

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS**Acts 18**

Intro: Our text for today is Acts 18 so I hope that you have had a chance to read it. As you already know, since we've been exploring the Book of Acts since January 19 of this year, there is much that we can learn in this history book of the early church. I hope you understand, however, that we are not covering everything that we can learn from Dr. Luke's writing – and that's not been our intention. That's why I've been having you read ahead and explore it so that you can see the other things that are there. With that in mind I'm not going to cover everything in Acts 18. Instead, I want you to see one thing that is very evident here, and it's in the title of this talk – Strength in numbers.

Now, I'm pretty certain that I probably showed you something similar to what I'm going to have up on the screen in just a bit. Nevertheless, if you've seen it or not, it's a perfect illustration of the power of working together. (Video of 300 Amish men moving a very large polebarn).

That might be impressive, but the truth is, we've experienced this here at ABC. We put out the word that someone needs to move from one house to another or needs a truck unloaded and a few ABCers show up and the job is done quickly and efficiently. I've experienced this personally. When I had my hip replaced in 2015 several of my pastoral colleagues from town came and visited me in my home and they asked me, every one of them, if there was anything that they could do for me. Fortunately, I knew that ABC would, and did, step up to care for the needs of the congregation in my absence along with any kind of need that I had. But I was still blessed to know that my colleagues in ministry were there for me.

John Donne wrote centuries ago, “*No man is an island, entire of itself*”, and he was right, we need each other. It's especially true as we work together for the Lord.

The Apostle Paul was an amazing person – we seen that as we were first introduced to him in Acts Chapter 9 and, in many ways, he has, and will continue to dominate the narrative for the remainder of Acts. Here is a good thing to remember though: as we study him, it is obvious that Paul didn't do ANYTHING alone. He didn't even try to. He knew how to work with others and others were attracted to his ministry. They saw what he was doing and they wanted to go along for the ride because his passion for Jesus was that contagious.

Paul also gave credit where credit was due. He always made sure he acknowledged his fellow ministers and made sure to show how very thankful he was for those who came alongside him and made him the effective minister that he was. This is because he knew the strength in numbers. As you read through his letters to the various churches, the Corinthian, Galatian, Ephesian, Philippian, Colossian, and Thessalonian Churches, and his letters to individuals in the New Testament, we see he had many people to thank – and he made sure he did.

The other day my devotional reading included the last chapter of Romans. My mind was mulling over this very message and for that reason the first 16 verses of Romans 16 made me sit right up. Listen to it (Romans 16:1-16)

Paul couldn't have done it without them and Acts 18 is a picture of that. In fact, right, in the first few verses of Acts 18, we are introduced to a couple who became two of Paul's most trusted and faithful colleagues. You've already heard their names in that reading from Romans 16. They are...

Priscilla and Aquila

- Paul left Athens where he was in our talk last week and he has moved on to Corinth. Some think that the original language here indicates that Paul may have been asked to leave Athens. That's beside the point, because no matter where Paul went it was as God's direction and because he NEVER stopped ministering.
- From our study of Corinth a few years ago you might remember that it was a sinful city even by the immoral standards of the Roman Empire. It spanned a six mile wide isthmus and was literally a crossroads of commerce with two harbors, one was on the Aegean and the other on the Adriatic. To act like a Corinthian was to infer that you had very loose morals and to have a Corinthian girlfriend, was to imply that you had a prostitute as a mistress. It was a horribly sinful place which made it a perfect place to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Still, Paul's work was cut out for him as he arrived there.
- Paul was a networker. We know this because we find out right away in verse two that he quickly found a fellow Jew named Aquila and his wife named Priscilla. They were there in Corinth Jews had been made to

feel very unwelcome in Rome with their frequent bickering and rioting, though its obvious that Aquila and Priscilla were not this way and it

- It's likely they were Christ Followers when Paul discovered them, but they were also tent maker/leather workers which was also Paul's vocation. As a rabbi, Paul had been required to have a trade since rabbis were bi-vocational. This was not a nice and convenient coincidence; it was a divine appointment.
- I can imagine as they worked whether it was sewing heavy cloth into tents or crafting saddles, that they bounced theology and scripture off each other that prepared them for when they went to the synagogues on Sabbath. Paul was sharpened by these friends and they were by him as they worked together.
- We will look at Priscilla and Aquila again before I finish out this message, but I want to move on to some other friends who show up and reveal the strength that there is in numbers.

Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia

- We were introduced to Silas and Timothy back in Acts 15 and 16. Silas was Paul's co-missionary after his falling-out with Barnabas. He wasn't just a hanger-on – he was a colleague who faced the same dangers and sorrow that ministry with the trouble magnet, Paul, could be. It takes a special man to sing hymns, at midnight, in prison.
- Timothy was a young protege whom Paul considered a spiritual son, and he and Silas had been traveling elsewhere and they probably arrived with some much needed finances that helped Paul to dedicate more to the preaching of the Word. Not only did these colleagues in the ministry of the Gospel come to help him to share the Good News, but they also helped him materially as they freed him up for expanded capacity for ministry.
- In that same passage, we see . . .

Titius Justus and Crispus

- Both were courageous men who went against the grain of both the Jewish leadership and Corinthian populace – they were Christ followers. Titius was a Roman who saw Jesus for who he really was. Crispus was the ruler of the synagogue, but he also knew that Jesus was the Messiah. These influential men were Paul's fellow ministers.
- With the strength of Titius Justus and the power of the vision that God would be with him, Paul boldly taught the word of God.
- When Paul moved on from Corinth, his close friends, Priscilla and Aquila, traveled with him. As he traveled, eventually to Jerusalem, he trusted their ministry enough to leave them in Ephesus to continue the planting of a church there.
- All along the way the text tells us that Paul traveled along strengthening all the disciples. He brought blessing no matter where he went. How did he strengthen the disciples? He encouraged them, he taught them the deep truths of the scripture. And, most of all, he modelled to them the power of holy boldness. Paul encouraged them, and they encouraged Paul.
- Finally, we meet . . .

Apollos

- One commentator describes Apollos as a rockstar. But that's probably going too far in this day and age of mega church preachers who latch on to their celebrity and it becomes a very dangerous thing. I prefer to think of Apollos a man who was deeply in tune with the Holy Spirit.
- He was a rockstar in that he was a very good preacher. People loved to come and hear him because he was very clear in what he said and so they easily the Good News as he accurately taught the things of Jesus as we read in verse 25.
- Aquila and Priscilla were in the synagogue when he spoke Ephesus. They were impressed with his passion and knowledge, but in their wisdom, they were concerned that it wasn't complete. Now, sometimes jealousy or simply a lack of decorum might cause someone to publicly call out another for their faulty ministry, but this is rude and it's wrong. This is not what Aquila and Priscilla did. Instead, with great sensitivity, they took Apollos aside, and as our text describes it, they explained to him the way of God more accurately.
- I love their heart and I love the open and receptive heart of this dynamic young preacher. It was a win all around and it demonstrated the strength in numbers.

- Next, notice that when Apollos wanted to move on to preach the good news in Achaia - our text tells us that the brothers in Ephesus encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to receive him and welcome him. When he arrived, he carried a letter of reference that was glowing and it enabled Apollos to minister more powerfully to the believers there. The strength of numbers came through.

Conclusion: Acts 18 is a picture of how we need one another. It's a reminder of how we must work together and to encourage one another. When we see something that is deficient or something that needs improvement in the lives of another, we gently call one another aside to build them up and when we get that kind of correction, we graciously receive it AND apply it.

There is great strength in numbers so let's live it. Amen