

I. Introduction

- A. Today is part seven in our summer series. We are looking at God's message for us today from the Book of Acts.
- B. I'm calling this series Our Turn. That's because this book tells us that the things God began to do in the world through Jesus Christ, he now continues to do through us, his people, also called the Church. It's our turn to pick up where Jesus and his apostles left off.
- C. Today we will talk about one of my top five heroes in the Bible. He is basically a minor character in the story with a major impact. His name is Apollos. Most Christians have never heard about him. But he inspires me.
- D. Our topic today is this:
 - 1. **Our Turn to Be Prepared**
- E. Let me read our Scripture passage, and then I have a story for you.

II. Scripture

- A. *"Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ."* (Acts 18:24-28)

III. The Non Miracle

- A. You may recall a few years back when a US Airways passenger plan made an emergency landing on the Hudson River in New York City.
- B. What caused it? A bird strike. Engines failed. The plane, surrounded by skyscrapers, had nowhere to go.
- C. Nowhere but the river.
- D. The pilot ditched the aircraft.
- E. Someone who had a friend on that aircraft contacted me. They said there was no panic. The crew operated flawlessly. No screams. No freaking out. It was as quiet as a library.
- F. The only voice you could hear was a man with his hand on the lever to open the emergency exit.
- G. And that man was praying.
- H. The plane landed. The exits were opened.
- I. The passengers used the emergency exits, boats rushed to evacuate the plane, everything was peaceful and orderly. Not one life was lost, and no one was hurt.
- J. It was a remarkable event.
- K. When a movie was made about this moment, Tom Hanks played Sully, Captain Chesley B. Sullenburger III, the pilot of that aircraft.
- L. The safe landing was called a miracle.
- M. "We've had a 'Miracle on 34th Street,' now we have a miracle on the Hudson." That's how New York's Governor, David Peterson, summed it up.
- N. Countless news outlets called it The Miracle on the Hudson.
- O. I am always happy when secular leaders ascribe good outcomes to God.
- P. It was a miracle, but only with a small 'm'.
- Q. In theology, a true Miracle occurs only when God temporarily suspends the laws of nature to accomplish his gracious purposes.
- R. I believe in miracles. I believe that Jesus literally walked on water and raised the dead. I believe that God parted the Red Sea and then sent it crashing back over the Egyptian army. I believe in miracles.
- S. The safe water landing of Flight 1549, however, was not a miracle. It was a wondrous rescue, an answered prayer, and a heartwarming story. But it was not the suspension of the laws of nature or physics.
- T. It was not a Miracle. It was, instead, something better than a miracle. Something far more meaningful to us today.
- U. It was an undeniable validation of a reality and a truth that I want to teach today and show you from the life of Apollos.
- V. The truth is this:
 - 1. **God uses prepared people.**
- W. Hats off to Sully, a highly prepared pilot. Hats off the flight crew and flight attendants, whose training and preparation all went on display. Hats off to all those boats and their captains who evacuated the passengers from the wings of the plane.
- X. Years of training and experience prepared all of them to make the split-second decisions and to execute the precise maneuvers required to glide to a safe touchdown on the Hudson River. God uses prepared people.

IV. Apollos

- A. In Acts chapter 18, the Bible introduces us to Apollos. Do not confuse him with Apollo, the Greek god. Apollos is a man, a remarkable man, whose story is condensed into just a few mentions in Scripture.
 - 1. *"Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent [learned] man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus."* (Acts 18:24)
- B. Of all the incredible people of the Bible, of the ones I wish I could hear, teach and preach, Apollos is in the top five.
- C. This is the book of Acts. It is written by a man named Luke. Luke was a doctor, and very precise and careful in his history and in his writing.
- D. Let's take four major details one by one.

