

The sermon

Intro

This morning we're going to encounter a unique pastoral situation. What do we do when we encounter a group of believers, apparently unconnected to a church, with a serious lack of understanding of basic Christianity?

This morning we're going to get a glimpse into Paul's evangelistic ministry. What did he do? How did he do it? What sort of response did he produce?

As we learn from Paul, we should be asking ourselves, how can we put into practice what Paul did?

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

Two points from Paul's ministry.

Point 1: Another incomplete understanding (19:1-7)

And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. – 19:1

Paul's made it back to Ephesus. He was gone for about a year. Paul encountered some unique disciples.

And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." – 19:2

This is an odd question. Paul must have detected something was a little off. These are the clarifying sort of questions we elders ask when people are interested in church membership.

They're apparently people who've believed, but they've never heard about the Holy Spirit.

And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." – 19:3

This is about 20 years after John the Baptist's death. It appears they were baptized by John. Paul assumes every believer has been baptized.

And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." – 19:4

John's baptism was linked with repentance. When one submitted to John's baptism, they were acknowledging their need to repent.

Repentance/Gospel

Repentance = doing a 180/turning in the opposite direction (Hebrew word), a change of mind (Greek word). Turning from sin to faith-fueled obedience. Changing one's mind about sin and God and obedience. When a person repents, their life changes.

Sometimes the Bible says whoever believes won't perish (John 3:16). Sometimes it's unless you repent you'll perish (Luke 13:3, 5). The Bible uses faith and repentance interchangeably. The two go together.

Maybe you're asking how do I become a Christian? My answer? God offers sinners (everyone ever born, you and me) forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The only way we can receive these is through faith and repentance. We're not born

Christians. There needs to come a point in our life when we move from death to life, from rebellion (doing life our own way) to repentance.

When we repent, we turn from sin because we believe God's word. We believe that God is good and my sins are offensive to God and Jesus had to die in my place to take away the punishment my sins deserve. We believe that sin is awful and God takes sin seriously.

So those who responded to John's baptism were saying sin's bad and I'm a sinner and I need to change my attitude towards God. I need to turn from sin. I need to live for God by faith. I need to start obeying God's commands.

Paul explains that John pointed his disciples to Jesus. When it was time for Jesus to go public, John said, "*He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease*" (John 3:30).

On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. – 19:5

They haven't experienced Christian baptism. Paul remedies the situation.

The order in Matthew 28:19-20 is made a disciple → baptized → taught to observe everything Jesus taught. The order in Acts 2:38-41 is repent → baptized → added to the church that day.

And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all. – 19:6-7

Here's where things get interesting. Why didn't John's disciples know about the Holy Spirit? Aren't saved people indwelt by the Holy Spirit when they believe? Should we expect to speak in tongues and prophesy when we're born again?

Explanation

Let me explain what's going on.

- 1) These are saved people who, like Apollos, have an incomplete understanding.

What about the fact that they don't have the Spirit?

This is common in Acts.

In Acts 2, Pentecost, Peter and others were filled with the Spirit and spoke in tongues (2:4). Note belief came before indwelling and tongues accompanied indwelling (2:5-13).

In Acts 8, there were Samaritans who "*had received the word of God*" (8:14). They believed. But it wasn't until after Peter and John came and prayed for them that "*they received the Holy Spirit*" (8:17). Note they believed before receiving the Spirit.

In Acts 10-11, there's Gentiles who revere the one true God (10:1-2) but haven't yet been saved (11:14). As Peter speaks the gospel (11:34-43) the Holy Spirit falls on them (11:44-45) causing belief and they speak in tongues (11:46). Note the Spirit and tongues came when belief came.

In Acts 19, there's disciples of John the Baptist who believed, but they got the Spirit after belief. And when they got the Spirit, tongues and prophecy came.

Note how the various experiences differ from one another. Note also that an indwelling Holy Spirit was a new experience.

Prior to Pentecost (Acts 2), people were born again, but the Spirit was with God's people and not in God's people. Jesus told Nicodemus, "*You must be born again*" before Pentecost (John 3:8). Jesus said:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. – **John 14:16-17**

How might we put these Acts Spirit events together? Acts 2 is God's initial pouring out of the indwelling Spirit (see Joel 2:28-29), where God affirms his apostles before the Jewish people and the nations. Acts 8 is God affirming the Samaritans as his people. Acts 10-11 is God affirming the Gentiles as his people. Acts 19 is God affirming the ministry of John the Baptist. The Jews despised the apostles, Samaritans, and Gentiles. The Jews embraced John the Baptist. In these Spirit events, God is testifying these are my people. And he's saying, Jewish people, if you accepted John, you need to accept Jesus.

Elsewhere we learn that faith and the Spirit go together. Later Paul said to the Ephesians:

*In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, – **Ephesians 1:13***

Spirit sealing happened when belief happened.

- 2) In the transition to the age of the indwelling Spirit, there were unique experiences for some believers, but the norm is instantaneously indwelt by the Spirit at the moment of faith.

What about tongues and prophesying?

1 Corinthians 12:29-30 says:

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

The implied answer is no. Meaning all don't speak in tongues. All don't prophesy. Just like we'd be crazy to say every believer is an apostle. Meaning these Acts events were unique happenings in the transitional period. Not the expected experience of every believer.

We aren't disciples of John the Baptist. We aren't living in the transitional period. We get the Spirit when we believe. We shouldn't assume every believer will speak in tongues when they get the Spirit.

More could be said. I'm good.

Application

But what can we learn from this?

