

“The Disciples at Ephesus”
(Acts 19:1-7)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we were introduced to Apollos.
 - a. Apollos is like a NT George Whitefield.
 - (i) A man mighty in the Scriptures.
 - (ii) One who spoke eloquently, skillfully.
 - (iii) Who was fervent in spirit, speaking boldly for the cause of Christ.
 - (iv) He was one the Lord prepared and equipped for the Gospel ministry.
 - (v) He seems like a juggernaut, moving forward with great energy, sweeping away all the opposition by force of argument.
 - b. But he was not without his faults:
 - (i) He knew the Scriptures, but not as well as he might.
 - (ii) He could speak and teach accurately about Jesus.
 - (iii) But his knowledge was limited to the baptism of John.
 - (iv) He still had a great deal to learn.
 - c. Thankfully, it was not the Lord’s will to keep him in the dark, but to make this mighty man even mightier in the Scriptures.
 - (i) When Aquila and Priscilla heard him and recognized his deficiency, they took him aside privately and began to instruct him.
 - (ii) Apparently, pride was not one of Apollos’ weaknesses – he had the heart of a disciple – and so he received their instruction.
 - (iii) As Solomon writes in the Proverbs, “Give *instruction* to a wise man and he will be still wiser, teach a righteous man and he will increase *his* learning” (Prov. 9:9).
 - (iv) Aquila and Priscilla were ready to teach, and Apollos had the wisdom to receive.
2. Armed with a more accurate understanding of the Gospel, Apollos then set his sights on Corinth.
 - a. The brethren, seeing his usefulness, encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to welcome him.
 - b. And when he arrived, he greatly helped the church by powerfully refuting the Jews in public, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

B. Preview.

1. This morning, we see Paul’s return to Ephesus.
 - a. He told them on his last short visit that he would return if God willed (18:21). God not only willed this, but also a time of great harvest.
 - b. Here we see its humble beginnings with twelve men.

2. In our passage, we see at least five things the Spirit is showing us:
 - a. First, that we should see the church as one body striving together for the progress of the Gospel: Paul built on Apollos' foundation and Apollos on Paul's.
 - b. Second, that we should be concerned for the spiritual wellbeing of others in the body of Christ that they might advance Christ's cause: Paul encountered twelve disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus and asked them if they had received the spiritual empowering of the Holy Spirit.
 - c. Third, that we should be ready to correct and instruct others when we see they are deficient in their understanding of the fundamentals of the faith: Paul recognized their lack of understanding and taught them more accurately about Jesus Christ.
 - d. Fourth, that we should have a teachable and submissive spirit to the Word of God: When the disciples heard the truth, they immediately received it and did what God required.
 - e. Finally, we see the necessity of the Spirit's ministry to equip us for work in the kingdom: When the disciples had been baptized, Paul laid hands on them and they received the empowering of the Spirit.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, we should see the church as one body striving together for the progress of the Gospel: "It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples" (Acts 19:1).
 1. While Apollos was still at Corinth, Paul had made his way back to Ephesus.
 - a. He was coming now to labor in an area where ground had been broken.
 - (i) He had done some ground breaking; when he left, Aquila and Priscilla were still there working; and finally Apollos came and labored.
 - (ii) It appears from this text that John the Baptist's ministry also had reached Ephesus.
 - (iii) Paul didn't avoid it for that reason, but used this to his advantage, as we'll see.
 - b. And Apollos was at Corinth, laboring where Paul had been earlier.
 - (i) Again, he didn't avoid Corinth for that reason, but used Paul's ministry there to his advantage, building on that foundation.
 - (ii) Neither man resented the others' work, but welcomed it.
 2. Sometimes we tend to resent what each other is doing for the Lord, or what other Christians do either because it's not the way we would do it or we feel threatened by them.
 - a. We should never be offended by the work done by others: the work is so great and the labors are so few – we need each other; we need more workers.
 - b. Remember as well that the Lord is more apt to use those who are willing to work, though imperfectly, than those who can work more accurately, but who do little or none.
 - c. Anecdote: D. L. Moody was once criticized by someone who told him that he didn't like the way he evangelized. Moody asked the man what he did. When the man sheepishly replied that he didn't, Moody said, "I like the evangelism I'm doing more than the evangelism you're not doing."

