

Priscilla & Aquila (Part 1)

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[0 : 0 0] For a short while I'd like us to turn back to the chapter that we read in the book of Acts, Acts chapter 18 and we can read again at verse 1 to 3.

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth and he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome and he went to see them and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked for they were tent makers by trade.

Now as we begin the service I'm going to give a wee bit word of explanation because I'm changing our plans ever so slightly. On the bulletin I had intended tonight when I sent the bulletin for printing that we would finish off a study of how the Bible fits together this evening but I would rather leave that service until out in house communion at the beginning of December and as it so happens we're going to spend a wee bit of time this morning in Acts chapter 18 but really rather than rushing it we're going to split it into two so we're going to look at part one this morning and we're going to look at part two this evening because this is a great chapter and it's got lots to teach us so my apologies for the change to the bulletin but I'm sure that you'll forgive me for that change.

Now when we read in the New Testament we read a lot of big names don't we? When you think of the New Testament you think who are the big names in the New Testament? Immediately the names come to mind like Paul and Peter, Luke, John, people like that all these big names people who wrote books, people who did great things, people who seemed to be super Christians, they seemed amazing, they seemed to be so prominent and so these names come to mind the big names of the New Testament but when we actually read through the books of the New Testament we see that there is also a constant stream of ordinary people who are mentioned. When you look through Acts, when you look through the letters again and again and again lots and lots of ordinary people are mentioned and a great passage to illustrate that is at the end of Romans and I'm going to read it. This is a long, long list of Paul greeting people and we'll just read it together verses 3 to 15. So this is

Paul at the end of his letter. Greet Prisca and Aquila. I know that's Priscilla, the same people in this chapter, same woman in this chapter. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epanettus who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. Greet Mary who has worked hard for you. Greet Adronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and fellow prisoners.

[3 : 0 7] They are well known to the apostles and they were in Christ before me. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ and my beloved Stachis.

Greet Apeles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristopolis. Greet my kinsmen Herodian. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus.

Greet those workers in the Lord, Triphena and Trifosa. Greet the beloved Persus who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus chosen in the Lord. Also his mother who has been a mother to me as well. Greet Asyncritus, Flaetjean, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers who are with him. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and Assisted and Olympus and all the saints who are with them. Now, one of the brilliant things about a list like that is that we don't know who most of the people are. Virtually everybody in that list are unknown apart from what is mentioned about them here. And I love that because it's a reminder that they were ordinary people. They weren't big names. They weren't people whose names were going to spread across all the ages of history that came after the first century. They were simply ordinary people. But they were special and they were crucial to the life of the church. And it's a reminder that one of the wonderful things about the

Christian church is that it is not elitist. The Christian church is not elitist. And that was one of the amazingly powerful things about it in the New Testament age because for the first time you had a place where a slave and a governor could sit side by side and worship together, where men and women and children were all equal. That's why you have this emphasis constantly in the New Testament. Doesn't matter if you're slave or free, male or female, Greek or Jew, whatever you are, because we are all equal. In fact, the church is the greatest beacon of inclusion and equality that the world has ever seen. It's full of ordinary people just like us. And today I want us to look at two of these ordinary names that we read of in the New Testament. And as you can see from the bulletin, these are Priscilla and Aquila. Now we're introduced to them for the first time in Acts chapter 18 at the beginning. After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth and he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla because

Claudius, who was the emperor, had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. So we have this married couple, Aquila and his wife Priscilla. Now we see all these names, we see all these places. It's sometimes good to just see exactly where they were so we can picture what's going on. So I hope you can see that quite clearly. It tells us in Acts 18 that Aquila was born in Pontus. Now can you see Pontus? Have a good look. Can you find it? Show them Tixie. There you go. There's Pontus, way over there on the south coast of the Black Sea.

[6 : 43] So that's where Aquila was born. However, it tells us that he had been living in Rome, which is way over there. So he had obviously travelled at some point in his life from where he was born over to Rome. Now it is possibly that that is where he met his wife Priscilla.

She may well have been from Rome and there's suggestions that her name indicates that kind of origin, but we can't be completely sure. But we do know that Aquila was born in Pontus and that he and his wife Priscilla had been living in Rome. But the emperor Claudius, who reigned from 41 to 54, expelled all the Jews from Rome. And that was probably in AD 49 and it's mentioned by the Roman historian, Stutonium, who indicates that it seems to be something to do with Christians, something to do with Christ. So it may well be that the Gospel had come to the Jews in Rome and some of them, like Priscilla and Aquila, believed, but maybe others were opposing the Gospel and maybe there was conflict, maybe there was difficulties. We don't know for certain, but what we do know is that the emperor said every Jew has to leave Rome. So they were expelled. And because of that expulsion, they come to Corinth, which is there, just sort of to the west of Athens on that really narrow bit in Greece. So here we have a Christian couple in the early church, in many ways very, very ordinary, but at the same time, very, very special. And so I want us just to look at them today and to look at how God used them and also to look at what we can learn from them. And we're going to focus on three things, their work, their home and their marriage.

