

## 44—Acts 18.1-17—Paul Plants and God Causes the Growth

- I. Introduction
  - a. I'm reading through Exodus right now in my daily reading. It's amazing to hear the Lord give Moses the plans for the tabernacle and it's even more amazing to see God provide people that he has given skill by the Spirit to do what he commands them to do.
  - b. At one point, Moses commands the people to stop giving because they had plenty to accomplish the work.
  - c. I hope you walk away today encouraged that God provides for what he calls us to do and he uses us to accomplish those things.
- II. Main Point
  - a. The Risen Lord Jesus continues to expand his Kingdom through the faithful planting of Paul and God faithfully provides for the work.
- III. Outline
  - a. God faithfully provides part 1
  - b. God faithfully provided part 2
  - c. God gives growth
  - d. The Lord protects and reveals
- IV. Exposition
  - a. We left off last week in Athens. It's likely that Paul only stayed there for a few weeks as we piece together the puzzle from his letters. But he doesn't leave Mars Hill without leaving a gospel witness behind. The Risen Lord Jesus saved lost souls in one of the hardest places. That's supposed to encourage you to keep sowing the seed of the gospel and trusting the Lord to give the growth. For reasons unknown to us, Paul leaves Athens. We don't know whether Paul spoke again on the hill but Luke tells us after this which seems to imply that he didn't, Paul went to Corinth. There the Lord faithfully provided for him to do what he had sent him to do through Aquila and Priscilla.
    - i. Many details of these missionary journeys are obviously left out. That doesn't mean we shouldn't realize there are many necessary provisions needed to do what God has sent Paul to do.
    - ii. He travels about 50 miles west to Corinth which was a major trade city.
      1. It's sort of like Panama where there was a narrow bridge of land between to bodies of water. Like Panama, Corinth eventually dug a canal to connect them.
      2. This is strategic as we've mentioned to the spread of the gospel. Where there's lots of trade there's lots of people.
    - iii. If you recall, when Paul had to flee from Berea that he commanded those who escorted him out to tell Silas and Timothy to come as soon as possible.
      1. A few weeks ago, we took note they did arrive in Athens but Paul sent them both back to Macedonia.
      2. The point I'm making is, Paul is alone in Corinth. He needs a place to stay. He needs provisions. And the Lord provides some ministry partners in a certain Jew by the name of Aquila, a native of Pontus along with his wife Priscilla.
        - a. Pontus is the region northern Asia Minor which is modern day Turkey. This region is the southern coast of the Black Sea.
        - b. The last time we heard of Pontus in Acts came in Acts 2:9 where it describes those Jews who were present for Pentecost from other places.
          - i. Obviously, it doesn't say Aquila of Pontus was there but there were Jews from Pontus there.
          - ii. Though he is a native of Pontus, Aquila and his wife Priscilla were recently living in Rome.

1. It gives the reason why they were removed there in verse 2 stating that Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.
- c. The question arises, are Aquila and Priscilla followers of Jesus? It's hard to tell from Acts 18.
  - i. Some have concluded that they are from a historical document written about why Claudius expelled the Jews which isn't completely clear either.
  - ii. However, all the people he has stayed with thus far have been disciples of Christ.
    1. Yet, it says Paul stayed with them in verse 3 because they were of the same trade to work with them making tents.
- iv. I want to take a moment to trace this couple's life from this point on. Regardless of how we answer the question about their relationship with Christ in these three verses, there's much more to know about them that needs to be seen.
  1. I think often times in the church these days it's hard to tell who are true believers. Many play the part well enough to go undetected. Others may still be immature in their faith and have had no opportunities for someone to help them grow.
    - a. I think the story of Aquila and Priscilla will help you evaluate where you are. We might be wondering here in these few verses but the rest of their lives bear clear witness who they are.
  2. The first place we go is a few verses later in Acts 18. Paul stays in Corinth for 18 months. When he leaves, these two go with him.
    - a. (Acts 18:18) <sup>8</sup> After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila.
      - i. This makes a statement about their relationship with Jesus. Never do we see Paul partnering with those who are not believers.
      - ii. Their willingness to pick up and leave again for something more profitable—laying up treasures in heaven—gives evidence that Jesus is their ultimate love.
  3. But if that isn't clear and certain enough, there's more. In verse 26, they take a preacher named Apollos aside and explain to him more accurately the way God.
    - a. We will look at this more next week, but Apollos (Acts 18:25) taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.
    - b. So, they are a couple who hears an incomplete understanding and approaches Apollos about it. They then help him grow and understand the way more accurately.
      - i. We can't imagine how important this was to spread of the gospel.
      - ii. The fruit of Apollos' ministry is in part due to the Lord using Aquila and Priscilla with the rest of the story.
  4. There are three other places the NT mentions this couple. I don't know the exact order but let me give you these other three anyway and make a few comments.
    - a. As you might know, Paul ends his letters with a list of greetings and acknowledgments of particular people who have partnered with him in ministry. That's why we have more information about this couple.
      - i. When Paul writes his first letter to the Corinthian church, it includes a comment to them about Aquila and Priscilla at the end which says, (1

Cor. 16:19) Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord.

