

Sermon Title: “**Talent or Gifting**”

Series: *Learn, Live, Lead*

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Text: Acts 18:23-28

Introduction

“Stand firm, and you will win life.” -Luke 21:19

We began this year with a look at what Kingdom endurance is. **Standing Firm** here means *Endurance* and is a very rich word embodying an **upward, consistent, contagious, and outward** motion that goes against the current. *It is swimming upstream after Jesus.* We saw this is the work the Spirit of God does in our lives, just as He did in Jesus’ - He leads us upward to higher ground and a higher life in Him.

We also looked at some of the outward challenges we face when going upward with the Spirit, including the spiritual forces of darkness which our on their way downward. As they are being cast out of God’s Kingdom, we are being brought in. This is the nature of our Spiritual Battle. Unlike the generations that came before Jesus since His Ascension the Spirit has now come upon us to take the battle to where it truly is at.

What does this look like lived out in or lives? Following Jesus as His Disciples.



“Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.”

-Matthew 4:19

This series is set to be a journey answering this question- *what does it mean to follow Jesus?* How do we today answer His invitation and see this journey with Him unfold as it did for the first-generation followers of Jesus? Together we will discover anew what it means to follow Jesus- *to be a disciple making disciples culture that **learns, lives, and leads!***

I. Keeping the Focus- Third Journey Begins (Acts 18:23-24)

“And having spent some time there, he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures.”

-Acts 18:23-24

Last week we saw the close to Paul and teams’ Second Missionary Journey. The Gospel has reached well beyond Jerusalem and Judea, having now becoming firmly rooted in the soil of Europe. Yet as the Kingdom of God continues to come into this world one heart at a time, the

enemy is not far behind and will be seeking to thwart through suffering and persecution, as well as twisting and perverting the message of Jesus. Understanding this, Paul is not easy staying back on the home front for too long. Rather this time is seen as a leave (explain military usage) to debrief, refresh in the unity of Brethren for the work of *all of Jesus for all of the world!*

Church by church God established through his ministry throughout Galatia and Phrygia were visited by this Apostle who loved them as a spiritual father. **Strengthening** means to confirm and build into more; make stronger or firmer. Paul isn't just asking them for their stats-numbers, financials, list of wins- he is inspecting them as a shepherd does their flock for infections, wounds, unhealthy watering or food sources, and the evidence of wolves roaming about. He is teaching them God's Word, going deeper with them in the Spirit as a good father does a child that is no longer on milk but ready for the meat of maturity.

All to real are the words of our Lord regarding human hearts,

“The sower sows the word. These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.” -[Mark 4:14-20](#)

Paul was already seeing and combating this in Galatia,

“I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.” -[Galatians 1:6-7](#)

This Third Missionary Journey begins by ensuring believers were healthy. Before he goes into further uncharted terrain for the Kingdom, he ensures the ground that was gained has not been lost. Maturing in the Spirit is what Paul pursues for his own life and those lives whom he is blessed to minister into.

Further, Luke wants our focus to be on Jesus. We are introduced to another person now named Apollos which shows us that God was doing much more than what we read in Scripture. Like John's witness about Jesus' own public ministry, that if everything was written the world would not be able to contain the number of books! (See -> John 21:20-25)

II. Apollos- The short reach talent. (Acts 18:24-26)

“Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being

fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue.”

– Acts 18:24-26

Luke takes us back 20 some years when John was baptizing in the Jordan River, preparing people for the approach of the Messiah and His Kingdom. Whether having come directly into contact with John or one of John's disciples we do not know. Yet, what we do know is that the cry to repent reached into his own heart and he was baptized. So convinced was he of the truth of this Messiah and His Kingdom, having a knowledge of the Scripture to allow for the conviction of the need of a Messiah (atonement), he most likely either went back to Alexandria or himself desired to take this message- this event at the Jordan River- beyond the Jordan, beyond Jerusalem, Judea, into the further regions of the Roman Empire where his Jewish brethren have yet to hear!

