

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

THE CHURCH ON MISSION

THE GOD WHO SENDS

The Setting: On Mission Wherever You Are

Not everybody is called into full-time Christian service. But we are called to serve Christ where we are in our community or sphere of influence. – *Billy Graham*

This lesson concludes our study of the Church on Mission. The premise of the lesson is that as followers of Christ we are to be on mission wherever we are – all the time regardless of our day job or whether or not we are retired! ‘Kingdom work’ should never be considered a part-time endeavor or just whenever we feel like it. Being on mission for the God Who Sends should be our life’s work – the heart of who we are and what we do. I must admit that it is not always easy. In fact, sometimes I would just rather take break. It certainly would have been easier for Paul if he kept God’s great salvation to himself when the going got rough. Paul had six visions from the Lord – all recorded in the book of Acts, The visions were always in response to some need of Paul’s. Today’s study picks up while Paul is in Corinth where he needed encouragement and confirmation. Since the Lord has promised to supply all our needs (*Philippians 4:19*), that is exactly what Paul received from the Lord.

Read Acts 18:9-10 (ESV) ⁹ *And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰ 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.”*

The Lord said to Paul, “*Do not be afraid.*” The Lord made the same promise to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jehoshaphat, Daniel, Mary and Peter. We need not fear because His promise is also for us! Put this promise in your heart and hold fast to it! *Isaiah 41:10 (ESV)* ¹⁰ *fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

We studied last week how in Athens Paul’s reception had been cold with little prospect of reaching people for Christ. His next city was Corinth. This is a reminder to us to **not** stop telling the story of Jesus just because someone is unresponsive to the gospel. Instead tell someone **else** that Jesus is alive! Keep in mind that Paul was not a paid pastor or an evangelist who took up collections. He was a tentmaker by trade. He was a ‘lay person’ who gave his life for the purpose of sharing Christ with others. See your occupation as a platform for proclaiming the gospel.

Read Acts 18:1-4 (ESV) ¹ *After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³ and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and*

worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Corinth was a city of 200,000 people and Paul went there alone. Thanks to its location the city was a center for both trade and travel. It had a reputation for great wickedness and immorality. Paul's visit to Corinth was part of his second missionary journey.

One of the ways that Paul was able to separate himself from 'religious hucksters' was to pay his own way. It was the custom of the Jews to bring up their children to know a trade, even when they were educated. Rabbi Judah says, "He that teaches not his son a trade is as if he taught him to be a thief." Although Paul was an educated Pharisee, in his youth he learned to make tents which served him well when he was on mission for Christ. Paul did not want to do anything that prejudiced others against his ministry.

As a tentmaker, Paul was able to go wherever God led him, carrying his livelihood with him. His tent-making skills brought him into contact with Aquila and Priscilla, who were also tent-makers. Like so many of the New Testament characters, we are not told many details of their lives. The focus is always on their ministry. The indications are that the couple were already Christians before they met up with Paul; otherwise, surely Luke would have recorded their conversion. It is interesting that Aquila and Priscilla are always mentioned together in scripture reminding us of Herschel Hobbs words, "we do best what we do together." We do know that Aquila was from Pontus. Pontus is mentioned in *Acts 2:9* as being one of the hometowns of people who heard the good news of Jesus in their own tongue on the Day of Pentecost. I would like to think that Aquila was present in Jerusalem on that day, but that is only speculation. Eventually Paul concluded his second mission trip and returned to headquarters in Antioch. After some time there, Paul began his third journey making his way to Ephesus along with his tent-maker friends, Aquila and Priscilla. From this couple we learn that we are to find ways to mentor and strengthen those around us.

Read Acts 18:24-28 (ESV) ²⁴ *Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures.* ²⁵ *He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.* ²⁶ *He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.* ²⁷ *And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed,* ²⁸ *for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.*

Paul was in and out of Ephesus on several occasions. By this time, Paul had left while Priscilla and Aquila remained. They were still there when Apollos showed up. Scholars have spent much time trying to discern exactly what Apollos knew or didn't know about the gospel. Scripture tells us that Apollos was a gifted speaker who had a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament. Keep in mind that the New Testament was only then in the process of being written!

