

Intro: *After Easter*— How does the reality of Jesus’ resurrection alter my expectations for today? When Paul wrote his first letter back to the church in Corinth, he wrote what is his longest recorded reflection on the resurrection (in chapter 15) and its implications. At the end of this passage, he concludes, *“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”*

The resurrection of Jesus, and our hope of an eternal and unfading inheritance given to us by God’s grace, not our performance, actually compels us to abound in the Lord’s work. Not because we have to gain the inheritance, but because we have been given it. Grace generates godliness.

We see this clearly narrated in this passage at the end of Acts 18. Paul is striving, even vowing, to return to Syria and visit the brothers there, to strengthen them, to share in their sufferings. He wants this so badly that he even leaves a seemingly opportune labor in Ephesus.

And we find Priscilla and Aquila laboring hard in Ephesus, taking a gifted preacher and orator, Apollos, aside to instruct him more accurately in the full implications of the gospel of Jesus. They remain in Ephesus and continue to abound in the work of the Lord.

Then we see Apollos himself, taking instruction humbly so that he can benefit those with whom he dialogues, both believers and unbelievers, abounding the work of the Lord.

The resurrection has implications on how we deal with our marriage, like Priscilla and Aquila, how we deal with our expectations of life as we see in Paul’s vow and haircut, and how we deal with our expectations of success or failure.

Luke gives us these three little character sketches in this transitional passage, so let’s look briefly at all three.

### 1. Priscilla and Aquila: The Couple Who Strengthened the Young Preacher

#### a. Remained at Ephesus

##### i. Their work and abilities were well-suited for Ephesus

1. Remember that they were exiled from her home in Rome – yet they used such a difficulty and suffering to the glory of God by strengthening others for the work of ministering the Word of God
2. They used their homes (plural) to strengthen the church
  - a. They used their home in Corinth (1 Cor 16:19)
  - b. They used their home in Rome (Romans 16:3-5)

##### ii. They travelled with Paul to Asia, rather than Silas and Timothy, who remained in Achaia

1. Though it was only Paul who went into the synagogue to persuade, not A&P

#### b. When they saw a young man with gospel-preaching potential, they helped him *privately*

##### i. They “took him aside”

1. That is, they didn’t address him publically, in a kind of corrective reprimand
2. They took him aside privately and helped him by setting forth the details which he did not yet know
  - a. Oh, if only we would find such bold humility which seeks the best for young preachers, rather than merely pointing out where they are lacking!
  - b. Aquila and Priscilla are a wonderful example of strengthening another believer to fulfill what God has gifted him to do
    - i. Do we ask the question, “How can I strengthen him?” or “How can I correct him?”

##### ii. They “explained the way to him more accurately”

1. To “explain” means to “expose” or to “set forth point by point”

- a. This shows us that Priscilla and Aquila’s instruction here was historical, explaining exactly what happened, and the theological implications of it
- b. There is no mention of exhortation or command given to Apollos, only informational instruction
  - i. Therefore, we cannot impose an authority into the situation, as if Aquila and Priscilla were Apollos’ *authority*
  - ii. They were reporting that Jesus fulfilled the OT even more particularly
- c. Thus, they were not using coercion or threat, but appealing to him from the gospel so that he might be an even more effective minister of the gospel

2. “more accurately” applies to their explaining, not to the content of Apollos’ teaching
  - a. That is, it is adverbial, modifying the act of explaining
  - b. They “explained to him with careful attention to detail”
3. Thus, this is not correcting something wrong with Apollos’ gospel, but filling in more detail which bolsters his case
  - a. Therefore, we immediately find Apollos “greatly helping, by grace, those who believed...and powerfully defeating the Jews in public debates” in Corinth
  - b. This “detailed information” helped make Apollos a better apologist for the gospel
    - i. And apologetics does these very things:
      1. Strengthens those who believe
      2. Defends the veracity of the gospel to those who don’t
- iii. They did this together, as equal participants in Apollos’ edification
  1. In every time they are mentioned (6 times), they are always mentioned together
  2. Interchangeability of name order implies equitable importance in gospel work
    - a. Luke is consistent in his emphasis on the value and importance of women
    - b. What appears to be the case here is the Priscilla is the more theologically and practically adept spouse in this marriage, and that her gifts of knowledge and instruction are being exercised here under the headship of Aquila
      - i. It’s a great example of the value of theological education for all of us, men AND women
      - ii. It’s also a great example of how gender roles, designed to reflect the nature of authority and submission in the very Triune nature of God, are to be exercised
        1. Aquila is not threatened by the theological giftedness of Prisca
        2. Nor is Priscilla undermining the God-ordained role of her husband as her head
        3. They are working together to glorify God and build others up!
    - iii. She is shown to be extremely gifted and talented, though not called to the authority of an office or role which Scripture does not ordain
    - iv. Yet, the Scriptures clearly affirm both her capability and the righteousness of her exercising such a gift for the benefit and “strengthening” of this young man alongside her husband
  3. You see this affectionate appreciation in Luke’s name for Priscilla:
    - a. the diminutive form “Priscilla” is only used by Luke, Paul uses formal “Prisca”
      - i. A little like the difference between “Katherine” and “Katie”
    - b. This shows that Luke probably had a very good and personal relationship with Priscilla and Aquila, so much so that he always refers to Prisca as Priscilla
      - i. There is much to be said about “mothers in the faith”, just as there are about “fathers in the faith” (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2) – and many of us owe a great deal to women who have helped us understand the things of the Lord
  - c. Priscilla and Aquila both used their strengths in order to build up this young preacher with potential
    - i. What a vast difference from the sarcastic and demeaning attacks on social media!

