

The Ministry of the Spirit
Acts 18:18- Acts 19:10

2nd Timothy 4
1 Corinthians 2
Psalm 95

This morning we will be looking at the last bit of chapter 18, and getting into 19. As we have been journeying through this book we have seen a sort of pattern by Paul in his ministry, that he always goes first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. In our passage today we will be focusing on 2 accounts that are set up as almost a sort of comparison to each other, the first account being the introduction to Apollos, and the second account being a small group of Jews that Paul encounters in Ephesus.

The last time we were here in this book, if you remember Paul was in Corinth, where he was staying with Aquila and Priscilla, and as is the usual turn of events for Paul in his ministry the leaders of the synagogue became angry, and rose up to persecute him. And it is usually at about this point that Paul is either driven out of the city, or he flees, but he received a vision from the Lord telling him to stay, and to be bold and fear not for no one will attack him to hurt him. So Paul remained in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching and preaching the gospel to which afterward he left, not being driven out as before but of his own accord, this time taking Aquila and Priscilla with him. From verses 18-23 we get this sorta summary of Paul making a journey with a few stops but Luke doesn't go into much detail at all but then in verse 24, we see the introduction of Apollos. The first of the 2 encounters we are going to be looking at this morning.

So lets go ahead and read verses 18-28. As we can see Aquila and Priscilla stayed with Paul until he got to Ephesus, to where Luke records that Paul went himself into the synagogue to teach, and in an interesting turn of events they were asking him to stay, they did not react to his teaching with anger, and jealousy as we have normally seen, but rather was curious as to what he was saying and wanted to hear more, but it is clear that Paul had other plans for he had intended to be back in Jerusalem in time for the coming feast. We have no record of which feast it was that Paul was intent on keeping, some scholars speculate that it was the Passover feast, since that feast took place in early April, and the sea faring shipping lanes closed for the season in March. Either way, the feast that Paul mentions is not the important detail, but rather it is that he tells them Lord willing he shall return.

But it is not as though Paul had abandoned the ministry in Ephesus, but rather Aquila and Priscilla remained and by the time we see them again they are living in Ephesus, and established there when Apollos arrives on the scene. As we look at this, we can see God orchestrating all the moving pieces, God has a purpose for Paul, others that he is to meet and minister to, yet he does not leave Ephesus without a solid outreach in which he brings Apollos onto the scene to pick up in Paul's absence. But as we see, Apollos is this sort of interesting character, he comes to Ephesus, which sounds like he is on a sort of his own missionary journey, traveling through preaching about Christ, to which Luke notes in this account, that he taught accurately, and boldly having been instructed in the way of the Lord, but only knowing up to the baptism of John. Being himself well taught in the scriptures, he had either seen, or had heard of John the Baptists ministry believing in the coming Messiah, but it would seem that he did not know that this very same Messiah has come, and has fulfilled all of these things that the prophets foretold.

So here we have this Jew from Alexandria, how had been influenced by the ministry of John the Baptist, one who had been instructed in the scriptures, and as it says in verse 25, was fervent in the spirit, who was going into the synagogue to preach about the one who was to come and Aquila and Priscilla hearing him pulled him aside and as scripture says, “explained to him the way of God more accurately” I don't see this as a rebuke, or rebuttal to his teaching, for Luke records that he taught accurately the things of the Lord, but it would seem that he only had a portion of the whole story. So they pulled him aside and likely instructed him that this Messiah which John the Baptist taught would come after him, has now, already come. And in the last verse of this chapter we can see how such instruction and information formed his teaching, for it says, “he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

He no longer taught scriptures teaching of the one who was to come, but now was using the written word of God to point to Jesus, the specific one and only Messiah who had already come and fulfilled all of these things that had come before. His account sets up a comparison as to Paul's experience here in Ephesus when he arrives there in chapter 19 which we will read about now, in verse 1-10. So here we have this group of Jews, who stand in comparison to Apollos, who had also had been influenced by John the Baptists ministry, to which they said that they were in fact baptized by. Luke refers to them as disciples, as followers of God but they had yet to receive the Holy Spirit. At this point, post Pentecost, it is the Holy Spirit's indwelling that differentiates believers, and I think it is the same here as we can see in our own churches today. A sort of belief in the things of God, yet not to the saving of ones soul.

By that I mean, there is in a sense a way that one may have knowledge and may claim belief but lack the spirit, their belief is nothing more than an intellectual assent that these things are true, but there is no personal, deep, connection to Christ for though they may attain the knowledge, their heart has not yet been changed. Sadly I think that this is the state of many in our churches today, but as we know this is not something that is unique to the times we live in, there has always been a cultural belief system, there has always been those who claim God, or even claim Christ, but it is not a personal, lasting, true and deep relationship with him, but rather an admittance that he exists. This can be a hard thing to grasp in a way, that there are those who today maybe claiming Christ but not have the new birth and the Holy Spirit. These are those who are tossed about by every whim of doctrine, those who can easily get caught up in the legalism and the law attempting to earn righteousness, whose work becomes their faith, and living a good life becomes their hope.

