

## A Mighty Messenger

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Turning the World Upside Down / Preaching; Power; Prelude; Preacher; A Messenger;  
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Acts 18:18-28 shows us how God prepares a mighty messenger.

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## Introduction

John Chrysostom was born in Syrian Antioch in about 347 AD.

His mother, Anthusa, was widowed at the age of twenty. She refused to remarry so as to devote herself to John's education.

John studied the Greek classics and rhetoric.

For a time, John practiced law, but he became a monk after his conversion and baptism in 368 AD.

After Anthusa's death, John practiced a severe ascetic life.

During this time, he spent two years living in a cave in a mountain near Antioch, where he dedicated himself to memorizing the entire Bible.

Finally, ill health forced him to abandon his lifestyle as a hermit.

John was ordained to the ministry in 386 AD.

He was a powerful preacher of God's word in Antioch for the next dozen years.

During this time, he was nicknamed "Chrysostom," which means "golden-mouthed," because of his powerful preaching.

He became the archbishop of Constantinople in 398 AD after being forcibly kidnapped and installed as the patriarch.

Because of his preaching, John was eventually banished on treason charges in 404 AD.

John Chrysostom died in exile in 407 AD at about 60.

The apostle Paul's home church was in the same town as John Chrysostom's birthplace, Syrian Antioch.

I don't know where the church met in Paul's day.

Did they meet in a home?

Did they meet in a church building?

Did John Chrysostom preach in that same facility about three and a half centuries after the church sent Paul off on three missionary journeys?

I don't know.

What I do know is that God raises mighty messengers of his truth all the time.

Just as he raised John Chrysostom to be a mighty messenger, he also raised a man named Apollos to be a mighty messenger some three and a half centuries earlier.

Today, we will see how God raised a mighty messenger for ministry.

## Scripture

Let's read [Acts 18:18-28](#):

**<sup>18</sup> After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. <sup>19</sup> And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. <sup>20</sup> When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. <sup>21</sup> But on taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills," and he set sail from Ephesus.**

**<sup>22</sup> When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.**

**<sup>24</sup> Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup> He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke**

and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. <sup>26</sup> He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. <sup>27</sup> And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, <sup>28</sup> for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

## Lesson

[Acts 18:18-28](#) shows us how God prepares a mighty messenger.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Purposeful Prelude (18:18-23)
2. Teachable Temperament (18:24-26)
3. Effective Evangelist (18:27-28)

### I. Purposeful Prelude (18:18-23)

First, God prepares a mighty messenger with a purposeful prelude.

On his second missionary journey, Paul spent eighteen months of fruitful ministry in the city of Corinth.

Then we read in verse 18a, **“After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila.”**

Paul decided to return to his home church in Syrian Antioch and give them a missionary report about what God had done.

Priscilla and Aquila accompanied him on this journey to Antioch.

In verse 18b, we read, **“At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.”**

Scholars are not sure what vow Paul took.

Some speculate that it was a Nazirite vow. Perhaps it was.

Whatever the vow, Paul cut his hair at Cenchreae, about 7 miles east of Corinth.

Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila sailed from Cenchreae to Ephesus.

When they arrived in Ephesus, Paul visited the synagogue, as was his custom, to share the gospel with the Jews there.

Paul received a much more welcoming response from the Ephesian Jews than the Corinthian Jews because they asked him to stay longer, but he declined.

However, he told them, “ **‘I will return to you if God wills,’ and he set sail from Ephesus**” (v. 21b).

Paul sailed from Ephesus to Caesarea by himself.

He left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, presumably to keep teaching the truth about Jesus to the Jews who were open to learning more about the gospel.

When Paul landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the dear brothers and sisters in the Jerusalem Church.

Then, he returned to his home church in Syrian Antioch.

He gave them a report on all God had done in the previous two and a half years.

The Antioch Church must have been encouraged.

They had prayed for Paul.

They had supported Paul.

Now, they could learn how God used their prayers and support to advance the gospel in other parts of the world.

Friends, that is why we pray for and support our missionaries.

God is using them in their respective fields to advance the good news that Jesus is alive and changing lives.

Luke then writes about Paul in verse 23, “**After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.**”

This is now the start of Paul's third missionary journey.

This journey will last about five years.

Commentator James Montgomery Boice asks, “Why isn’t the division between these two great efforts by Paul more clearly marked?”

