

October 20, 2024  
As You Are Going: Uninformed vs. Unbelief  
Acts 18:18-19:10  
Vernon Advent Christian Church

Hopefully you have had the chance to get out and enjoy this wonderful fall weather we've been having lately. But these cool mornings remind us that winter is coming and with it comes Christmas. As the Christmas season approaches, I'm reminded of the theme of almost every Christmas movie: belief in Santa Claus. The plot of many of these movies such as Elf or The Santa Clause, or even classics like Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> St, is that kids are the ones who believe in Santa, and it's the grown-ups who live in unbelief. And it's not because the adults are just uninformed about the idea of Santa, or because they have not heard of him or don't know who he is, but it's that they just don't believe. And we see at the end of these movies this the pivotal point where the grown-ups finally believe in Santa, and everyone has a Merry Christmas.

You see, there is a difference between being uninformed and walking in unbelief. This morning, we're going to see this play out as we look at the differences between two journeys in our text today. And as we follow these two journeys, we are going to see two different encounters, two different baptisms, and two different responses to the gospel. Let's start by looking at two journeys. If you are able, please stand with me as I read God's word.

[Read Passage]

The first journey we see is part of the continuous journey of Paul which we've been following for several weeks now. Last week we walked through the beginning of Acts 18 and we looked at Paul's work in Corinth, and that even though he had found some success in terms of the gospel, he had become discouraged and God appeared to him in a vision and encouraged him with the promise of his presence and that he still had many left in the city that had not yet put their faith in Christ. And so, we're told Paul remained in Corinth for a year and a half.

And we pick up in the text today with Paul leaving Corinth, along with entourage which now includes Aquila and Priscilla, and we're told that they travel first to the port city of Cenchrea where find this interesting phrase, "Paul cut his hair..." This is in reference to a Nazarite vow that Paul must have made with God, possibly in response to the vision he had while in Corinth, and when it was completed, according to OT custom, the person would shave their head and burn the hair as a sign that the vow was fulfilled. From there, they sailed across the Aegean Sea and came to Ephesus. Paul preaches in the synagogue there, but unlike other places, the Jews ask him to stay longer so they can hear more, but he has a plan to return to Antioch and he leaves it to God's will if he should return. And so he travels back to the church in Antioch, which would have taken several months one way, to report what God had been doing along his journeys as he has done before and much like we see today when we hear from our missionaries about the work God is doing around the world. [Plug for Jeff Walsh]

After some time there, he then travels back by land, encouraging all the churches he has planted in his first journeys in places like Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Derbe, and the in the region Galatia, and then he makes his way back Ephesus about a year after he had left.

During the time Paul was away, we are introduced to a man that becomes a prominent figure in the early church by the name of Apollos, and we begin to follow his journey. And the first thing we're told is that Apollos is a "Jew and "a native of Alexandria." Now, Alexandria, located in modern day Egypt, was the second largest city in the Roman Empire and the leading

intellectual and cultural center known for its massive museum and 400,000 volume library. There was also a large Jewish population there and it was members of this Jewish population that wrote the first Greek version of the OT, known as the Septuagint, about 200 years before Christ.

But Luke also mentions that Apollos was not only a native of that city, but “he was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures.” Apollos was not just from Alexandria, but he was a well learned man, an academic himself, who understood the Scriptures well and could communicate the teachings of God compellingly. It’s because of descriptions like these that some scholars even believe that Apollos may be the author of the book of Hebrews. However, Luke identifies one particular issue early on in the Christian life of Apollos. He says he “knew only the baptism of John.” Which leads us into the first of two encounters.

From the context, I would agree with most commentators who suppose that Apollos is already a believer, but he is uninformed about the baptism of Jesus. Luke says in verse 25, [read] So it seems that Apollos is a believer, he is teaching in the Spirit and proclaiming accurately the things about Jesus, but he seems to be uninformed on a particular piece of doctrine. He has not been made aware of the baptism of Jesus, or what we would call believers baptism, which we see come into play later in the text.