These are those who are easily deceived, for though they claim Christ, they lack the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which works in them discernment, They can be cold, arrogant, self righteous, with an air of superiority over others thinking that they are just a bit holier than everyone else, lacking humility, mercy, grace, and love that comes from the spirit. They can be a people who worships the God of their own creation, by that I mean..they believe in God, but in their own selfish desires they make God to be what he is not, to fit their mold, and their understanding of what they believe God should be, how he should act, and what he should do instead of believing the God of the bible. So while they may confess with their mouth a belief in God, the reality is that they are not believing in the God of the bible, but rather one of their own making.

And though they may hear the word, though they may hear the gospel preached to them, without the spirit work within their heart and mind they can not understand, nor truly grasp it. Just as we read this morning in 1st Corinthians, “The Natural man does not receive the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them for they are spiritually discerned.”

Without the spirit, there is no way to discern, nor see the truth of Christ, one must first be born of the Spirit, to see, and to know the spiritual things of God. So in essence what we have, are liars and deceivers, for though they may claim Christ, they do not know Christ, and the truth is not in them. The gospel message falls upon deaf ears, unable to hear, unable to believe...and it is offensive, which is I think another reason why there are so many churches who have gone away from the preaching of the word of God, for it is offensive, it convicts, and cuts to the heart. And of course this arises the question..how then can God find fault, short answer, it is because the sinful nature of mankind which is inherit in us since the fall of Adam has inclined us all to rebellion, and all will perish in that rebellion, and not only that, will do so happily. So unless it is God who comes and gives his spirit to convict, and change the heart, then there is not one who would believe.

The natural man, who is in his sin rejects the good news of the gospel for to him it is as Paul wrote," it is the stench of death." Therefore, what has happened is exactly what we read about this morning in 2nd Timothy, For a time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, a time where they will make claims of belief, but deny the truth of scripture, attribute to God things that are not of God, they will soften the truth of the gospel so as not to offend, they will be accepting of sinful behaviors in a false hyper grace sort of way that Paul taught against when he said, "should we sin so grace may abound? Certainly not!" and because of this, because they have forsaken sound doctrine, and the teaching of scripture, they will "according to their own desire, because they have itching ears, will heap up for themselves teachers who will turn their ear from the truth, and they will be instead turned aside to fables and false teachings." Again, sinful man, making a God in their own image, crafting for themselves a God that they wish to believe in instead of the God of scriptures.

One way this manifests itself today, is in those who claim... I believe in God, but there is no hunger, no thirst for the things of God. They may attend church services, but it seems many make the claim without even bothering to, then, if they do, they chose to attend one which is comfortable, non-confrontational, which appeal to their emotions, a feel good story that make them feel holy, . Where the gospel is not taught, but rather 15 minutes of cute, moral life lessons after 45 minutes of emotional music. Now, of course I am not criticizing music in services, infact, music is a powerful minister to the spirit, nor am I criticizing the emotional aspect of it, but when that emotional high becomes the focus of your worship, when that feeling is the driving force behind your so called faith, it is nothing more than a corporate emotional manipulation used to create a form of high, to give a false sense of holiness...and if that is all there is, then it is empty and without substance. Those who build up for themselves this God, not only do not want the God of the bible, they deny him, for in their understanding of forgiveness and grace, they deny his power and his righteousness. There is a duality to God and if either is denied, then the doctrine is false and where false doctrine thrives, false faith also is born and nurtured. . Yes, God is all mercy, yes God is all grace, and yes God is all love.. He is all of those things, and each of those things 10's of thousands of times more then we can even comprehend, .but he is also equally all Righteous, All Holy, and all powerful, who is a jealous God, a vengeful God, and wrathful God, who will not withhold his hand against the wicked. He is not limited by our will,by our understanding or by what we believe he is, and will not spare his wrath on the sinful world who rejects him.

To reject his Holy and perfect nature, to reject his judgment of sinful man, and his wrath poured out upon the lost world, and paint him as being one who is only a God grace and mercy, is to deny him, it is to not have the understanding of God through the Spirit, but rather to make a God who is pleasing to our own desires, to make him out to be nothing more then a benevolent sky Santa...it is to heap up for one self teachers who tickle the ear. God is both benevolent, merciful, gracious, kind, and loving...and he also a God of judgment ,vengeance, and wrath.