First, God cares about the details. It wasn't enough to be baptized by John. They needed Christian baptism. So getting baptism right matters! Getting baptism right, getting the Lord's Supper right, etc. These are things we should care about. Paul's not satisfied because these guys believe some things correctly.

It's not being overly picky. It's doing church right.

Second, how much does a person have to understand to be saved? Evidently key details can be unknown. These men were saved and they had never heard of the Holy Spirit. I think you'd agree a person can believe without being an expert on election and predestination and millenniums and tongues and even baptism.

A person today could be indwelt by the Holy Spirit without even knowing there's a Holy Spirit. I'm pretty sure when I got saved I had no idea what the Trinity was all about. I certainly wasn't familiar with the indwelling Holy Spirit. But I was confident that the Bible was true and I was a sinner and Jesus died and rose again and Jesus died for me and I was under

judgment and in need of God's forgiveness and I needed to repent and follow Jesus. When I called out to God in my bedroom, I did ask God for a new heart so I could follow him.

After belief comes baptism and being added to the church where ones learns everything Jesus commanded. A curious seeker doesn't need to be an expert on everything.

Point 2: Getting the message out (19:8-10)

In this section, I have five simple observations about evangelism.

And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. – 19:8

Paul's back in the synagogue...for three months.

Observation #1: spoke boldly

To speak boldly is to speak with confidence. To speak freely and openly. To fight fear and anxiety. To act with courage.

Not holding anything back. Telling it how it is. Not beating around the bush. Not softening the rough edges. Not withholding unpleasant truths. Speaking directly. Speaking clearly.

Paul walked into synagogues and argued that Jesus was the promised Messiah. The Jews were heated about this one. He knew what they believed. He knew their disagreement with him. He spoke plainly.

Paul pushed the issue. He initiated the discussion.

Boldly is the manner of speech.

Observation #2: reasoning

Paul appealed to the intellect. He tried to show the Jews how reasonable it was for them to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, that he died on the cross for our sins, that he rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures.

Paul started arguments. He created controversy. He showed people why they were wrong about Jesus.

Paul pressed the matter. He tried to get people to think.

Reasoning is the method of speech.

Observation #3: persuading

In some cases Jews were convinced by Paul's arguments. Some believed.

Persuading is effectiveness of speech.

But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. – 19:9

Observation #4: rejection

"some became stubborn and continued in unbelief." Some were persuaded. Others were not. Paul experienced rejection.

Paul wasn't a failure because some rejected. No, Paul was faithful. He did his part. He initiated the conversation. He reasoned as best he could. It was outside his power to control stubborn hearts. They dug in their heels. No amount of reason could break through.

Observation #5: slander

Some were "*speaking evil of the Way before the congregation.*" "*the Way*" = the Christian faith, the church. Harsh words came Paul's way.

As he reasoned, some objected to his conclusions. Enraged by his conclusions, they resorted to insults and name-calling and probably false charges of blasphemy.

Paul wasn't a failure because he was slandered. No, Paul was faithful. His hearers were responsible for their response.

hall of Tyrannus

After three months in the synagogue, Paul had done all he could. Speaking in the synagogue was no longer wise or fruitful. Paul had worn out his welcome. So he left with a group of disciples convinced by his arguments.

Between Priscilla, Aquila, the 12, and this group, a church was already formed in Ephesus. But Paul kept evangelizing.

Tyrannus = the owner of the building or a philosopher who taught classes there.

Paul had a public location where he was free to speak and engage people. And evidently everyday he had people willing to listen. Gentiles. People who didn't believe the Bible is true. People who'd never heard of Jesus or the Bible. Paul was comfortable talking with these people. Note Paul's method again is reasoning.

It would be like our church renting a spot in the Grange because people were in and out of the Grange all day to hear various philosophers speak. This isn't our situation. We need to find creative ways to reason that fit our situation.

This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. – 19:10

Paul was at the hall of Tyrannus for two years. The result being all of Asia heard the gospel. It doesn't mean Paul personally evangelized every last person. It doesn't mean every last person in Asia was personally evangelized. It means through Paul, his co-workers, and the nearby churches the gospel reached every place in Asia.

Application

Paul's methods teach us:

1. We need to be bold, open, clear, direct.
2. We need to reason. We need good arguments.

Especially with people who don't believe the Bible is true. We have to be able to answer hard questions. We need to be able to correct false understandings. We need to be able to show the beauty and plausibility of the gospel.

3. We should expect some to be persuaded.

Some will believe!

4. We should expect some to reject the gospel.

Some won't like what we're saying. That's okay.

5. We should expect some to speak evil of us.

Jesus created conflict. Paul created conflict. We'll create conflict. But it wasn't that Paul craved controversy. Paul longed for sinners to be rescued from the wrath to come. So he opened his mouth and reasoned with people.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't be wise. Sometimes we've said enough. We don't need to press the issue. We need to listen to questions and answer. Not push through a set of material. A question they ask might get them where they need to go.

What we learn from Paul is he initiated conversations. He went where people were. He argued. And he kept going when rejected.

What stands out to me is that reasoning was critical to Paul's ministry. I think a good idea would be a Sunday school class where we could explore how to initiate conversations. How to reason with different sorts of people. We could share the objection we've encountered. But I'm a good person. God hates LGBT people. We could brainstorm where we might go. Talk with me.

Paul's ministry encourages us to look for opportunity to speak and reason.

When your grandchild says, "I don't believe that stuff anymore" we need a response. That can't end the conversation. We need to reason.

Pastors/elders exist to equip you for the work of ministry. How can we help here?