

Scripture Reading:

Acts 18:22 “And when [Paul] had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch. **23**After he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. **24** Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. **25** This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. **26** So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. **27** And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; **28** for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.”

"Being Mighty in the Scriptures"

You may have noticed by now that I shy away from the modern practice of starting these sermons with a bit of humor to lighten things up! However, I must admit that as I prepared for this message there was an American cultural image that I could not get out of my mind: We are in the thick of baseball season and there comes that time where the batter sees the mistaken high fast ball coming down the pipe from the pitcher! This morning's text certainly looks like one of those high fast balls when I see that I get to talk about the importance of the Scriptures and how we see Jesus in them.

- I should hit this one out of the park!

When the batter smacks that fast ball over the fence, he celebrates his home run as he rounds the bases and the pitcher looks a bit depressed.

- On the other hand there is nothing sadder than watching the batter miss that fast ball for a strike-out!
- Lord willing, I will not miss the mark and we will be blessed by the lessons we can learn from this text!

At the end of chapter 18 and the beginning of chapter 19, Luke leaves Paul in the early part of his third missionary journey to tell us about some of the disciples of John who we will consider after family camp and a man who apparently was taught by disciples like them, who we will study this morning.

- We must remember as we study Luke's orderly account, he is giving us the story of how the Spirit of God is filling the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus!

While much of Acts focuses on the ministries of Peter and Paul, at the same time the disciples of Jesus carried out His command to be His witnesses to all corners of the world so there is much more that is taking place. After the death of Stephen the Church was scattered and you would have had stories like this account of Apollos all over the known world.

The disciples of John went down three different paths: Some like Peter & Andrew or John and James became disciples of Jesus. Some came to wrongly believe what John himself denied, claiming that John the Baptist was the Messiah. And still others continued to minister as John did proclaiming the coming of the lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world, without fully understanding all that happened with the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus!

- So with that in mind, we see Luke introducing us to a man named Apollos.

24 “Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.”

Luke tells us that Apollos is a Jewish man who came from the cultural center of Alexandria. His education there produced an eloquent man who had studied his lessons as a young Jewish boy. He knew his Bible.

- Luke tells us that Apollos was “mighty in the Scriptures.”

I think this means more than the fact that he would have had vast portions memorized, which is a very good thing and something we certainly encourage our covenant children, and you adults as well to attain.

I think this means more than the fact that he could speak well when presenting the truths of Scripture, though he certainly would have as an eloquent man. The image is of one who speaks with authority, knowing his Scriptures well, able to communicate them well and soundly proclaiming...

“Thus sayeth the Lord!”

- We should have the image of the warrior pictured in Ephesians chapter six wielding the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

Luke then goes on to tell us more about Apollos:

25 “This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke & taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John.

- This might seem a little confusing, but it provides a VERY important lesson for us today!
- We need not know everything there is to know about the Bible to be Mighty in the Scriptures!

Look carefully at what Luke tells us:

- Apollos had been instructed in the way of the Lord!

This may well have come from one of the disciples of John since Luke tells us that he knew only the baptism of John

- Apollos was fervent in spirit!

We cannot help but think of the new convert here: One who does not yet know much about the systematics but knows that he loves Jesus and that Jesus has changed his life: He is fervent about sharing the Good News.

- Apollos spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord.

Now it is obvious from the things that follow that Apollos had more to learn about the way of the Lord, but he still taught what he did know accurately: He did not add or subtract from what he had learned from the Scriptures and whoever brought him to the Messiah.

- And finally Apollos applied what he knew sharing the Good News, not hiding the light that he had under a bushel.

26 “So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue.”

- The Lord is going to use Apollos in a mighty way in the city where Jesus told Paul that He had many people: The City of Corinth!

But before He sends him there, He is going to continue his instruction with Saints who had spent at least eighteen months with the Apostle Paul...