1. This is most certainly from Ephesus where they had gone with Paul from Corinth.
2. Notice the church in Ephesus was meeting in their house. What we see them doing with Paul in Corinth now happens on a larger scale by offering their home to gather for worship and teaching.
- ii. Sometime later, they seem to move again as far as the timeline goes back to Rome and then back to Ephesus.
  1. Notice in (Rom. 16:5) <sup>5</sup> Greet also the church in their house.
    - a. They have a house church in Rome while they are there.
  2. Before we look at the other Romans text, notice this comment in the second letter to Timothy who was the pastor at Ephesus at the time: (2 Tim. 4:19) <sup>19</sup> Greet Prisca and Aquila.
  3. Their lives seem to be surrendered to the Lord to go and do whatever they can for the Kingdom. It's not just about Corinth or Ephesus. It's Rome or wherever the Lord sends.
  4. They use their financial resources to be mobile and available and hospitable everywhere they go.
- b. And they are just tentmakers. You can make your life count for the Lord through most professions. While Peter and Paul and the likes get much of the attention, it's people like this for whom the world is not worthy.
  - i. I've left the Romans text for last because of how Paul describes Aquila and Priscilla in a particular way.
  - ii. Here it is: (Rom. 16:3-4) <sup>3</sup> Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup> who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.
    1. First, they are Paul co-workers in Christ Jesus. Not only were they co-workers in tentmaking they were also co-workers in Kingdom work.
      - a. They did both and so can you in the power of the Holy Spirit and the Lord's grace.
    2. Second, they are described as risking their necks for Paul's life!
      - a. We don't know what incident Paul refers to here but he is in trouble so frequently it could have been anywhere.
      - b. Wherever it was, the churches (plural) of the Gentiles in part owe the fact that they've heard the gospel from Paul because Aquila and Priscilla risked their necks to save Paul's life.
      - c. When you are certain that you have eternity with Jesus awaiting you in the resurrection then risking your neck isn't a dangerous risk.
  - iii. I think Christians want to be useful to the Lord. I want you to hear these stories and see that common, everyday working folks can be useful and fruitful in the work of the Kingdom.

1. Let me give you a few examples of how this church makes it possible for me to do Kingdom work that someday the Lord will pour out your rewards for.
  - a. The trip to Cuba is still reaping much reward as I remain in contact with them.
  - b. Recently, I was afforded much time with the Burriss family and I'm still ministering to them often. I think those conversations and prayers at the hospital and funeral will bear fruit someday.
  - c. And one more...as you know I write a manuscript and I make that available on my blog for you and whoever to make use of it. Since January of this year, there have been 414 downloads of those manuscripts from 10 different countries.
- iv. Your weekly giving is far bigger and far more important than you realize.
  1. In our church covenant, it says and I quote: "We commit...to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, and the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations."
  2. I want to encourage you to keep this commitment you have made. Be available to the Lord especially in these seemingly small things. Be hospitable and flexible and eager to love and serve.
  3. Your reward is great in heaven.
- v. This is a story of how the risen Lord Jesus provided for Paul to do the work he had called him to do. What God commands, he provides for. And he uses people like us in unnoticed acts of love and service to accomplish magnificent things.
- b. This next point ties in nicely with the first because the Lord provides for the ongoing work through Paul in a different way. This time it's through the arrival of Silas and Timothy, but how?
  - i. It seems clear that before they join him, Paul is working as a tentmaker with Aquila and Priscilla on the six days of labor. But on the Sabbath, he was reasoning with the Jews and Greeks at the local synagogue.
    1. We've seen this numerous times already. There's no need to explain what he's doing here.
    2. But notice there in verse 5, when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.
      - a. In other words, now that they have arrived, it seems that Paul doesn't have to work his tentmaking job and can be fully devoted to sharing the word everyday not just on the Sabbath.
        - i. Now that could mean that Silas and Timothy go to work to provide for all of them.
        - ii. But we also know from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians that support from the other churches was given to him while he was in Corinth.
          1. (2 Cor. 11:8) <sup>8</sup> I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you.
            - a. He means that figuratively.