And this is where we see Pricilla and Aquila enter the scene once again. Now, we have already been introduced to this couple last week as we looked at the first part of ch. 18. Pricilla and Aquila were tentmakers who joined Paul in his ministry and traveled with him to Ephesus while Paul continued on to Antioch, and some scholars even believe they may have helped to finance his trip. But we see earlier in ch. 18, Luke uses a similar phrase to introduce Aquila that he used to introduce Apollos. Back in Acts 18:2, we read, “And he [Paul] found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus...” Now, we typically gloss over information like where people are from, and I had to look it up myself, but Luke, by using this same phrase with Apollos, “a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria,” is making a point here. You see, in that time, people from other places looked down on people from Pontus. Pontus was a region located on the northern coast of modern day Turkey, away from all the major cities. The people there were seen as uneducated barbarians, hicks from the sticks if you will, which stands in stark contrast to the city of Alexandria, as I’ve just mentioned, a city of intellect and culture. And what Luke is pointing out is how Aquila and Pricilla are the ones who correct Apollos on his teaching.

After hearing Apollos teach in Ephesus, they notice his error or misunderstanding of baptism, and they meet with him, it’s indicated privately, to correct him. [more] And it says they taught him the way of God “more accurately.” Now, we we’re told he was already teaching accurately about Jesus, but he could be more accurate in his teaching. I think this is why it is so important for us to continue to grow in our faith, to grow in our knowledge of God and his Word and to be able to recognize and correct any error or false teaching that comes up in the church.

But that’s the easy part, right? We all have no problem being the one to correct people in their error. But have you ever been the one that needed to be corrected? Here is this man and his wife from Pontus, seen as being uneducated, and they are the ones correcting Apollos who comes from a great academic and intellectual area. We are not told in the text exactly how Apollos took that correction, but it seems that he received it well as he was ready to continue in his ministry with the support and encouragement of these Ephesian disciples. And we’re told in vs. 27 and 28. [Read] Sometimes being corrected is hard to hear, but God uses those times to sharpen and equip us to be more like Christ and more effective for him.

Now the text shifts back to Paul and we look at the second encounter mentioned in our passage in Acts 19:1 where it says Paul “found some disciples.” At least a year has passed since

Paul left to return to Antioch. Luke gives a vague reference to these disciples by using the word “some.” These are not disciples of Jesus as is revealed in a moment, but rather they consider themselves as disciples of John. They also claim to be baptized into John’s baptism. Again, connecting this story with the story of Apollos. However, the difference here is that these disciples do not know about the Holy Spirit. This group of disciples are not just uninformed about a particular doctrine like Apollos. They are unbelievers. We know this because the text tells us they had not received the Holy Spirit, which indwells every believer at the moment of salvation. We are not told how they came into John’s baptism, but they either weren’t listening to his message, or they never heard it to begin with.

You see, the main difference between these two encounters is that Apollos was simply uninformed, but those whom Paul encounters were walking in unbelief. I think we should examine our lives in light of this to see where we are this morning. Maybe you are here, and you’re a follower of Christ, but are you growing in your knowledge and understanding of his Word? Are you receptive to correction in your thinking if need be? We see this happen through the church as Pricilla and Aquila met with Apollos and corrected him. Maybe you need to join a Bible Study where you can have that kind of accountability and grow in your faith with other believers as we seek to understand and apply God’s Word together. And may we be as humble and receptive to correction in our doctrine and understanding as Apollos was.

On the other hand, maybe you are here this morning, and you are like these people Paul encountered. Maybe you have been a part of church your whole life, or even baptized when you were younger, but you really have never responded in repentance and faith. My prayer is that you will be like these disciples who, upon hearing the good news of Jesus Christ, repented of their sins and were baptized in the name of Jesus. This brings us to the next thing we are going to compare are the two baptisms that are mentioned in the text.

As I’ve already mentioned, the phrase, “the baptism of John” connects our two stories and stands in contrast to the baptism of Jesus, or believer’s baptism. So, the question is then, what is the baptism of John? First, it’s in reference to John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ we read about in the Gospels and Paul says in vs. 4, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” So, we see John’s baptism anticipated the coming of Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT prophecies. There was this expectation or anticipation of someone greater to come.