## 2. Paul: The Apostle Who Strengthened the Churches

- a. Vow at Cenchrea
  - i. This act of growing one’s hair in a vow to the Lord was from the form of Judaism
  - ii. This shows two primary things: Forms are fluid and Forms are valuable
    1. Paul still maintained some forms of Judaism which were not opposed to the gospel of grace
      - a. This may have been a conscientious choice for himself (but not imposed as a necessity upon others)
      - b. Or, it may have been a useful form which gained him a hearing with his fellow Jews (‘to the Jew I became a Jew’)
      - c. Yet, the form of his gratitude to God for his past grace (keeping him safe in Corinth?) takes the form of a vow

- iii. There was a gratitude which was important to Paul
    - 1. It is unclear what this vow was concerning, and a vow could be for *gratitude* for past blessing from the Lord (protecting him in Corinth), or for *a future blessing* from the Lord (getting to Syria/Jerusalem)
    - 2. Some people conclude that this was Nazirite vow
      - a. It was a public declaration of one's separation to the Lord
      - b. After the time of the vow, one was to go to the Temple and give an offering to the Lord, shave his head and burn the hair, and be released from the vow
        - i. Since Paul had his hair cut in Cenchrea, rather than the Temple, means that he was not holding to a Nazirite vow
          - 1. Thus, he is not bound to a form, but modifies it to suit the gospel purpose, i.e. gratitude and opportunity
    - 3. The haircut also shows us that his vow was ending, not beginning, meaning that his public gratitude and declaration of his union with the Lord took place in Corinth
      - a. This would have preached to the Jews who wanted him expelled, too
  - iv. There may be a time for expressing gratitude distinctively differently for the Lord, such as this
    - 1. The motive must never be to bargain with God (which is what Jesus warns against in the Sermon on the Mount), however
      - a. I remember a time here when I made a vow of gratitude to the Lord for rescuing this very church from the danger of a different gospel
      - b. But when I cut my hair –it never grew back
    - 2. Have you considered consecrating yourself to the Lord through some kind of costly way which portrays an otherworldly commitment to Him?
      - a. It's not a necessary thing, of course, but it may be a beneficial thing – like fasting.
- b. Trip to Ephesus
  - i. Entrusted the building of the Church to Christ Jesus, through His Spirit working in and through other believers there
    - 1. Leaves Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus
    - 2. Refuses to stay on in Ephesus, even though he is accepted and appreciated there
      - a. Why?
    - 3. He seems to be in a hurry to get to Syria and Jerusalem
      - a. Either to arrive before Pentecost, when sea travel on the Mediterranean closed due to weather, or out of sheer excitement/desire
    - 4. The question becomes whether or not Paul made a poor choice to pass up such an opportunity in order to travel back home
      - a. Luke gives no impression that Paul was mistaken or faithless in this act.
      - b. In fact, he goes on to “strengthen the disciples” throughout Syria and Asia Minor and back to Ephesus again
- c. To Syria and back up through Asia Minor to Ephesus by land
  - i. A trip of approximately 1,200 miles
  - ii. He landed in Caesarea, the Roman capital of Judea, and “went up” to ‘greet the church’
    - 1. This most likely applies to the church in Jerusalem, because the phrase “went up” is a Hebraic idiom that almost exclusively refers to Jerusalem and “went down” to leaving Jerusalem
    - 2. He only went to greet them, however, not to stay
      - a. He wanted to maintain good relations with the Jerusalem church, which was important considering the accusations against him of despising Jewish customs (see his later arrest in Jerusalem)
- d. This is a summary of Paul's travels, a break from the details until chapter 19
  - i. Why? - Luke wants us to know something, but not necessary to know everything
  - ii. What is the something?
    - 1. The church grows as every believer participates
      - a. Paul serves the church wherever he goes
      - b. Priscilla and Aquila serve the church quietly and generously
      - c. Apollos serves the church with powerful rhetoric and apologetic