And as I said, we won't get through them all this morning. So we'll look at their work this morning and then we'll pick up again this evening to finish things off. So what do we learn about Priscilla and Aquila's work? Well, the really interesting thing about Acts chapter 18 at the beginning is that it tells us that Paul met these people when he came from Athens. He left Athens, went to Corinth, he found a Jew named Aquila, and the place where they met was through their work. Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome, he went to see them and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked for their tent makers by trade. And here we see the amazing providence of God because Priscilla and Aquila have just come from the west, from Rome. And Paul has just come from the east, he's come through Asia Minor. And so they're coming from completely different directions. And yet at this time, God brings them together in Corinth and he brings them together through their jobs. And in doing that, God was meeting their needs because Priscilla and Aquila were no doubt traumatised, they were living in Rome and then they've been expelled. Imagine somebody came to us and said, everyone has got to leave Lewis, you're gone. It's like an eviction in many ways. It would be hugely, hugely traumatic. And so

Priscilla and Aquila, I would imagine, came to Corinth in a sense of trauma, in a sense of uncertainty, and maybe even a sense of disillusionment. Maybe they were asking themselves, what is going to happen to this church? What is going to happen to all those who are following Jesus?

And yet they arrive in Corinth and who do they meet? They meet the greatest missionary that the world has ever known. There they have Paul and he starts to work for them as a tentmaker.

[10:50] And so for Priscilla and Aquila, God was meeting their needs and encouraged them. But for Paul, especially, Priscilla and Aquila were a huge, huge help to him. Now this is where we have to try and bring together the books of the New Testament because you can read through the book of Acts and you'll learn lots of fascinating things. But what we have to remember is that the letters that Paul wrote, many of them were being written during his time through the book of Acts. And so as we go through the book of Acts, the letters of Paul are either being written or they're referring to events that took place. So you have to kind of take Acts and take the letters and put them together. So we know from the beginning of chapter 18 that right now we are here in Corinth. And so Paul wrote to the Corinthians not long after this. And so by going to the letter of Corinthians, sometimes we can get more information to see what happens. And this is very much the case here because in Corinthians, we discover how Paul felt when he arrived in Athens. Acts 18:1 says, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. That gives us no indication of how Paul felt. But 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 3 tells us how he felt. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And so if you put the two together, you could read Acts 18 verse 1 and say, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth in weakness, in fear and in much trembling.

In other words, Paul was really low at this point. He was really, really struggling. Now that of course is a reminder that every Christian struggles. Even Paul, so easy to look at Paul and think, oh, he must have just never struggled ever in life. Not true. He struggled just like you struggle, just like I struggle. Every single Christian struggles. And if you look back at Acts chapter 16, 17 and 18, it's actually no surprise that Paul felt so low. It's really, really interesting to try and trace through what happens. Back in Acts chapter 16, Paul received the Macedonian call. Passing by Messia, they went down to Troas and their vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia was standing there urging him and saying, come over to Macedonia and help us. When Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

So this was the call that God got, that God gave Paul to go to Macedonia. So if we look at the map, we can see where he is. So you can find Troas, it's just at the edge of Turkey, they are next to Messia. That's where they had come to. Paul and his group are there in Troas. And they receive this call from Macedonia, which as you can see is over on the other side of the Aegean Sea. And it's so easy to hear of a call like that and to think, wow, imagine getting a call like that from God. Life would be so simple, life would be so clear. You would know what God wants and everything would seem so great. Well, what is it that actually happened? Well, they went on, they crossed to Macedonia and specifically they went to Philippi. So you can follow the arrow. What happened in Philippi? They were thrown in prison. And that's where Paul and Silas met the Philippian jailer. Eventually they were released, but they were asked to leave Philippi. So then we come to Act 17, they went on to Thessalonica. You can see the arrow there, Thessalonica is just south-west of Philippi. But what happened there? The Jews stirred up a riot and during the night

Paul had to escape. And so they went on to Berea, which is next, you can follow the arrow and see where they went. And again, Jews who were in Thessalonica heard that Paul had gone there, followed him down, stirred up trouble again. And so Paul had to flee again and the disciples sent him off on his own to Athens, which is much further south. And there in chapter 17 we read of how Paul was horrified by the idolatry he had witnessed. And he spoke to the Areopagus, the city council. A few of them believed, but most of them were unsure and some of them mocked Paul. So imagine being Paul. He had got this Macedonian call.

Seemed great. This is what God wants for us. Everything's falling together perfectly. And yet the reality was incredibly difficult. Do you follow Paul's path?

[15 : 43] He's following God's call, but it was blow after blow after blow. Every single one of these cities, Paul was delta blow. And it was really hard. Now that reminds us of a really, really important lesson that sometimes following God means that things are hard. And it's so easy, and it's so easy for us to do something for God, whether it's whatever it may be, whether it's to involve ourselves in something at the church, whether it's to start going to the prayer meeting, whether it's to become a member, whether it's to try and speak to people or to involve ourselves in something like street pastors or whatever it is, you can do that.