In a sense, Apollos was following Jesus before he understood fully His Death, Burial, and Resurrection as well as fulfilling Jesus' Mission before he knew it! *I point this out because many are led by the Spirit differently than we may have been coming to know and place faith in Jesus- do not discourage, but encourage with power, love, and understanding which is what God's Spirit brings into us.*

Apollos means, given by *Apollo*, the Greek and Roman god over many things. From the sun to the god of truth and prophecy, as well as healing from disease. *Eloquent* means well versed in literature, arts, history, etc. and able to communicate himself with skill. It also implies being rational and one looked toward for wisdom. This would have been his heritage from Alexandria. Having this skill set rooted into the Jewish Scriptures would have been from his Jewish heritage.

Mighty in the Scriptures means not only that he knew them, *but his conviction/world view was shaped by them and anchored in them.* When he would have spoken about Abraham, Moses, David, you would have felt as if you were transported into their time and presence with the liveliness Apollos brought to the text. He was an animated speaker bringing life to the Jewish Scriptures. *Apollos would have been the teacher that made the subject come alive to such a degree students would wish he was their teacher to learn from him!*

Instructed in the way of the Lord means that John the Baptist was doing more than baptizing, he was investing into his disciples all that he had received from the Lord; John overflowed into his disciples of which Apollos was one of. *Again, so much more was going on and happening than what we read of in the Scriptures- remember and trust God for He is doing so much more than what you and I hear and see!*

Ephesus we will get much more into next time, but for our text today- Ephesus was God's divine appointment for Apollos where his talent would transform into God's gifting! More on this in a second. Remember though, Paul had been in Ephesus already for a short stay,

“They came to Ephesus, and he left them (Priscilla and Aquilla) there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, but taking leave of them and saying, ‘I will return to you again if God wills,’ he set sail from Ephesus.” -Acts 18:19-21

While they may not have realized fully why God allowed circumstances to force an anti-Semitic order from the Roman Emperor expelling all Jews from Rome (of which they were a part), why they were compelled to leave Corinth with Paul and his team to arrive and stay behind at Ephesus, but Luke sees a piece of this. God always has purpose in and through His Sovereignty, even when it doesn't make sense to us nor is what we would prefer. He moves us where He desires to see His Kingdom Grow and His Son Glorified. *It is His Kingdom coming by His Will.*

Being **fervent** here means *to be boiled by intense heat*; **in the spirit** means *the Holy Spirit was the heat*. As he would hear the Scripture read in the Synagogue, the Spirit would stir his heart so passionately to bear witness of the Messiah and His Kingdom that he could do no less than to speak boldly what he knows!

As he was, Apollos was a man that could win an argument simply by his wisdom and oratory abilities. He could have rested on what many would have considered admirable talent that many would wish they had. If he did though, his reach would continue to be very short. For, knowing about Jesus is not the same as knowing Jesus. Knowing about the Holy Spirit is not the same as being baptized and filled with the Spirit. If he desired to lead others into this Kingdom he was sold out to, he would need to enter it more fully first.

And to do this he would need to let go of what the world calls *talent*, and embrace what God calls *gifting*.

III. Talent or Gifting? A matter of division or unity in the local church.

This may seem like we are talking about semantics- however I believe there is a significant heart issue at stake in understanding and embracing the idea of personal talents or God given gifting. And this is especially geared toward those in or pursuing positions of leadership in the local Body of Christ.

In and of itself, talent is self-driven. If we believe what we have is our own, we choose how we use it. However, if we believe we are gifted with abilities from God, then God gets to call the shots on how they are to be used. Talent often does not submit to being refined; gifting constantly submits to learn, experience, and mature for greater Kingdom use and Glory to Jesus. Talent makes excuses; gifting owns and transforms. Talent emphasized and celebrated can often lead to division, whereas gifting shared unifies.

Please understand, I am not talking about *the Fruit of the Spirit*. It is inaccurately taught that there are only nine, and believers vary in having specific ones or different intensities of gifting. The Bible affirms if we are in Christ, we have His Spirit and all of His Fruit is in us; so we need

to drop the “I don’t have the gift of (list the nine)”- if you have the Spirit you have them all and He is maturing them through you!