26 “When Aquila & Priscilla heard him, they took him aside & explained to him the way of God more accurately.”

Now we need to consider two important questions that arise:

- 1) How did Aquila and Priscilla approach and teach Apollos?
- 2) What did they explain more accurately?

Now of those two questions, we are certainly more interested in the second: We want all the details about what Apollos needed to learn. We want to know what he had been teaching in the Synagogue and what was lacking?

- Well, we will come away pretty disappointed because Luke gives us no details what so ever!

The only hint we are given is in the comment about Apollos knowing only the baptism of John, so he was obviously missing some of the later things that happened with Jesus. However, Luke tells us that he spoke and taught accurately in terms of what he did know. Aquila and Priscilla take him aside and teach him more.

Now we could go the way of the liberal commentators and say that Luke really messed up here by not giving us more detail: What a silly oversight! Think of all the debates and discussions that have raged down through the centuries about what the details were, that could have been avoided with Luke providing just a bit more information.

- Of course, this is not a good idea if we remember that it was the Holy Spirit that guided what Luke wrote!

However, we do have the details of the first question of how Aquila & Priscilla corrected Apollos and perhaps this is where the Spirit wants us to focus!

I would argue that this is a very important verse for our particular day and age:

- I am confident that God uses His Living Word in such ways, having timeless truths in place for certain times & places to focus on.
- I believe this text is such a place for the Church in America today!

When you consider the individualistic underpinnings of our nation and the many denominational divisions that we have today in the Church, I think we need to pay special attention to how this wise couple handled this situation.

- Actually there are important lessons to be learned from both sides.

As we have already touched on, Luke tells us that Apollos spoke and taught accurately using the information & knowledge that he had.

- Apollos was mighty in the Scriptures, eloquent in his speech, fervent in his spirit and able to teach the things of the Lord accurately!

If he knew only the baptism of John, he was missing something important in the rest of the ministry of Jesus. I personally think it was ascension of Jesus to the Father's right hand and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost! Apollos likely did not understand the full story that Luke is revealing in the Book of Acts:

- That the Spirit would glorify Jesus by filling the earth with His Kingdom!

So the first lesson for our times is that many who may not understand all there is to know about God's story of salvation, can still be mighty in the Scriptures, fervent in spirit and teach what they do know accurately!

Now let's consider the reaction of this Godly couple from the other side. They hear Apollos preaching boldly in the synagogue and it is immediately clear to them that he does not know the whole story! Luke tells us that they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

- Please notice that they did not interrupt his preaching and tell the attending Jews that Apollos does not know the whole story.
- Please notice that they did not attack Apollos for being a heretic!
- Please notice that they did not simply shrug their shoulders and move on to hear people who knew the Gospel better.

Sadly it is much more likely to be one of these three ways that we would treat someone today who we thought lacked all the doctrinal understanding they needed to explain the way of God!

- May we learn to be those who can rightly & quietly take people aside when we have such concerns.
- Calling someone out on Facebook or a blog does not accomplish this!

There is an important lesson to learn from Apollos' reaction as well: Remember Apollos is a Jewish man who learned to be an eloquent man who was mighty in the Scriptures in one of the great intellectual capitals of the world in that day: Alexandria.

- He is preaching boldly and accurately presenting what he knows and along comes a couple of tent-makers who want to take him aside and correct what he is doing!
- What reaction might we expect?

Again, I think it is critical to see that Luke tells us NO details about what was said about his doctrine!

- What Luke does tell us is how Aquila and Priscilla approach Apollos and the fact that Apollos listened and continued to grow in the Lord.

God then opens up new doors of ministry and Apollos is highly recommended by the Saints there in Ephesus:

27 “And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him;”

Luke ends this account with a type a chiastic structure returned to the power of Apollos' speech and his ability to show from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ:

“and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; 28 for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.””