V. Details

- A. Equipped

1. "Born at Alexandria"
2. The first thing is that he is an eloquent man, born in Alexandria. This immediately catches important attention. Apollos is a learned Alexandrian. By the time of the New Testament, Alexandria had become the cultural and intellectual center of the civilized world. It was founded by Alexander the Great almost 400 years earlier. But not even Alexander could imagine the grandeur that would one day belong to this glorious city. It was situated in Africa, in Egypt, near the mouth of the Nile River.
3. Alexandria was home to the greatest library that the world had ever known, over half a million books. The goal was to bring together all the learning of all the world, and translate all these books into Greek. The city was a center of learning and of scholarship; it was a gathering together the most elevated wisdom from every corner of the world.
4. It was in the city of Alexandria that the greatest translation of the Bible in history occurred. That was the translation of the Old Testament Bible from Hebrew into Greek. That Greek Translation is called the Septuagint. When those apostles and first missionaries preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, when they quoted the Bible before the New Testament was finished, and when they turned the world upside down, the Bible they had was that Greek Septuagint, made in Alexandria.
5. Alexandria was home to the greatest mathematician of the ancient world. Euclid's book on geometry has been used as a textbook for 2,000 years.
6. It was also home to a famous Jewish philosopher named Philo. It is highly likely that Apollo was a student of Philo and studied Judaism, and Plato's philosophy, and rhetoric from him.
7. In later years the hub of Christianity moved from Jerusalem to Alexandria. It was from Alexandria that famous Christians such as Athanasius, Tertullian and Augustine came. This was a city where learned men lived, and Apollos was from that society, and he himself was undoubtedly one of these brilliant, educated men.
8. And so Luke tells us he was born in Alexandria, and gives us an important clue about the making of a man or the making of a woman of God.

a) 1. EQUIPPED — When God prepares his people to make an impact for Christ, he uses everything in their history, both good and bad, to equip them for their work.

9. This is going to be different for everybody.
 - a) Some are called to preaching and teaching, like Apollos, so God set him in Alexandria.
 - b) Others are set in rough and tumble cities like Daniel, or on farms like the prophet Amos, or in crazy, emotionally messed up places, like Esther, or in slums, or in wherever.
 - c) This includes your family of origin. This includes your social status. This includes the level of wealth and health in your childhood.
 - d) God has a plan...
 - e) But you say, God, I don't like your plan. I had a horrible family and lived in a horrible place... and my mom and dad were so messed up... what's that about?
10. One of the ground rules of life on planet earth is this: this fallen world is a morally broken pain machine. Have you heard that before? That's the ground rules. That's the way it is. God didn't make it this way, we humans did that... with a lot of help from his Infernal Majesty the devil. And God is going to reverse all that, but not until Jesus returns.
11. In the meantime, God takes the pain and the evil that this fallen world and its fallen people heap upon you... God takes all that bad stuff and somehow converts it into good stuff... amazing stuff... beautiful stuff...
12. If you will only keep the faith, and not turn off from God, you will come out of that incubator with greater grace, deeper love, stronger muscle, and a tender heart... ready, willing, and able to bring the love of Calvary's Cross to a desperate and needy world.
13. You've got to keep faith with God, especially when it's hard.
14. So here is Apollos, born at Alexandria, born into scholarship, and a scholar himself.

B. Mighty in the Scriptures

1. Luke also informs us that Apollos was mighty in the Scriptures.
2. This one statement is why I love Apollos so much, and why he is one of my heroes.
3. He is not only smart, not only educated, not only eloquent, not only able to sway an audience with the power of his words... he finds all that power in, and directs all that power to the service of, the written Word of God.

a) 2. KNOWLEDGEABLE — When God prepares his people to make an impact for Christ, he calls them deeper into his Word and truth.
4. Mighty in the Scriptures. If I can ever rise up to the Order of Apollos, those men and women who can said to be Mighty in the Scriptures, I will die a happy man.
 - a) The Bible teaches and we believe that every Christian is a minister.
 - (1) We believe in the ministry of the saints (Ephesians 4:12).
 - b) The Bible teaches and we believe that every Christian is a priest.
 - (1) We believe in the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9).
 - c) The Bible teaches that every Christian is a soldier in the army of heaven, supplied with the full Armor of God, to fight back against the devil's tactics (Ephesians 6:11-18).
5. But not every one is called to be a pastor. Not every one is called to be an evangelist or a missionary. As a pastor, I enjoyed the great privilege of devoting years to college and full time seminary and years of full time studying and teaching.
6. Not every Christian is called to that level of preparation. Not every Christian has the luxury of that blessing.
7. But we are all called to some preparation. We all need to grow. To put on the armor of God. To resist the devil strong in the faith. To be mature. To lay aside those habitual sins. We're all called to shed the dysfunctions and lies of our filth-saturated society and to live a radiant life of Calvary Love.