He answers his question as follows:

The reason, I think, is that Luke’s interest shifts from the journeys themselves to the establishing of the very solid church at Ephesus. At the end of the second journey, which we are dealing with now, Paul passed through Ephesus (though briefly) and met with some success. Therefore, on the third journey he returned to Ephesus again and spent two years there. This period of service became the longest period of ministry in any place Paul visited (James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expositional Commentary* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997], 312).

Before Paul arrived back in Ephesus, we learn how God prepares a mighty messenger for ministry.

## **II. Teachable Temperament (18:24-26)**

Second, God prepares a mighty messenger with a teachable temperament.

In verse 24a, we read, **“Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus.”**

Alexandria was in Egypt.

Alexandria, like Athens, was a center of learning. Its library, which contained as many as 700,000 books, was one of the great libraries of the ancient world.

Alexandria was the city of Philo, the famous Jewish philosopher.

Alexandria was a multicultural city, with a large Jewish population that comprised perhaps one-third of the city’s population.

The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures) was translated in Alexandria about three hundred years earlier.

Some scholars speculate that Apollos knew Philo and had perhaps even studied under him. But there is no evidence to support this speculation.

Luke tells us six facts about Apollos.

First, Apollos **“was an eloquent man”**(v. 24b).

He communicated clearly and effectively.

He was a master communicator.

Today, men like Sinclair Ferguson, Robert Godfrey, and Derek Thomas are eloquent.

Second, Apollos was **“competent in the Scriptures”** (v. 24c).

Apollos knew the Old Testament, the Scriptures he had at the time.

He knew nothing of the New Testament, which was being written at the time.

Nevertheless, Apollos had undoubtedly seriously studied the Old Testament and was extremely knowledgeable about it.

Apollos was probably the Bible Bee champion of Alexandria!

Third, Apollos **“had been instructed in the way of the Lord”** (v. 25a).

Since the “Lord” refers to Yahweh in the Old Testament, Apollos knew about God and his covenantal dealings with his people.

Alexandria had a colossal synagogue, and it is entirely possible that Apollos was diligent in learning as much as he could about Yahweh and his ways.

Fourth, Apollos was **“fervent in spirit”** (v. 25b).

He spoke with energy and conviction.

His delivery was not dull; it was animated.

He believed what he was talking about, and people could not help but pay attention to him.

George Whitefield (1714-1770) was an extraordinarily gifted preacher and the spark of the Great Awakening.

Thousands of people used to flock to hear him preach.

He was also “fervent in spirit.”

The story goes that when someone fell asleep during one of his sermons, Whitefield exclaimed loudly, “I must be heard, and I will be heard!”

Fifth, Apollos “**spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus**” (v. 25c).

How did Apollos know about Jesus?

Apollos had likely learned about John the Baptist.

He had learned that John taught a baptism of repentance, which is what Luke tells us about Apollos in verse 25c, “**though he knew only the baptism of John.**”

In other words, Apollos knew about God’s plan of redemption up to and including the ministry of John the Baptist.

But he did not know that John had announced Jesus, the Christ, had already come.

Apollos understood that the Christ proclaimed in the Old Testament was about to come, but he did not realize that Christ had, in fact, already come and completed his earthly mission.

I think that this is the right way to understand this fact about Apollos because of what we will soon learn about Priscilla and Aquila’s interaction with Apollos.

And sixth, Apollos “**began to speak boldly in the synagogue**” (v. 26a).

Apollos spoke boldly and eloquently about the Christ foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures.

He wanted the Jews in the synagogue to embrace the Christ he thought was about to come.

It is at this point that Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos speak.

They were impressed with his knowledge of the Scriptures.

They were also impressed with his eloquence.

But they knew he was deficient in understanding the whole truth about Jesus.

What should they have done with Apollos?

Should Apollos have been rebuked?

Opposed?

Refuted?

Luke tells us what they did in verse 26b, “**..., but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.**”

James Montgomery Boice gives an excellent illustration of a similar situation in church history. He writes:

At the time of the Reformation in England there was a man just like Apollos whose name was Hugh Latimer (1490–1555). He was a very learned man. He had a thorough knowledge of the Bible and could speak with eloquence. He even had considerable influence in the church because he was a bishop. Latimer was eventually martyred for his faith by being burnt at the stake along with Nicholas Ridley. This was the occasion on which he spoke those heroic words that are so often quoted in church history courses: “Be brave, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day, by the grace of God, light such a candle in England as, I trust, shall never be put out.” That was the dying testimony of Hugh Latimer.