I am talking about the gifts unique to *our anointing* in Christ-

*“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. **-Ephesians 4:11-16***

This is the gifting God gives the church to lead toward maturity in unity. Unity in the Spirit of *power, love, and sound mind*. When these gifts are seen as talents, the reverse can be experienced in the local church- namely division. This was happening in Corinth specifically in the congregation regarding Apollos and Paul.

Paul addresses this by showing it is not about us but Jesus who works through His gifting in us,

*“Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, ‘I am of Paul,’ and ‘I of Apollos,’ and ‘I of Cephas,’ and ‘I of Christ’. Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in Paul?” **-1 Corinthians 1:10-13***

Further, Paul writes,

*“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not mere men? What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.” **-1***

Corinthians 3:1-7

I want to note that this was not a confusion or error on Paul, Apollos, or any other leader at Corinth. This was the immaturity of the congregation celebrating what they deemed personal talents they preferred rather than God given gifts they needed for unity and maturity. But this is not always the case. Many a leader falls short of entering their anointing due to embracing the

enemy's language of talent versus gifting. We are gifting for the unity of the Body and the Glory of Jesus Christ! Why does unity matter so much? Why am I making such a big deal about this?

“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.” **-Matthew 18:15-20**

****Insert Car Break Down Story****

Churches are stuck in this neutral state coasting to the side of the lane of influence through declaration and demonstration. Why? One reason is that we are quenching the Spirit. (More on this in Acts 19!!) Another reason is that its more about us and our talents which may be a big deal in our local church, but beyond our walls our names matter very little and will only continue to depreciate. However, the Name of Jesus unities us with the global Body, the Universal Body, and the Eternal Kingdom that has no end!

IV. Apollos- the long reach of gifting (Acts 18:26-28)

“But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.” **-Acts 18:26-28**

Notice the manner in which Priscilla and Aquila become a part of Apollos' journey toward Jesus. They heard him and then took him aside. **Took him aside** does not necessarily mean simply not correcting him publicly although that is part of it. It means to pulled him aside and brought him into their company (Intimacy of friendship and shared all things) and both taught and disciplined him in the greater clarity of the Death, Burial, Resurrection and Ascension along with the outpouring and filling of the Holy Spirit resulting from the Baptism of Faith in Jesus Christ- the Messiah and Kingdom he has so passionately been laboring for others to see.

Apollos was not publicly discouraged or belittled, although Priscilla and Aquila could have played that card. They didn't because that is not the fruit of maturity. They saw him as a brother with significant Kingdom value- not a talented man but a gifted child of God! *But, would Apollos see that?*

He did- blossoming into a greater light for the mission of all of Jesus for all the world! The Body of Christ of which he was a part now, unified in the Spirit due to gifting building into each other, agree to the Spirit's leading upon Apollos to go to Achaia (The growing and thriving

church at Corinth the Apostle Paul spent the longest time to date at). **Urging** means *strongly encouraged*- Apollos had felt the stirring of the Spirit that cause his conviction to boil. Now, he hears the voice of the Spirit and is learning to listen and follow through the urging of the brethren.

They wrote a letter to affirm him in Christ, asking the believers to **welcome him**, which means *to receive as a gift*, and as a result God used Apollos to **help**, which *means to bring together in unity*, the Body of Christ in Corinth. How did he do this? **Powerfully** here implies *Strengthening their knowledge of the Scriptures to become a force driving back the kingdom of darkness*. **Demonstrating** that this Gospel of declaration and demonstration was not of the devil and a deception, but of God and the Truth!

A unified church moves forward in the power, voice, and leading of the Spirit for the Glory of Jesus Christ, binding what is defeated and running loose over lives coming into the Kingdom and loosening all that God has in store to see His Son Glorified through His Kingdom Reigning!

Let us move forward together in the anointing over our lives by embracing His gifting and overflowing into each other's lives, modeling a Kingdom Unity that is binding and loosening for the Glory of Jesus Christ!