8. We are all to be, in our own setting, and to our own degree, to be mighty in the Scriptures. It's part of our preparation.
9. "Deep calls to deep," says the Psalmist (Psalm 42:7).
10. As a freshman at Wheaton College, I was in awe when Billy Graham spoke at our chapel service. The media treated him like a celebrity. Reporters hounded him and photographers snapped shots of him. I sat in Edman Chapel to hear his message. In that message Billy Graham spoke one sentence that has stuck with me since I was 19 years old.
11. He said...
 - a) "If I knew that Jesus Christ were going to come back in five years, I'd spend my next four years preparing for my ministry in the fifth."
12. I heard Billy Graham's grandson say that his grandfather had an open Bible on the table in every room of his house. And wherever he went, before he sat down, he went to that Bible and read the next verse or two from where he left off.
13. The Word of God is muscle. The Word of God is power. The Word is the Sword of the Spirit. The Word of God is what you need more than anything else.
14. Look, God can use you just as you are, if you will offer your service to him.
15. But, for a deeper, broader, more lasting work, for a mission that has a glorious impact, God uses prepared people. And there is no more critical preparation than following the footsteps of Apollos, who was Mighty in Scripture.
16. God has called me, and God has called our church, to be a center for the teaching of Scripture. We want to raise up a generation that is Mighty in the Scriptures.
17. Will you be part of that tribe of everyday Bible scholars?
18. But let's not stop with biblical scholarship.
 - a) *"This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord..." (Acts 18:25)*

C. A Passion for God

1. Apollos is fervent in spirit. This is a passion, a fire in the belly, an energy for God. The word fervent actually means boiling. Apollos has a passion for God.
2. The Bible speaks of Strongholds. In our next Sixty Degrees Event... a big outside event coming in September... we are going to tackle strongholds.
3. But basically a stronghold is a big structure of thinking and believing and knowing that runs your life and you hardly know it's there.
4. A stronghold is what happens when you assemble a philosophy of life from bits and pieces you gather as you grow up. Unfortunately, most of those bits and pieces are sub-conscious. And most of those bits and pieces are contaminated with the devil's acid spit.
5. A stronghold is basically a worldview turned toxic.
6. A handful of strongholds have captivated our culture today. There are sexual strongholds of sensuality and lust. There are entitlement strongholds of victimhood and violence. There is a "cult of death" stronghold. There are new age strong holds, atheistic strongholds, and false religion strongholds.
7. But I think there is one stronghold bigger than the rest. It that has glommed onto American Christianity in a very big way. And I am talking about Christians. This stronghold is as old as the Bible. And both Jesus and the prophets called it out.
 - a) *For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them. (Matthew 13:15, quoting Isaiah 6:10)*
 - b) *"Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge... (Jeremiah 10:14)*
8. This is the stronghold of dullness, the stronghold of apathy, the stronghold of being lukewarm about God.
9. Welcome to the church in America today. Christians don't care. Never mind the dazed and confused world. Christians have lost their grip on the almighty God and his invincible truth...
10. But I'm hoping and I'm praying that the Stronghold of Apathy is beginning to tumble down.
11. Here comes Apollos and one of the most notable things about him is that he is on fire for God. Fervent in spirit. Passionate. At the boiling point.
 - a) **3. PASSIONATE — When God prepares his people to make an impact for Christ he tears down the stronghold of dullness and lights their hearts on fire.**
12. There was a missionary named C.T. Studd. He was born into wealth, a successful athlete, and he gave it all away to be a missionary. Studd was one of the first missionaries to bring the Gospel to China, and then to India, and then to Africa. And he did this when those places were uncharted and unmapped and desperately unsafe, back in the 1920s and 1930s.
13. They called him a gambler for God.
14. If there was anyone in the last 100 years who was fervent in spirit like Apollos it was **C.T. Studd**. He said...
 - a) **If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him. He said...**
 - b) **Christ wants not nibblers of the possible, but grabbers of the impossible by faith in the omnipotence, fidelity, and wisdom of the Almighty Savior. He said...**
 - c) **God's real people have always been called fanatics. He said...**
 - d) **Some wish to live within the sound of church or chapel bell, I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.**
15. Fervent in spirit. Where are the modern day heirs of Apollos and CT Studd? Where do we find this tribe?