However, at the time when the following story took place Latimer was not yet a Christian, though he was in the church and knew the Scriptures well. He knew Jesus Christ; that is, he knew who Jesus was and much about him. But he did not know what it was to be born again. He did not know the gospel. Like many in his day, he thought that the way to get to heaven was by good works.

There was a young monk who knew Latimer and admired him. This monk was known as “Little Bilney” because he was short. He did not have much education. No one thought very much of him. But Bilney was converted, and he wondered how it might be possible for him to bring the gospel to Hugh Latimer. Bilney thought that Latimer would be a tremendous force for the Reformation in England if he could just hear the gospel. So Bilney prayed about this and finally hit upon an idea.

Priests were required to hear those who wanted to confess their sins. So one day when Latimer was serving in the church, Bilney went up to him, tugged at his sleeve, and asked Latimer to hear his confession. Latimer said he would. So they went into the confessional, and Bilney confessed the gospel to him.



He told how he was a sinner, how he was unable to save himself by his own good works, how Jesus had died for him, and how now, by faith, the righteousness of Jesus had been imputed to him apart from good works. That is what he confessed to Hugh Latimer, and in that way Latimer heard the gospel for the very first time and was converted. It was an important moment in the English Reformation (James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expositional Commentary* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997], 316).

Something like this happened with Apollos.

Priscilla and Aquila heard him speaking about Jesus.

But they knew that he did not fully understand the gospel.

So, they invited him to dinner and explained to Apollos the way of God more accurately.

This is where we see the teachable temperament of Apollos.

He did not say he was far more learned than Priscilla and Aquila.

He was not offended that they corrected his inadequate understanding of biblical truth.

He received the word of God humbly, believed it and his life was transformed by it.

Let me encourage you to learn the way of God more accurately.

You may be a Christian.

You may already be knowledgeable about Biblical truths.

But every one of us has more to learn.

So, attend an Adult Bible Fellowship on Sundays.

Or attend a Men's Bible Study or a Women's Bible Study.

Develop a teachable temperament so that you can be a mighty messenger for God.

### III. Effective Evangelist (18:27-28)

Finally, God prepares a mighty messenger to be an effective evangelist.

I want to draw your attention to the three results of Apollos' complete gospel understanding.

First, Apollos wanted to proclaim the good news.

Luke says that Apollos **“wished to cross to Achaia”** (v. 27a).

That is, Apollos wanted to go to Corinth.

He wanted to tell lost people about the way of salvation and encourage them to trust in Jesus.

Apollos did not need to be begged to serve.

No. His desire was to be actively involved in spreading the gospel.

Second, Apollos was endorsed by the church.

Luke writes, **“The brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him”** (v. 27b).

The Ephesian Church wrote a letter of introduction for Apollos to the Corinthian Church.

They wanted to assure their fellow believers in Corinth that Apollos was not a self-appointed lone ranger.

He was credentialed, as it were.

He was affirmed and sent by the Ephesian Church.

And third, Apollos was a mighty messenger.

He was active on two fronts.

Luke says in verse 27b, **“When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed.”**

Because Apollos now had a clear understanding of the gospel, he was effective in discipling the young believers in their faith in Jesus.

In addition, Apollos was skilled in apologetics, as Luke writes in verse 28, “... **for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.**”

Apollos was able to answer any question that came his way about Jesus because he had just recently learned that the Christ was Jesus.

## Conclusion

R. T. Kendall was the pastor of Westminster Chapel in London from 1977 to 2002.

This is the same church that Martyn Lloyd-Jones served from 1939 to 1968.

R. T. Kendall was recently asked, “You have been in ministry for 70 years. What would you say to the young R. T. Kendall?”

Kendall replied, “I realize that I have several degrees. I would say to young ministers today, ‘I would not recommend seminary.’ I think of [Acts 4:13](#), when the Sadducees saw the boldness of Peter and John, they were amazed. They noticed that they were uneducated, but they had been with Jesus. My advice to anybody is two things: know your Bible and pray a lot.”

I am not as opposed to seminary as R. T. Kendall.

But I think he is on the mark when he says, “Know your Bible and pray a lot.”

Apollos knew his Bible. Admittedly, he had an incomplete understanding, but Priscilla and Aquila helped him fully understand.

He became a mighty messenger for God.

You can also become a mighty messenger for God.

I encourage you to know your Bible and pray a lot.

You will find that God will use you to help others recognize Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Amen.