2. From Philippians 4, we know the church in Philippi partnered with Paul by sending him money so that he could do the mission work in other places like Corinth.
- iii. Therefore, it was most likely regular people with regular jobs doing normal, faithful things.
- iv. Again, the risen Lord Jesus is funding what he called Paul to do through his people. It's very simple.
  1. This ought to make us eager to give but that can only happen if you trust the Lord.
- ii. One last issue to mention in this section. In trusting the Lord when you give to mission work like what Paul is engaged in, you must trust the Lord with the results too.
  1. Notice, Paul gets fully funded to do full-time work and what happens? They oppose and revile him.
    - a. Was that a waste of time and money? No, it's not. Who knows what will become of that work. Who knows when the Lord will cause that to grow in those who heard.
    - b. But there does come a time when you say, "I'm moving on. You have heard it plainly and have rejected. There are many who haven't heard. Therefore, I am moving on to others."
      - i. That's what Paul is doing here. The visual he gives them of shaking out the garment means that he's no longer responsible. He was responsible to give the gospel. Now that they have it, it's on them. It's time for them to respond.
      - ii. We must not forget that Paul is just a messenger. He's not God. He's not their savior. Jesus is.
        1. What did Paul remind the Corinthians in his first letter?
          - a. (1 Cor. 3:6-7) <sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. <sup>7</sup> So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.
  - c. Again, that ties in nicely with the next point. God's causes the growth in the house next door.
    - i. Paul moves on and right away you can see why.
    - ii. It wasn't a long journey. But he leaves the synagogue and goes next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God.
      1. There, Luke records the conversion of Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue that he just left.
        - a. Isn't that amazing! He and his whole household believe and were baptized.
        - b. Now that's worth supporting, right? Even if this doesn't happen, we are called to give anyway. Giving tests our trust of the Lord.
      2. But there's more. It says in verse 8 that many Corinthians hearing Paul believed in the Lord and were baptized.
      3. We have seen over and over through Acts where the word of God spreads, God saves people.
  - iii. As it often does, where there's great numbers coming to faith, so too comes opposition.
    1. The enemy hates seeing sinners turned from worthless idols to the living God.
    2. Whatever the occasion, the risen Lord Jesus visits Paul in a vision it says in verse 9.

- a. He commands this: (Acts 18:9-10) "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."
  - i. First, even the Apostle Paul was afraid. It makes no sense to think he wasn't. He even tells the Corinthians in his first letter to them he was afraid.
    1. (1 Cor. 2:3) <sup>3</sup> And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling.
  - ii. Second...we've seen the Lord supply what he demands. The same is true here. If the Lord is going to demand that Paul not fear, how will he supply what is needed?
    1. Notice the Lord promised to be with him. He promised in this particular place that no one will attack him to harm him.
    2. That's good reason not to be afraid.
  - iii. Third, he commands him to keep on speaking and do not be silent.
    1. Again, how will the Lord provide what he needs to do this? What reason does God give him to keep doing this?
      - a. He says, because I (the Lord) have many in this city who are my people.
      - b. Our confession faith says this in section 9: God's purpose of election
        - i. "We believe that election is the eternal purpose of God, according to which He graciously regenerates, sanctifies, and saves sinners."
    2. I'm not sure why you give or share the gospel or show up here and do anything if there's no certainty that God will actually do something.
      - a. Why should Paul stay in Corinth and keep speaking the gospel?
      - b. Why do we pray for our loved ones to be saved if we do not believe God indeed does save.
      - c. Because God has people in this city. They must hear the gospel and God will cause the growth.
    3. Honestly, I don't know how to understand why Paul would keep going from trouble to trouble if he didn't believe this.
      - a. I'm not sure why Aquila and Priscilla would risk their necks for something that has no certainty.
  - iv. We should trust in the sovereign grace of Christ to save. We should give and go and send because God saves.
    1. I certainly do not go because I'm good at it. But I trust that the Lord will do something.
    2. I keep sharing and going because God has elected.
    3. What a flimsy thing it is not to believe those things.
- d. And finally, Luke finishes this section by showing us God protecting Paul and saving a very unlikely person.
  - i. I think it's plain enough that the Lord does what he said he would do to protect Paul.
  - ii. But I want to see what happens at the end.
    1. We see the ruler of the synagogue beaten in front of the tribunal after Gallio refused and drove them out.

2. Either this guy is the new ruler of the synagogue because we know that Crispus became a believer or there were a plurality of rulers in the synagogue.
3. Whatever the case, he takes a beating for some reason. I tend to lean towards that it was the Jews who did it when they could not get any satisfaction.
4. But something interesting happens with Sosthenes. Can you guess?
  - a. In the introduction of (1 Cor. 1:1) Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes
  - b. Did you hear that? At some point he comes to faith in Jesus.

V. Response

- a. Does your life give evidence that you really are a true believer who takes up your cross and follows Jesus?
- b. Do you want to be useful to the Lord? The Lord is faithful to provide all you need to do what he has called you to do.
- c. We need people like Aquila and Priscilla to be risk takers for Jesus.
- d. Maybe you are a Crispus or Sosthenes who needs to believe in Jesus—come and repent!
- e. Maybe you need to seek a church home with us. Come speak to me after the service and we will discuss that process.

Benediction: (Num. 6:24-26) <sup>24</sup> The LORD bless you and keep you; <sup>25</sup> the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; <sup>26</sup> the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.