- Brothers & sisters, I hope and pray that we will take these important lessons to heart!
- Especially in our day and age where we have so many divisions in the Body of Christ.
- May we be those who learn how to take someone aside and quietly help them to understand more about the ways of God.

May we be those who are humble enough to know that we never arrive at the full understanding of all God can teach us...

- And thus be ready and willing to be instructed by those who would take us aside and show us the way of God more accurately.

As reformers we can look at the Baptist and say they are missing so much of the covenant blessings that God offers, but do we approach them as Aquila and Priscilla did Apollos?

- Or think about it this way: Are we more focused on the details of the disagreement than we are how we handle the relationship with our bother or sister.

Now I am sure someone could & might take this out of context to say that I am teaching that doctrine is not as important as relationships!

- BOTH are vital and I would simply point out that in this case Luke certainly puts the stress on the relationship and leaves out almost all the details about the doctrine.

- We are commanded to speak the truth in love, so we do need both right doctrine & right relationships.

There is certainly a ditch that many liberals have crashed into where doctrine is ignored and all you have left are some mushy Kumbaya sessions. However, here in America most of us have gone so far off the road on the other side into the ditch of doctrinal disputes destroying relationships that we have a long way back before we are in danger of the liberal ditch.

- This is why I think this passage speaks particularly to our day & age

And finally, I want to encourage our covenant children, and all the rest of us to be serious about being Mighty in the Scriptures!

- So just what does that mean?

Consider the example of Apollos: Luke tells us he was a Jew so he would have been raised in a covenant home and been very familiar with the Scriptures. You are being raised in covenant homes and I trust you are becoming very familiar with the Scriptures.

- Here at Church, at home and even in your schooling you need to be learning the great truths given to us in the Bible!

You need to learn about the great Saints who have gone before as we considered last week and you should be memorizing LOTS of Scripture!

- Do it while you are young because it is so much easier!

We are told that Apollos was an eloquent man...

- You are called upon to not only know the Scriptures, but to be able to present them in an intelligent and pleasing way.
- A great speech delivered poorly is no longer a great speech!
- This includes how you speak, your vocabulary, your dress and your manners!

All of these practical things matter when it comes to being eloquent so listen to your parents and others when they try to teach you such good habits!

And finally we are told that Apollos was instructed in the way of the Lord, that he was able to teach the things of the Lord accurately. This is not just about how much knowledge Apollos had [remember he did not have the whole story] and it is not just about his delivery or debating skills...

- This is about knowing Jesus!

Remember, the Scribes and Pharisees knew LOTS & LOTS of the Old Testament... They memorized entire books of Scripture. They attended all the religious ceremonies, they kept all their man-made laws and they could debate with the best of them:

- Even the Son of God Himself!
- But what did Jesus tell them to their face?

John 5:39 "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. 40 But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. 41 I do not receive honor from men. 42 But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. 43 I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. 44 How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God? 45 Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you--Moses, in whom you trust. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

- **This Book is NOT a text book:**
- **It is God's Word and it reveals God's Son & His great redemption!**

Being Mighty in the Scriptures means first and foremost that we see Jesus!

- **And it means that we see Jesus everywhere, from Genesis to Revelation!**
- **Being Mighty in the Scriptures means that we must know how to rightly divide the Word of Truth so that we can also present the way of God more accurately.**
- **This is a lifetime project so we are ever learning and ready to learn from any whom God chooses to use.**

And finally, being Mighty in the Scriptures means knowing how to use the Bible as the Sword of the Spirit as we serve the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who will bring ALL the nations under His command before the end of history!

- **May we all desire and learn to be Mighty in the Scriptures!**

Communion Meditation: Psalm 119: 101-107

“ I understand more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts. 101 I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word. 102 I have not departed from Your judgments, For You Yourself have taught me. 103 How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth! 104 Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way. 105 Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path. 106 I have sworn and confirmed That I will keep Your righteous judgments. 107 I am afflicted very much; Revive me, O Lord, according to Your word. ”