

Explore the Bible: Incomplete Picture

January 9, 2018

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Jan. 28 focuses on Acts 18:24-28; 19:1-7.*

By the time we reach the events described in Acts 18 and 19, the Apostle Paul has traveled many a mile on his tiring-but-impacting journey that began in Acts 16. After an extended stay in Corinth (which we can see was a significant group of people to Paul, based on his letters to the Corinthians), Luke tells us about another missionary whose journey nearly intersected with Paul's.

Paul was leaving Ephesus and his friends, Priscilla and Aquila. At that point, another evangelist named Apollos came into Ephesus with boldness similar to Paul's. He also had some "room to grow" in his depth of understanding.

Before delving into the text, ask your group: *If you were just impacted by an amazing person like Paul, how would you respond to another person coming to town after him?* Let's be ready to learn from this unique example.

A Partial Witness (Acts 18:24-26)

Apollos was a native of Alexandria, and that tells us a lot about him. Alexandria was the home of a "great library and museum, which made the city known as a great center of learning," with thinkers such as Philo being a product also of its learning (J. Bradley Chance, *Acts*, 333-34).

When Apollos spoke, we are told that he was clearly accurate, communicating with a “fervor” that helped him to stand out against those who hindered The Way. Perhaps this is what caught the attention of Priscilla and Aquila. Rather than seeing Apollos as competition to Paul, they turned to teaching Apollos.

Imagine the humility it took for these three! Apollos evidently accepted the teaching, acknowledging his understanding was incomplete, while Priscilla and Aquila had to accept that their voice was not the only voice. *What might this teach us today?*

Humility seems to be the gateway to being whole in our understanding. Acting like a “know-it-all” leaves us incomplete, while being open to learning moves us toward fullness. Ask your group: *How will my life change if I always am open to learning?*

A Complete Witness (Acts 18:27-28)

The end result of their mutual humility led to a greater possibility: Apollos was empowered and began to speak with even more boldness. This was a win-win. There were no sides to choose here, because they all were evangelists of Jesus.

Be sure to read 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 in light of this mutual work of Apollos and Paul. (I cannot stress the significance of this passage enough). Greater things happen when God’s many messengers are about the work of God rather than the reputation of men.

In light of this, when Apollos desired to move on in his journey, he was fully affirmed by the disciples of Ephesus and went on to greatly help those in Achaia. His boldness went into overdrive as he debated the anti-Way Jews, and this was because of his initial humility.

We are complete witnesses when we all are on the side of our Lord. *What do we need to do to guard ourselves from being divided? How must churches of varying affiliations come together to prove this complete witness to our community?*

An Incomplete Faith (Acts 19:1-7)

This story comes full circle as Paul arrives in Ephesus and encounters those who were as unaware as Apollos initially: They only knew of John's repentance baptism, not the baptism of Jesus that brought the Holy Spirit. It is interesting how these disciples are a continuation of the work and teaching done for Apollos in his former ignorance.

Lack of understanding and shallow faith happens to both the educated and non-educated. This is because knowing Jesus through faith and living in the Spirit is not something you learn in a classroom; it must be believed and experienced.

Notice Paul did not look down on these people. Rather, he acted as the teacher by taking the opportunity to disciple 12 men. We should never view those who are ignorant of understanding with discouragement. As Paul would say, "May it never be!"

The result was these "incomplete" became "complete" by receiving the Spirit. Just imagine how they must have went on to be faithful followers and messengers of the Good News. Leading others to a whole faith will only result in more messengers serving the same Lord and working on the same team.

Conclusion

Confucius once said, "Real knowledge is to know the extent of one's

ignorance.” Similarly, Benjamin Franklin added, “The doorstep to the temple of wisdom is a knowledge of our own ignorance.” These two thinkers, separated by centuries, point to the reality that we are incomplete when we don’t recognize we are incomplete.

Apollos and these 12 disciples in our story possessed knowledge and faith, but they were lacking. Priscilla, Aquila and Paul had depth of faith and discipleship, and they took the time to teach those who were incomplete. There is no more beautiful picture of discipleship than this story. *How does this encourage us forward?*

We all must be aware that we are not the storehouse of wisdom and understanding. Each has something to learn. We should be aware of our incompleteness and be a part of leading others from being incomplete to whole. This will only strengthen people, build faith and create disciples who will create disciples.

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