

Text: Acts 18:18-28
Intended audience: Christians
Topic: The life of an apostle
Theme:
My purpose for this message:
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[Book Thesis: *The Power of God Spreads the Gospel*]

Apollos, God's Firebrand

Words, shake the earth. Words are power. While a picture may be worth a thousand words, TV's have still not made radios obsolete. Words. Delivered powerfully. Adolph Hitler observed *The broad masses of a population are more amenable to the appeal of rhetoric than to any other force.* The madness of Russia's 1917 revolution was spawned not just by Marx' ideas, but by Lenin's fiery oratory. The civil rights movement dismantled institutional racism toward black Americans not just by protest marches and civil disobedience, but the spellbinding oratory of Dr. Martin Luther King.

One of the luminaries of America's independence movement, Benjamin Franklin was not a Christian. But he was a good friend of the preacher George Whitefield. He never stopped wondering at the ability of this man's words, to move the hearts and hands of men and women. Franklin recounted what transpired during one sermon on compassion.

I happened...to attend one of his sermons, in the course of which I perceived he intended to finish with a collection, and I silently resolved he should get nothing from me. I had in my pocket a handful of copper money, 3 or 4 silver dollars, and 5 pistoles in gold. As he proceeded, I began to soften and concluded to give the coppers. Another stroke of his oratory made me ashamed of that and determined me to give the silvers; and he finished so admirably that I emptied my pocket wholly into the collector's dish, gold and all.

The power of words—for good or evil. Today I want to talk about preachers and preaching as we look at the life of one of the great ones during Paul's day: Apollos .
READ Acts 18:18-28. PRAY.

The Travels

For 3 chapters in Acts, Ephesus becomes ground zero around which all the action and people swirl. Chapter 18 contains Paul's first—and very brief visit, 19 covers the 3 years he spent there during his 3rd mission trip, and chapter 20 recounts Paul's emotional goodbye to that church's elders.

Paul, Aquila & Priscilla all left Corinth together (18) but before they did, Paul cut off his hair to fulfill a Nazirite vow (Numb.6) he had made—perhaps may when he was discouraged, depressed (18:9-10). Part of the requirements of such a vow meant not cutting your hair at all during the duration of it, and then cutting it when it ended. Then you would take the cut hair and offer it with a sacrifice in Jerusalem at the temple.

The three travelers crossed the Aegean Sea to Ephesus where Aquila and Priscilla stayed. Paul and his packet of hair got off the ship too but only long enough to speak to Jews at the synagogue. They *wanted* him to stay but eager to get home, Paul soon left, went to Jerusalem (while not mention, v.22 says he went “up” which is normally how a devout Jew spoke of Jerusalem since it sat on a hill), and then arrived at his home church

in Antioch in Syria. After 9 months or so there, he left for his 3rd mission trip, eventually returning to Ephesus for 3 years.

Apollos

But during his absence, a fiery preacher got off the boat in Ephesus. Apollos had traveled 500 miles from Alexandria, Egypt. His home was a premier city of the ancient world, built by Alexander the Great. A center of Greek scholarship, it was also probably the busiest port in the world at the time, boasting a 40 story lighthouse whose light burned through sea air up to nearly 4 miles; it was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world.

Apollos was a well-educated Jew and, a follower of Jesus. Whoever told him about Jesus did so accurately, but it was incomplete. Apollos seems to have known little or nothing about Jesus' death and resurrection. Yet he followed him. And apparently, *preached* for him. And wow, could he preach.

Ephesus was a good place to preach. If you wanted your message distributed across an entire continent, Ephesus was a good place: Asia's major trade center. Apollos didn't go there by randomly putting his finger on a map, he'd been led here by the finger of God.

To say words, powerful words. He seems to have been able to mesmerize people. Later in Corinth, some Christians looked to *him* as their authority, "We follow Apollos (1 Cor.3:4). Dangerous, but not unexpected when a man sticks speaks the truth and does so with conviction and passion. We could *use* some more preachers like Apollos.