2. The kingdom is not a one-man-show, nor is God dependent upon Paul, but rather Paul is dependent upon God
  - a. Now, I recognize the irony that this week I am both preaching and leading the music – but the kingdom of God is more than just Sunday morning, right?!
3. Apollos: The Apologist Who Strengthened Believers and Defended the Faith
  - a. Culturally Different Minister of the Gospel
    - i. Apollos is a name only found in Egypt
      1. Christianity spread quickly in Northern Africa, and Apollos was a part of this early movement
      2. Thus we see, again, the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic purpose of God in the Church
    - ii. Alexandria the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city in the Roman Empire
      1. Leading intellectual and cultural center of the Hellenistic world at the time
      2. 400,000 volume library located there
      3. LXX translated there
  - b. Well-learned and rhetorically trained Jewish man who became a believer in Jesus
    - i. ‘eloquent’ means rhetorically convincing – a powerful preacher who convinces and motivates people
      1. Paul actually contrasts Apollos’ great rhetorical skill with his own lack of eloquence in 1 Corinthians
    - ii. ‘powerful in the Scriptures’
      1. Referring to the OT, he grasped the overarching story and teaching of the LORD
      2. This prepared him greatly to show how Jesus is the Messiah promised in the OT
    - iii. ‘instructed in the way of the Lord’
      1. “instructed” is the word ‘catechized’ – formally taught by word of mouth
      2. ‘the way of the Lord’ always refers to the way of salvation through Jesus alone in the book of Acts
    - iv. ‘speaking fervently in the Spirit’
      1. Refers to the power of the Holy Spirit upon him for such powerful rhetorical preaching in the synagogues
      2. The Holy Spirit had empowered him to do this, though he still had some things to learn
    - v. ‘though he knew only the baptism of John’
      1. John the Baptist’s baptistic rite was only related to the ‘promise’
        - a. Thus, it was repent and wait for the kingdom
      2. The baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is related to ‘fulfillment’
        - a. Thus, it is ‘I am united to Christ Jesus the King’
      3. Therefore, though Apollos was correct in his preaching about Jesus, his view of baptism was incomplete, thus P&A help him see how baptism has changed to symbolize not the promise, but the fulfillment of the kingdom union in Jesus
  - c. He humbly accepted instruction from P&A
    - i. What P&A “laid out” for him was historical information about Jesus, i.e. more detail of how Jesus fulfilled the OT Scriptures
    - ii. It was not correction, nor instruction, but information regarding Jesus which Apollos did not have, but which served the cause of the gospel ministry to Jews even more
      1. The verb describing Priscilla and Aquila’s work with Apollos does not include exhortation (command or authority), but explanation, literally “lay out” or “explain”
      2. This seems to have to do with the purpose of baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit (see Ephesus in chapter 19) as the fulfillment of OT prophecy (Ezek 36; Jer 31)
    - iii. This is why Apollos immediately goes back to Achaia (Corinth) “powerfully refuting the Jews publically, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus is to be the Messiah”
      1. This shows what P&A “laid out” for him that he would know “more accurately” that Jesus is the Messiah
  - d. Immediately sought to glorify Christ by putting this growth into practice for others
    - i. Goes back to Corinth and builds up the church there
    - ii. Again, working for the benefit and strengthening of others, they recommend this young man for the work of the preaching ministry in Corinth

Conclusion: Over all of these brief stories is the underlying purpose of “strengthening all the disciples” by the ministry of the gospel proclaimed in its fullness. But, how can we do this? How can we “abound in the work of the Lord, steadfast and immovable”? These three characters did so because they were moved by the majesty of Jesus.

It is the good news of God’s grace towards us in Jesus that strengthens us (sinners redeemed – crucified and raised up with Jesus our hope) and we need to hear it and be reminded of its truth, its details, its glorious beauty, its historical veracity and its present and eternal implications, so that we are humbled by its real revelation of the depths of our depravity and hopeful at its real revelation of the love of God for us even then; so that we are grateful to God and gracious towards others, building them up as those in need of God’s grace, too.

All our obedience, what we are supposed to be as humans, to love God first and one another second, redeemed and sanctified by His blood, empowered by His Holy Spirit, is rooted in and always running towards the glory of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ – it is His Grace which generates godliness. I will leave you with the words of Walter Marshall, from his highly-recommended-find-it-and-get-it-but-get-the-updated-language-version masterpiece, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, which is printed on the front of your bulletin:

*“Mark well the great advantages you have for the attainment of holiness by seeking it in a right gospel order.*

*You will have the advantage of the love God manifested towards you, in forgiving your sins, receiving you into favor, and giving you the spirit of adoption, and the hope of His glory freely through Christ, to persuade and constrain you by sweet allurements to love God again, who has so dearly loved you, and to love others for His sake, and to give up yourselves to the obedience of all His commands out of hearty love to Him.*

*You will also enjoy the help of the Spirit of God to incline you powerfully to obedience, and to strengthen you for the performance of it against all your corruptions and the temptations of Satan, so that you will have both wind and tide to forward your voyage in the practice of holiness.”*

— *Walter Marshall, The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*