16. Studies show that a majority of Christians today — of all ages — have
 - a) a weak view of truth, a flexible view of morality, a self-generated view of God. The glories of heaven are assumed. The fires of hell are quenched. The gospel is forgotten. And evangelism frowned upon. The wonders of God's Word are set aside in favor of emotion and experience and trance-like high. Church is skipped. Fellowship forgotten. Prayer neglected. Holiness optional. Excuse after excuse. Service for Christ is absent. Love for God is lukewarm. The power of the Spirit neglected. And their best days with the Lord are behind them, receding fast in the rearview mirror.
 - (1) For the hearts of this people are grown dull.
17. But into that desolate situation thunders a spiritual giant, a man mighty in Scriptures AND fervent in spirit.
 - a) Not light without heat. Not heat without light. But light and heat together, both.
18. And the devil flees when a believer of any age, standing in the Order of Apollos walks into the room with such a passion for God.
19. May God increase his tribe.
20. But as mighty as Apollos was, he still had so much growing to do.

D. Teachability

1. *"This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." (Acts 18:25-26)*
2. Priscilla and Aquila, converts of the Apostle Paul, were either attending the synagogue for worship or heard of this man Apollos preaching in the synagogue and went to hear him.
3. What gracious people Priscilla and Aquila were!
4. When they heard Apollos preach, they thought he was awesome. But they also knew his teaching was 20 years out of date! He hadn't heard the full story of the Cross and Resurrection! Apollos needed an update!
 - a) He only knew the baptism of John. That means he was basically an Old Testament teacher with a light touch of Jesus Christ.
 - b) He wasn't filled in on the meaning of the Cross, the perfect satisfaction for sins, and the all sufficiency of Christ's death.
 - c) He didn't know of that mighty victory when Jesus shattered the gates of hell and routed the demons and rose again from the dead.
 - d) And he had never heard of how God would dwell not just with people but also in his people through the Holy Spirit and make them into mighty warriors for the gospel.
5. So Priscilla and Aquila hear Apollos, and this humble power-couple brings the preacher home for dinner. Aquila and Priscilla were probably not more than eighteen months old in the Lord, but they were instructing the mighty Apollos. They were just laymen but they knew enough to instruct Apollos in the riches of the full meaning of the Cross.
6. And the amazing thing is that even though he was a doctor of theology, Apollos made himself humble, and teachable, and willing to learn.
 - a) **4. TEACHABLE — When God prepares his people to make an impact for Christ, he makes the heart both confident and teachable.**
7. I thank God for the people who have explained the way of God to me more perfectly. In every era of my decades of ministry there were women and men who took me aside, taught me, equipped me, encouraged me. I don't want to ever be finished learning. I don't want to ever think I know it all or have it all figured out.
8. I've never met a powerful influencer for Christ who wasn't inquisitive and humble and hungry to learn more and grow deeper.
9. When God wants to use a person in really amazing ways, he prepares that person.
10. And look what happens.
 - a) *"for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ." (Acts 18:28)*

- E. When Apollos came to a full understanding of the person and work of Christ, he became a powerful evangelist for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

VI. Conclusion

- A. **Apollos was a hero, but not a superhero.** He had no magic. No secret powers. No miracles up his sleeve.
- B. Apollos was a man like us. Same hopes, same dreams, same weaknesses and frustrations, dealing the same giant pain machine, and fighting the same world, the same flesh, and the same devil.
- C. But whatever potential he had, he made real. He roused himself to soar with the eagles, not to peck bugs off the ground with the chickens.
- D. Just like him, you have tremendous potential in Christ. You are richer than you think. You have resources, and powers, and blessings, and privileges. You have salvation. You have the Holy Spirit. You have the completed Word of God, the Bible. You have a church, which though not perfect, is sincere and true and good. You are invited to the heights of Christian manhood and womanhood. You can soar. You have greater potential than you think. It's never too late and it's never too early.
- E. So the higher we go the more we own. "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." This is Paul's own inventory of our property; let us claim it, every last bit of it.
- F. **Ask God to prepare you for the heights of service for him, and then motivate yourself to get going.**
- G. So that when the story of your life is written, your fruit for Christ and the gospel will remain, and someone will say of you, fervent in Spirit, mighty in Scripture, and bold in love and truth.