This is why John was baptizing people in the Jordan. To prepare people and point people to the coming work of Jesus. John was urging people to repent of their sins and seek forgiveness from God. And he explicitly mentions that the one who is coming will baptize with the Holy Spirit. It is interesting then, that these “disciples” who were baptized into John’s baptism have never heard of the Holy Spirit. This is why I am hesitant to say they were actually disciples of John, because they clearly did not understand John’s own teaching on baptism, the coming of the Messiah, or the Holy Spirit. John was proclaiming that the act of baptism is not what will bring salvation, it is repenting of your sins and trusting in the work of Christ.

The second baptism we see is this baptism of Jesus or baptism in the name of Jesus. We don’t get to read all of what Paul said to these disciples but we are told that in response “they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” and “the Holy Spirit came on them.” We can easily assume that Paul shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with them as he has been doing throughout his missionary journeys. Upon hearing the gospel, they are baptized in the name of Jesus to emphasize their repentance of sins, belief in Christ’s work on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, and trust in him as their Lord and Savior. And upon their baptism, the Holy Spirit comes

upon them as a sign and promise to those who place their faith in Christ. This baptism of Jesus is what we are all baptized into now. Into the name of Jesus.

By believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are sealed with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And this is why Paul asked these men if they received the Holy Spirit when they believed because this was the sign of those who are truly disciples of Christ. The evidence of whether you are really a disciple of Christ is if you have the Holy Spirit.

Where do you find yourself? Have you been baptized to publicly proclaim your faith in Christ? If you have trusted in Christ and have not been baptized, maybe your next step is baptism in order to be obedient to Christ and identify with him. [baptisms next week]

This brings us to our last point this morning, the two responses to the gospel: rejecting the Word or receiving the Word. Let's read vs. 8-10 again. It says...[read]

We read that Paul remained in Ephesus and continued going to the synagogue to "reason with the Jesus," many of whom, we have to imagine, were the same ones that wanted him to stay longer earlier in the text. But instead of wanting to hear more, they respond by rejecting the Word. You see our natural state, as humans, is unbelief. We don't want to hear the good news of the gospel. Left to ourselves, we would reject Christ and his salvation every time. This point is made in vs. 9 when it says after Paul had shared the gospel "they continued in unbelief." They heard the Word of Christ preached and chose to remain stubborn and hard hearted to the gospel. And not only that, but they actually began to speak evil about "the way."

Now this in contrast to the other response we've already seen in the text which is the receiving of the Word. We saw this with the disciples Paul encountered. Again, it says in vs. 5, "On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." They received the Word of Christ and were saved. There are only 2 responses to hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ, belief or unbelief. There is no middle ground or gray area. We either repent of our sins and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord, or we reject the message, harden our hearts, and continue in unbelief.

And so again I ask, "Where are you today?" Are you part of the group that continued in unbelief? If that is you, do not harden your heart to the gospel. Respond to Jesus in repentance and faith. You can do so even now by crying out to God in prayer, confessing your sins before him and trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior. If you have questions about that, I would love nothing more than to share with you how you can have eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Maybe you are here, and you identify with those disciples who upon hearing the gospel of Jesus were baptized and indwelt with the Holy Spirit. If so, you are a child of God and are called to continue the work of being on mission for him. We are called to use our spiritual gifts in the church as we see Apollos doing in his preaching, and Pricilla and Aquilla in their teaching and correction. Maybe your next step is to become a member of the church and become an active part in what we're doing here, using your gifts and talents that God has given to you, to strengthen and encourage the body. Again, we would love to talk with you about that.

We've looked at these two journeys of Apollos and Paul and their encounters with others in Ephesus. We've seen that there is a difference between being uninformed and corrected in our understanding and living in unbelief. We've also seen how God uses his people to continue to build and strengthen his church, through the continued ministry of Paul, the raising up of Apollos, and the correction brought by Pricilla and Aquila. And more and more people were coming to faith in Jesus as we're told that "Paul remained there for two years and [all the people] heard the word of the Lord. As you are going, let's be the church on mission by continuing to preach the truth of the Gospel. Let's pray.