Although there may be no shortage of applicants, there's a shortage of good preachers today. When I applied for the pastorate of Oak Park EFC in Michigan in 1991, my resume was stacked with 52 others. But not all—and perhaps not even most—men who want to be pastors, love the pulpit. One survey taken showed most pastors believe preaching is the most important thing they do. Yet many of those same pastors said either that they do it *poorly*, or don't like to do it at *all*. We could use some more preachers like Apollos.

Learned Preacher

Acts 18:24 says he was a learned man. He had a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. V.25, he had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and because he was a diligent student, he taught about Jesus accurately. Depending how you calculate it a seminary education may cost a man \$50,000 to \$75,000 but spending that and going through the curriculum doesn't guarantee a preacher. It guarantees a graduate. One of my favorite writers, pastor and theologian, never went beyond 8th grade. But when A.W. Tozer spoke, people listened. Because despite the lack of degree, he was learned man: self-taught like Ben Franklin.

Fervent Preacher

Acts 18:25 says Apollos spoke with great fervor (literally, burning or "boiling"). He was the kind of preacher Dr. Martyn-Lloyd Jones had in mind when he defined preaching as **logic on fire**. V. 26, Apollos spoke boldly" in the synagogue. V. 28, he "vigorously" refuted the Jews in debates. Fervor, zeal, passion. That's not enough by *itself* (in Rom.10:2 Paul regretted that though his people were zealous, it was a zeal without knowledge), but then neither is being learned, educated, and well-taught enough by itself. We need men who will preach the results of their learning, on fire.

John Wesley was frequently asked why so many people came to hear him preach. He answered, “I set myself on fire and people to watch me burn.” That’s why Benjamin Franklin—despite being an unbeliever—said he went to hear George Whitfield preach: “To watch him burn.”

Humble Preacher

And there’s one other quality Apollos had: humility. Hearing the gutsy guy at the synagogue, Aquila and Priscilla thought, “Wow, here’s a diamond in the rough. Imagine what a difference he could make for Jesus.” Problem was, his preaching revealed he lacked some crucial information. So they invited him where the two of them instructed him on Jesus’ death and resurrection—and the implications. They explained about baptism that went *beyond* repentance, a baptism that included the name of Jesus, about the baptism of the Spirit.

There may have been quite a number of these “incomplete Christians” during the early decades after Jesus’ death. Next week we’ll see this same situation in chapter 19: 12 followers of Jesus who have neither been baptized in his name, nor received the Holy Spirit. Can they rightfully be called Christians? We’ll wrestle with that next week.

Apollos humbly listened to Aquila and Priscilla. Some people who are good at something already, resent being told how to improve. Ask any coach who’s tried to help a good striker become a great one, a good left fielder become a great one. They see kids all the time who will never achieve full potential because they not humble, not teachable.

Not Apollos. Gifted, *and* humble. In fact, 3 statements in vv.27-28 testify to his favorable response to Aquila’s and Priscilla’s mentoring:

- When he wanted to go on a mission trip to Achaia, everyone gladly supported him.
- During the time in Achaia, he proved to be an enormous help to the Christians
- He became a powerful defender of the faith, proving to skeptics that Jesus was the Messiah.

Not only a great preacher, but likely a brilliant writer. Although we can’t know for sure, I tend to think Martin Luther was right when he surmised that the NT letter to the Hebrews, was written by Apollos.

Words, powerful words. The Church, needs preachers like Apollos. Men who are students, who have passion, who are teachable. I look out over the audience and wonder, who is, or who *will* God call from this congregation to be a preacher of the gospel. Tragically, we pastors are become managers, CEO’s, and promoters, when the great need of the hour, is great preaching. 50-60 hour weeks are being consumed by everything but, preaching preparation.

Concl:

The agnostic philosopher David Hume was chided about going to church regularly to hear an orthodox Scottish minister preach.

“I don’t believe all he says,” Hume replied, “but *he* does, and once a week I like to hear man who believes what he says.”