- d. Of course, everyone's Gospel presentation will be flawed in some way, some will miss the truth altogether; but if the fundamentals are there in our brethren's message, we shouldn't complain, but thank God. We should see ourselves as fellow workers and not adversaries.
 - e. We should also do our best to press forward, consider too that we won't know what effect our efforts will have until Judgment Day: perhaps it will continue to spread and grow as John's had done.
- B. Second, we should be concerned for the spiritual wellbeing of others in the body of Christ, especially with the advancement of Christ's glory in view: "He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they *said* to him, 'No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit'" (v. 2).
- 1. When he arrived, he found twelve disciples who did not have the Spirit (v. 7).
 - a. He noticed from speaking with them that their understanding was very basic. They were still in the foundational school of Christianity. Apparently, they hadn't run into Aquila and Priscilla, as Apollos had done.
 - b. He asked them whether they had received the Spirit – perhaps this was a question Paul asked to see if they had been properly taught, or perhaps he suspected this was the case from his conversation with them, or maybe he noticed something lacking in them (*e.g.*, holy zeal).
 - c. He must have found some deficiency since he asked this question.
 - d. Their answer showed he was right: They had not, nor had they even heard that there was a Spirit.
 - (i) They might have been Gentile converts with no OT background, or they might have been Jews acquainted with the OT and the promise of the coming Spirit, who had not heard He had come.
 - (ii) In any event, they hadn't received Him, and since He had been poured out by Jesus to empower His church for service, the fact they didn't have Him presented a problem that needed to be overcome.
 - (iii) If these men were to glorify Christ and be useful to Him, Paul needed to inquire more deeply into the problem.
 - 2. We should inquire into our own lives and the lives of our brethren, why we don't have more of the Spirit than we do.
 - a. We shouldn't be looking for the Charismatic gifts, such as speaking in tongues, which we'll see follows in our text; but we should be looking for the love, power and zeal He gives – that's how we can know we have Him and are filled with Him.
 - b. And when we find other "professing" Christians who lack these things, or who are spending their lives chasing the charismatic gifts, we should do what we can to get them on the right path.
 - c. In doing this, we'll not only be helping them, but we'll be helping the kingdom to advance.
- C. Third, we should be ready to correct and instruct others when we see they are deficient in their understanding in the fundamentals of the faith: "And he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' And they said, 'Into John's baptism.' Paul said, 'John baptized with the

baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus” (vv. 3-4).

1. When Paul saw that they didn't understand, he catechized them, much like Aquila and Priscilla did with Apollos.
 - a. When they replied that they had not heard whether there was a Holy Spirit, Paul asked into what they were baptized.
 - (i) If they had been baptized in the name of Jesus – that is, the baptism He commissioned – it would have been Trinitarian (Matt. 28:18-20), in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
 - (ii) They would have know who the Spirit is – God, the Spirit.
 - (iii) They would possibly have known something of His work: baptism, remember, is a visible sign of what the Spirit does in applying Christ to us – “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).
 - b. They said they had been baptized into John's baptism.
 - (i) When did this happen? Apollos may have done this. However, if they had been converted by Apollos, they would have known more about Jesus and possibly the Spirit, especially when we consider that these men were in need of baptism, whereas Apollos apparently wasn't.
 - (ii) Perhaps they had come into contact with an earlier disciple of John, one who left before Jesus had presented Himself to John.
 - (iii) They appeared to know only some of the things John had taught, but were sadly deficient in their understanding about Christ.
 - c. Paul took hold of what they knew and began to build on it: “Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus” (v. 4).
 - (i) John's whole purpose was to point to Jesus Christ. His baptism of repentance was to get the people ready for the One who was coming. After He came, John was to decrease while Jesus increased (John 3:30).
 - (ii) Paul owns John's ministry as sent from God. But it wasn't enough: they needed to know about Jesus – and so he tells them.
 2. Again, we see the importance, as we did last week, of using what a person knows and taking them to the next level.
 - a. We might not know everything that can be known about the Gospel.
 - b. But if we know something helpful – especially foundational truths – that others are ignorant of, we can and should help them, if they're willing to receive it from us.
- D. Fourth, we see that they were open to learning, showing us the importance of having a teachable and submissive spirit to the Word of God: “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (v. 5).

1. When Paul was finished, and they realized that they were still living in the light God gave to prepare them, rather than in the reality itself, they immediately received Jesus and were baptized into His name. They received that knowledge and acted on it.
 2. In the same way, Christ calls us to grow in knowledge and obedience.
 - a. We show that we have a new heart when we move from our former ignorance and sin into the paths of truth and holiness.
 - b. We should always be ready and willing to learn, and then immediately put into practice what we've learned.
- E. Finally, we see the necessity of the Spirit's ministry to equip us for work in the kingdom: "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they *began* speaking with tongues and prophesying. There were in all about twelve men" (vv. 6-7).
1. When Paul laid his hands on them, they received the empowering of the Spirit – evidenced by their speaking with tongues and prophesying.
 - a. The laying on of hands was often used in the OT to show conferral of something to something or someone else, such as when Jacob laid his hands on Ephraim and Manasseh to confer God's promise to them (Gen. 48:14), or when Moses laid his hands on Joshua to set him aside as Israel's leader (Num. 27:23), and in the NT to show again the conferring of office and of the Holy Spirit to anoint them for service.
 - b. In this case, it was to confer the Holy Spirit.
 - (i) This would not only tie the recipients to the one church at Jerusalem – though Paul was headquartered at Antioch, we still see his involvement with the Jewish Church – but equip them with power to serve the Lord.
 - (ii) Some believe that these men became the first elders of Ephesus and those Paul will later call to himself while at Miletus (20:17); the Spirit's coming on them was to equip them for that office.
 - (iii) If this was true, they didn't receive the office then, since it is not to be entrusted to a novice.
 - (iv) Paul will spend at least another 2 years and three months in Ephesus before he moves on (vv. 8-10); this may have been the time in which they were discipled.
 - (v) But here they received the most important element of that call: they were filled with the Spirit and empowered for ministry.
 2. We should be concerned not only that others receive the Spirit, but that we ourselves are filled with Him as well.
 - a. Jesus said, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5).
 - b. However, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13) – Christ strengthens us by His Spirit indwelling us.
 - c. And so as Paul tells us, "Do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). If you are, you will be more useful to Him.
 - d. Let's look for this blessing now as we prepare to come to the Table. Amen.