But here is the good news of the Gospel...There is an escape from his wrath, there is an escape from that Judgment and it is only found in his Son Jesus Christ, for without him, we would all be lost in our sins for the penalty of our sin is death, not just the loss of our life, though that is definitely one aspect brought into the world by sin, but even greater still is the eternal death and suffering the wrath of God in hell where there is no reprieve, no release, no hope. But, Christ has come and paid that cost for us who by the spirit believe, laying to himself the penalty of our sin, so that though we in this flesh yet sin, for we are yet bound by this body, though we in this flesh yet fall short of the glory of God...it is Christ's blood that covers us which God sees...for our sin's have been forgiven, they have been paid for by Christ on the cross, and for those who are in Christ, for those who are born of the spirit, there is now no condemnation, there is no judgment, there is no wrath, for all is forgiven, for God see us as Sons and Daughters, as heirs to his kingdom which he has prepared for us.

This is the hope and the light of the world, that God has prepared a way to reconcile his people to himself. For without his intervention all would perish and die in their sins, and further more..all would chose to, for sin is not merely an action, or merely a thought, but flows out of a heart which is by its very nature at enmity with God. This is why salvation, and the new birth are of the spirit, and not of our will, or our works for it can never be of anything of ourselves, for we are dead until God makes us alive through the spirit. Here is is, Colossians 2:13 “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he has made alive together with him, having forgive you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us...interesting language, the handwriting of requirements, the law which condemned us, which was against us...it says verse 14, “he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” The punishment of the law against God's people has been put upon Christ at the cross, and now we are sealed by his blood, the promise of life given to us, not by what we do, but by what God has done for us.

And we see a beautiful example of the mercy and grace of God in salvation through our 2 accounts today. Look again what Luke writes of Apollos, He was an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, he was fervent in the spirit, and taught accurately the things of the Lord...but his knowledge and understanding was limited, until God brought Aquilla and Priscilla into his life, who quietly pulled him aside and taught him, as it says in verse 26, “the way more accurately.” Here is the beauty in this....we don't have to get it 100 percent right to be a child of God. Indeed, while in this body, it won't even be possible for our minds can only see the things of God as through a mirror darkly...yet, that doesn't matter, what mattes is faith and belief. Apollos knew the scriptures, infact it says he was well educated in them, which would be the texts that we today know as the old testament for the gospels had yet to have been written...and through the old testament, and through the witness of John the Baptist, Apollos believed in the Messiah to come, just as all of those who came before, listed in Hebrews who had died not obtaining the promise but have seen it afar off.

And Aquila and Priscilla pulled him aside and told him of Christ, the one who he was looking forward to, has already come and fulfilled these things...no longer does he need to preach of the one to come, for he has come. And we see this shift in his ministry in verse 28, “for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ. So Apollos didn't have every little detail right, but he knew and he believed what mattered...that there would be a messiah who would come and take the sins of the world and pay the penalty of them for his people, and he believed and trusted in the one to come.

Then on the other side we have these 12 Jews that Paul meets in Ephesus in chapter 19, who have heard and seen the ministry of John the Baptist, who being Jews I am sure were familiar with the scriptures....but not yet have received the spirit unto belief. They had an understanding, and a sort of belief but it was not that of Apollos. But Paul instructed them that the one John the Baptist spoke of as coming, had come, and verse 5 says, "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." I will admit, maybe I am wrong here for it isn't entirely clear per say, but this seems to me to set forth this example of people as we have been talking about this morning, who believe...but not to salvation, for the spirit had not yet come. I get this concept because after making a confession of belief it would seem that Paul baptized them again, this time as believers not followers of John. The message here I think is one of hope, not just to each and every person who has not yet come to faith, but to those of us who minister as well.

We do not know who God has predestined to belief, we don't know God's chosen people, But the word of God has the power to bring new life, the new birth, when the spirit softens a hardened heart. It is for us to witness, to share the good news of the Gospel, and it is God through the spirit who will save. We can take great joy in knowing that this is a work of God, and he is about his business saving souls....and even those who have a belief in God, yet do not have the spirit, are not deceived enough to have no hope, for God may yet bring them into his fold. May our prayer be for those who are lost, for those who are deceived...we often think of the ministry as an outreach to the world around us, but it is ever as much also to those sitting in the pews every Sunday, for there are those who have a form of belief without the spirit, and may God be pleased to open their hearts and minds to the truth of his word, may God be pleased to grant the new birth and convicting souls so that the words that they speak of knowing God, may be true in heart as well as mind.

I want to close this morning by reading Isaiah, 55. (read Isaiah 55) The sweet mercies and promises of God. Incline your ear to hear, and come to me and your soul shall live and I will make an everlasting covenant with you. The word of God shall not return void, but will accomplish that which he pleases. Praise God for his word, for his sovereign grace and mercy toward us that he would offer us the bread of life without price, we bring nothing to this transaction, it is God who provides, and it is God who gives...and may he be pleased to give abundantly.