, they all felt that it was time to continue on. However, Paul chose to stay in Ephesus a little longer.

Acts 19:23-27. *And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. ²⁴For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; ²⁵Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. ²⁶Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: ²⁷So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.*

It seems that it is good that Paul remained behind. The "revival" that was sweeping through the region was so significant, that it impacted the sales of pagan icons. This is reminiscent of the Great Awakening in the 18th-century United States that was so significant that it impacted the amount of crime on the streets and drove many bars out of business. Demetrius, a leader of the silversmiths, organized a revolt against the Christian movement because of its negative economic impact on their business.

There is one hermeneutical "rabbit" that can be chased at this point. In verse 26, we see the words, "Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people." Did Paul lead people astray? Of course not: these are the stated words of the pagan silversmith. Many people over the years have had a literal approach to the Bible that ignored the context or source of the scriptural text. There is a belief that every word, or even every letter, has a unique authority. This is one of many instances in the scriptures where it is necessary to consider the source of the text. This statement is not a God-breathed, inspired, description of Paul. It comes from the lips of a sinner who is attacking Paul.

In his arguments, Demetrius referred to the discrediting of the temple of Diana, impacting the central identity of the city itself. The economy of the city centered

largely around the temple. The pagan temple was the main tourist attraction in Ephesus, and was also the center of their banking industry. The statements by Demetrius are directed at the general population, seeking to create an uprising that would bring the entire city into a war with Christianity. This is coming at a time when, and as a result of when, the gospel was spreading throughout the region in great power. The real issue at stake with Demetrius was not ideological, but economic. He knew he could not defeat Paul and the church on the argument of his economic losses alone, so he brought in religion and civic pride. He referred to Paul as "robbing" Diana of her deity.

This situation became dangerous for Paul, and for the propagation of the gospel itself. Any riot that would ensue would be firmly dealt with by the Roman government, not by the government of Ephesus. The crack-down would most likely result in significant persecution of the church, and a forced restoration of the pagan practices.

This is not far removed from the church today. As long as the gospel remains within the walls of the church, the church can continue without persecution. However, when the teachings of the gospel spill outside of the church walls, as it is intended to do, conflict always arises. Almost every point of doctrine in the Christian faith is in conflict with the doctrines of this pagan and secular world. Consequently we see Christianity portrayed by the world's media as a weak, inferior, intolerant and an ignorant system of beliefs that is to be ridiculed and scorned. We should not be surprised that the world, with satan as its prince, is not accepting of the gospel of Jesus Christ and does all it can to silence the message. This is all the more reason for us to be part of this conflict, taking upon ourselves the conscience of the world.

Acts 19:28-34. *And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. ²⁹And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. ³⁰And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. ³¹And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. ³²Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they*

were come together. ³³And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. ³⁴But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

A riot started in the theater where Paul was preaching the gospel. The followers of Demetrius started shouting praises to Diana. That would not be much different than it would be for a mob to come into our local church, take over the program and start shouting blasphemies against God. What would we want to do if this happened? Paul wanted to go to the theater and defend the gospel. It is interesting that it was the officials of the city that asked Paul to stay away. This illustrates the respect that the officials of the city held for Paul. Up to this point, Paul had always depended upon his own preaching to defeat the enemy, and he usually landed in prison or was beaten. This situation would end a little differently.

Acts 19:35-41. And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? ³⁶Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. ³⁷For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. ³⁸Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. ³⁹But if ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. ⁴⁰For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. ⁴¹And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

Alexander, the town clerk, though a Jew, was respected by the community, and his connections with the government demanded their attention, even though the rioting continued for a couple of hours, it was contained in the theater as he was trying to bring it under control. The rioting was typical of mob behavior, with

many people not even knowing what they were rioting about. Alexander reminded the people of the reprisal that would come upon them if the Roman government responded to their rioting, and instructed Demetrius to take his case to the public court rather than to the streets. The riot was quelled and nobody was hurt.

The Holy Spirit has the power to make a tremendous difference in the lives of individuals, and through them, through entire communities. Occasionally the Christian church brings the voice of truth to the public in a manner that is loud enough to get public reaction, one that is almost always negative. The modern media refers to Christians as radical "right-wing" extremists, denouncing them with such a label. Christians stand for issues such as a right to life, a right to expression, and many other positions that the counter-culture opposes. We can know that Christianity is making a difference when the world responds to the gospel by its opposition. Meanwhile, in the conflict, people are hearing the truth, and are being set free of the bondage of sin. Let us not withdraw into our churches, but let our light shine before all men that they may see the good works of God. Aquila and Priscilla made a difference. Apollos made a difference. Even Alexander the Roman's Jew made a difference. It is time for another "Great Awakening" and when the church decides to take its full-gospel message of love and grace outside of its church doors, we could see it happen again as the LORD uses both the church and the community that it serves to bring His message of grace to a violent, evil, and lost world.