

Acts

Part 47 – “Traveling Mercies”

Acts 18:18-28

The Book of Act is a narrative of the history of the church’s founding. It is the second part of a work by Luke which begins with his gospel account. Luke wrote his account for the purpose of presenting an apologetic for the Christian faith. Therefore, his interest goes beyond a mere recounting of events (although he is never doing less than that). Luke/Acts is intended to point the reader to Christ; to persuade that Jesus is Lord and Savior.

The Book of Acts differs from the New Testament epistles in that it is a record of events rather than a didactic treatment of specific doctrines. Nevertheless, the Book of Acts is part of God’s holy Word, inspired by the Holy Spirit and useful for our encouragement, correction, and training in godliness.

Acts 18:18-28 consists of three brief sketches: Paul’s continued journey to Ephesus from Corinth, the introduction of Apollos, and the ministry of Priscilla and Aquila. Unsurprisingly, in the record of these lives and events we are being instructed. Certainly, we are learning the facts of the church’s expansion and maturity. But we are also given a view into the deep things of God. In this way seemingly mundane details like travel plans and meetings between new friends are shot through with meaning. They become the means by which God orchestrates the building of his church.

Main Idea: By his wise providence, his gifts, and through his people God has provided his church all they need to advance the gospel to the world.

1. The Mercy of God’s Providence

God exercises mercy through his sovereign providence.

- The journeys of Paul and the apostles along with the attending blessings and hardships were directed sovereignly by God. We refer to God’s sovereign direction of all things as “providence.” “Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand” (**Proverbs 19:21**).

a) We can be sure that God orders our steps.

Vs. 18 – Paul’s vow was probably the Nazarite vow which was a practice belonging to ancient Jewish ceremonies. The purpose of the Nazarite vow was to either express thankfulness for past blessings or to accompany petitions to the Lord for future blessings. Either way, the taking of the vow signals Paul’s confidence that every blessing he experienced came to him from the hand of the Lord.

Vs. 21 – “I will return to you if God wills” (James 4:15).

- Luke would have us know that God is the great director in this entire story of the church’s growth and the advance of the gospel. Paul understood that his every step was ordered by the providence of God.

b) We can be sure that our actions matter.

Vs. 19 – “And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.”

- After departing Corinth, Paul arrives at Ephesus where he continues to follow his typical pattern of going first to the synagogue (if one was present) in order to evangelize his fellow Jews. Paul had complete confidence in God to direct his steps. He had complete confidence in the Lord to accomplish all of his will and gather all his elect. And yet this did not diminish Paul’s zeal to act on behalf of those who needed the gospel. At no time did Paul see God’s sovereign providence as a reason for fatalism. Our actions matter. It matters if we make Christ known. The God who chose his people before the foundations of the world also determined that they would be reached through the witness of his people.

c) We can be sure that hardships will come our way.

In the previous section (**Acts 18:1-17**) Paul traveled from Athens to Corinth. There he stayed for one-and-a-half years to establish a church. God promised during those 18 months in Corinth to not allow any harm to come to Paul (**18:9-10**). However, while Luke does not provide the details, we know from Paul's epistles to the Corinthian church that this congregation would eventually cause him much trouble and heartache. We also know from 2 Corinthians 11 that much harm would come to Paul throughout his ministry. God's providence is not a promise of worldly comfort and prosperity.

d) We can be sure that God will keep his promises.

Vs. 20 – “When they asked him to stay for a longer period...”

This was the response from those attending the synagogue in Ephesus. What a difference from the response of the Jews in places like Thessalonica and Corinth. Certainly, Paul was not guaranteed favorable response everywhere he went. The catalogue of his physical and emotional sufferings was proof of that (**2 Cor. 11**). But he was sure, as can we, that God still has a people throughout the world. His promises have not failed. Our labors for the sake of the gospel will never be in vain.

2. The Mercy of God's Gifts

God exercises his mercy through the gifts that he bestows upon his church.

Vv. 24-25 – “Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus...”

- Luke introduces us to Apollos who will go on to have a great impact on the church. From the beginning we see that his impact will be through the ministry of preaching. Luke tells us that Apollos was eloquent, competent in the Scriptures, fervent in spirit, possessed of boldness (**vs. 26**), and powerful in debate (**vs. 28**). Not everyone is gifted in the same manner but all members of Christ's body have been given certain gifts for mutual edification (**Roman 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:7**).
- **Ephesians 4:11-12** – God's gifts are not to be understood only as specific *enablements* distributed to individuals within the church. Jesus has given to the church individuals who perform particular ministries for the equipping of the church for ministry.

3. The Mercy of God's People

God exercises his mercy through the kindness and support of his people for one another.

Vs. 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.”

- We meet the husband and wife team of Priscilla and Aquila in several passages of Scripture. It is clear that they had a ministry of discipleship. Together they were skilled in the Scriptures. In fact their knowledge was significant enough that they were able to shore up Apollos' knowledge. It seems that Apollos needed help in understanding how Christ had fulfilled all the Scriptures. After time spent with Priscilla and Aquila we are told that Apollos “powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus” (**vs. 28**).
- “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” (**vs. 27**). Here we see the ordinary grace of encouragement in the body of Christ. Apollos was encouraged by the church who he himself also “greatly helped.” No member of the body of Christ is expendable (**1 Cor. 12:14-20**). *Do not be pre-occupied with whether or not others are encouraging you. Be pre-occupied with being an encouragement to others.*