



## 22. 'Stretching the Kingdom'

Acts 18.<sup>18-28</sup>

### Background

Sometimes the book of Acts can read a bit like a travel brochure: interesting, certainly, but it can leave us wondering what we're to make of it all and what lessons we can learn from it.

The story being recounted by Luke in Acts is the remarkable story of the growth of the church – the way in which Jesus built and continues to build His church: and while it was always through the power of the Holy Spirit, He uses *means* – and it's those 'means' to which this passage here is pointing us.

In the hymn, '*Jesus shall reign*', we sing the line, *His kingdom stretch from shore to shore ...* And it's certainly that 'stretching' of the kingdom which we're witnessing through the book of Acts – that's partly the reason for the geographic references, and why it can be valuable to get a map out and track the progress of the gospel in terms of its geographic spread.

But the 'stretching' involved is the stretching of the individual believers, that which sees the church growing not only numerically and geographically, but spiritually also. In some respects what we're seeing in this passage is the 'cycle' which we adopt as our acronym here (appropriately 'ACTS'). People being **attracted** to Jesus in the first instance: the faith of such new believers being carefully **consolidated** through their being disciplined by others: such believers then being **trained** for ministry themselves: and all with a view to their being then **sent** out in the service of the gospel – in such a manner that others are attracted to Jesus ... And so the cycle goes on!

It's that pattern which is very much in evidence here in what may seem a rather 'bitty' passage: the 'stretching' of new believers, whereby they grow in their walk with the Lord and themselves are increasingly enabled to serve the Lord fruitfully in the cause of the gospel.

The message on Sunday morning will draw this out, and highlight graphically how this 'cycle' of stretching and growth is well illustrated in the narrative which Luke has given us here. It's a helpful reminder to us of why we do what we do: and a reminder, too, that this 'cycle' of growth is not a case of our simply going round in circles(!) – anything but! It's much more akin to the 'spiralling' nature of the consistent way in which God works (witness Gen.1).

## 1) Monday 31<sup>st</sup> July – stay the course!

Read [Acts 18.18](#)

*“.. Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time ..”* (Acts 18.18)

Despite the efforts of opponents to be rid of him (vv.12-17), Paul remained in Corinth for a good 18 months. There was much to do! Discipling new believers who’d brought baggage by the barrowload with them takes time. Serving the Lord requires stamina!

Do you give up too easily on people when you see little response?

How faithful have you been in keeping vows which you’ve made before God?

**Prayer:** *Grant me daily strength in serving You, my Lord: help me to fulfil the vows I’ve made before Yourself, and to honour the commitments that I make to other people*

## 2) Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> August – sow the Word!

Read [Acts 18.19-21](#)

*“.. he promised, ‘I will come back if it is God’s will’ ..”* (Acts 18.21)

‘Great oaks from little acorns grow.’ No church in the NT figures more largely than the church at Ephesus, and this first fleeting visit by Paul was the ‘little acorn’ from which something big would grow. A sizeable harvest begins with the sowing of small seeds.

How were the seeds of the gospel first sown in your life?

Is God prompting you through these verses to return a call or a visit to someone you said you’d be in touch with again?

**Prayer:** *Thank You, Lord, for those who first sowed the seeds of gospel truth in my life: may that seed bear good fruit in all that I do and say today.*

## 3) Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> August – keep in touch!

Read [Acts 18.22-23](#)

*“.. he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church ..”* (Acts 18.22)

Paul wore many hats! Apostle and evangelist: but a pastor as well. There were people he needed to see, brothers and sisters to keep informed, believers, both old and new, to be strengthened and encouraged. The effort involved in such ministry is worth it!

**What does it mean to be ‘strengthened’ like this (see also, for instance, [Acts 14.21-22](#))?**

Who are the people who have most strengthened you in your faith, and how have they done that?

Are there people with whom today's verses prompt you to be back in touch?

*Prayer: Lord, may my words and deeds throughout today serve to strengthen the hearts of those I'm with and deepen their trust and confidence in You.*

#### **4) Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> August – grow in grace!**

Read [Acts 18.24-25](#)

*".. though he knew only the baptism of John .." (Acts 18.25)*

Even the most able are always at best no more than a work in progress. Apollos was a case in point. He got the gospel all right, but his focus on repentance ('the baptism of John') meant he knew little of the renewing and liberating work of the Spirit of God.

How thorough is your knowledge of the Scriptures and how might that be improved?

Read [2 Pet.1.5-8](#): in what areas mentioned here do you see there is most need for growth?

*Prayer: Keep me from any complacency, Lord, in my grasp of Your truth: give me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word which will sustain the weary ([Is.50.4](#))*

#### **5) Friday 4<sup>th</sup> August – grace and truth**

Read [Acts 18.26](#)

*".. they invited him to their home .." (Acts 18.26)*

Priscilla and Aquila were wise, mature believers. No public dressing down of the man. No hard-line rebuttal of the guy's doctrinal stance. Instead, they quietly took him aside, welcomed him into their home, and helped him gain a greater gospel clarity.

Have there been older believers, like Priscilla and Aquila, who welcomed you into their hearts and homes and helped you grow in your understanding?

Are there those to whom you may be able to afford the sort of hospitality and ministry displayed by Priscilla and Aquila?

*Prayer: How grateful I am, O Lord, for the patience shown towards me by those who gently and wisely bore with my faults and graciously corrected my wayward thinking.*

#### **6) Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> August – help the saints**

Read [Acts 18.27](#)

*".. he was a great help to those who by grace had believed .." (Acts 18.27)*

Having himself been helped by Ephesian mentors, and sent with a warm, hand-written commendation under his arm, Apollos in turn was able to help the new believers in Corinth. The helped become in time the helpers. Encouraged we become encouragers.

Paul wrote that while he had 'planted the seed, Apollos watered it' (1 Cor.3.6): what might that 'watering' of the seed have comprised in Apollos' ministry?

In what ways may you be able to 'help those who by grace (have) believed'?

**Prayer:** *Lord, keep my mouth from all unwholesome talk: instead may all I say prove helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may truly benefit them.*

## 7) Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> August – loose the lion!

Read [Acts 18.28](#)

*".. proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah .." (Acts 18.28)*

Our Jesus-centred gospel is far from being some airy-fairy message which obliges folk to bin their mental faculties! It's a message robust enough to stand against all scrutiny: and a message so coherent that you would have to be blind not to see it!

What does Luke mean when he writes here about Apollos '**proving** from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah'?

How would you go about helping a friend to see from the Scriptures that Jesus is indeed the promised Christ?

**Prayer:** *Anoint by Your Spirit the preaching of Your Word today, O Lord, that the hearts of all who hear Your Word may be drawn out in faith to a deepening trust in Jesus.*