But, what does scripture mean when it says: *he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John?* Apollos knew about Jesus but did not have all the information needed to share about Jesus accurately since he knew only of John's baptism unto repentance. Apparently, Apollos had not yet connected the death and resurrection of Jesus with the **baptism of the Holy Spirit!** Possibly, Apollos at this time had only 'head knowledge' and not 'heart knowledge' of Christ.

Priscilla and Aquila recognized Apollos as 'fertile ground' for receiving the entire salvation story and lovingly made it their mission to bring Apollos home with them for the purpose of revealing to him **privately** the ways of God more accurately! They made a point of not publicly embarrassing him and then when he was ready to leave they supported him. Leave a legacy of faithfulness behind you.

Read Acts 20:17-21 (ESV) ¹⁷ *Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.* ¹⁸ *And when they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia,* ¹⁹ *serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews;* ²⁰ *how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house,* ²¹ *testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul had been away but now returned. Today the city of Ephesus is inland about two or three miles from the water's edge. Miletus is on the coast. Paul sent for the elders of Ephesus to come to Miletus to meet him there. Paul realized that he would not return to Asia and he wanted to speak with them before he left for Jerusalem. He knew the probability of arrest and imprisonment was hanging over his head. Paul had begun by reviewing the past with them. Next, he gave a testimony of the present.

Read Acts 20:22-27 (ESV) ²² *And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there,* ²³ *except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.* ²⁴ *But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.* ²⁵ *And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.* ²⁶ *Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all,* ²⁷ *for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.*

Paul opened his heart and spoke of his feelings. In Acts, there are eight messages given by Paul. This address is unique because we see him relating to the elders as their pastor rather than an evangelist or defender of the faith. Paul said *I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all*, This comment is an Old Testament reference to Ezekiel. In ancient times cities placed watchmen on their walls to guard against invading armies and dangers from within such as fires or civil unrest. It was the responsibility of the watchman to sound the alarm. To remain silent in times of trouble meant to forfeit one's own life. God had made Ezekiel watchman for the entire house of Israel. Paul viewed himself as a watchman on mission to proclaim the gospel of Christ. He

accomplished his mission as watchman and their blood would not be on Paul's hands. Next, Paul closed his message with a warning about the future.

Read Acts 20:28-38 (ESV) ²⁸ *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.* ²⁹ *I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;* ³⁰ *and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.* ³¹ *Therefore be alert,* ³² *And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.* ³³ ... ³⁵ *In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'* ³⁶ *And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.* ³⁷ *And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him,* ³⁸ *being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again...*

Many times as Christian workers we want to quit for a variety of reasons. Christian service is the most wonderful thing you can do and at the same time can be the most heartbreaking. "The Christian life is not a constant high. I have my moments of deep discouragement. I have to go to God in prayer with tears in my eyes, and say, 'O God, forgive me,' or 'Help me.'" – *Billy Graham*

Paul warned them to pay careful attention to themselves. Many problems begin in our own hearts. Paul also warned of the dangers from the outside – false teachers he described as wolves doing their best to harm the flock. There were also dangers already among them – people within the church who were hungry only for personal ambition and power. Paul's message as he left Ephesus so long ago is still relevant for every church and every believer today.

Paul closed his farewell message by kneeling in prayer with his friends, and then they all wept together. It is a difficult thing to say good-bye, especially when you know you will not see someone you love again in this life. But we have the blessed assurance that we will one day see our Christian friends and loved ones in heaven. It was Paul who wrote in **1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 (KJV)** ¹⁶ *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:* ¹⁷ *Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.* ¹⁸ *Wherefore comfort one another with these words.* "I think about heaven a great deal, I think about the failures in my life in the past, but know that they have been covered by the blood of Christ, and that gives me a great sense of confidence...I have a certainty about eternity that is a wonderful thing, and I thank God for giving me that certainty. I do not fear death. I may fear a little bit about the process, but not death itself, because I think the moment that my spirit leaves this body, I will be in the presence of the Lord." – *Billy Graham*