You could think to yourself, I feel that God wants me to do this and I want to do it. You could start it and then it's hard. And you immediately think, I've done the wrong thing.

When things are hard, we immediately think, I've made a mistake. God didn't want me to do this. Well, Paul is reminding us that that's not how it works. God made it abundantly clear that he wanted Paul to follow that path.

But it meant that he was facing struggles. He was facing difficulties. Don't let things being hard put you off because that's how it often, often is. So by the time Paul got to Corinth, which is just to the west of Athens, he was really, really low.

And there, God has a lovely Christian couple waiting to help him. And the means that God uses to bring them together is their job. They were all tent makers, so they worked together.

[17 : 44] Now, there's a couple of points I want to emphasize that we learn from that in the time that's left. First of all, this reminds us what an amazing encouragement Christians can be to each other.

Here was Paul, he was desperately low. Things had been incredibly difficult. And yet now he meets these wonderful Christian friends, Priscilla and Aquila.

And if you look at Paul, you see how much he loves his friends, how much he values them, how important they are to you. That's what we read about in Romans one.

I long to see that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you. That is that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, by yours and mine. Just the same thing to Timothy. I thank God who myself, as I did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers, night and day.

As I remember your tears, I long to see you that I may be filled with joy. Paul loved his friends, and he needed his friends. And it's a great reminder of the fact that as God's people, as people who come along to this church, we need each other. We need each other.

[19 : 05] And that's a fundamental truth about the human race. When God made us, he said, it's not good for man to be alone. That's a creation ordinance, something set out from the very beginning. God has made us to be together, to share together, to support together, to help one another, to comfort one another, to encourage one another. We are made to be together.

That's why people love their friends. And it's a shame because we all love our friends. We love going and it's great. You go up to the football, and there's a football match on. You stand at the side, you chat to people, you meet them, you spend time with your friends. It's great.

It's great when you've got nice colleagues. You go along and you have a nice lunch break, and you chat together. It's lovely. It's wonderful to spend time with friends. That is something that should be at the heart of every church. A church service is a gathering to worship God, but it's a gathering of friends, a gathering to meet together, to laugh together, to share together, because we need each other. God wants us to help and support one another. God does not want us just to be individualistic. There is no individualistic allowed in the Christian church. Because if you look, for example, at the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit has given every single believer gifts. The New Testament speaks about this in various places. Romans 12.6 is an example.

So it says, you've got gifts that differ. So having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us. Let us use them, the prophecy in proportion to your faith. If service in our serving, the one who teaches and is teaching, the one who exhorts in his exhortation, the one who contributes in generosity, the one who leads with cheerfulness, the one who does acts of mercy, leads with zeal, sorry, the one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness. So lots of different types of gifts.

And these are used in the service of God, but they are not just used with reference to God. They are exercised for the benefit of your fellow Christian. Look at what Peter says, as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's very important church. You think about somebody in the church who's really gifted.

[21 : 41] God has given that person those gifts to help you, to benefit you. And he's given you gifts as well. And they are to be used to benefit and help your fellow Christian. That's why the church is such a wonderful place because there's roles and duties for every single one of us. We are all different.

We all have different gifts, but we use them to serve one another. And it's a real reminder that you're not just here today, all of you, every single one of you, you're not just here today to increase your own knowledge. You're not just here to strengthen your faith. You're not just here to offer your own prayers. You're also here to boost everyone else who's here. You're here to encourage one another. And that's why it is so encouraging to see you here, to have everyone together. It is brilliant. Imagine how depressing it would be if there was just three or four of us here. But there's not. There's loads of you here. Which is amazing. And we should be so encouraged by that and so blessed that we can spend this time together. It is so good that you are here.

And it is a fundamental truth of the Christian church that we need each other. And this is the reason why the New Testament absolutely bans criticism, jealousy, gossip and division from the Christian church. Do you see how it fits together?

God has set from the beginning of creation that we need each other. God, the Holy Spirit, has given us gifts to support each other, to bless each other. God's law then gives us restrictions to keep out the things that will spoil that. He's saying, don't ever criticize one another because that is going to quench the spiritual gifts that I have given you. Don't divide from one another because you need each other and I want you to be together. Don't be jealous of one another because you all have gifts and you all can contribute something and you are all equally special in my eyes. And don't gossip about one another because you're not here to talk about where everybody's going wrong. You're here to help people and support them and to encourage them. We're not here to tear each other down. We are here to build each other up. So if you are having a hard week, if last week was hard for you and it might well have been, please press on.

Press on because God is with you and we are right behind you as a church and whatever your circumstances are, we want to support you. We want to encourage you. Press on in the week ahead.

[24 : 26] If you are feeling low about yourself today, if you look at yourself and you think, I am so far from what I should be, we want you to know that we love you. We love you as a church and God loves you and we are so thankful that you are here. We are so thankful that you are part of this congregation. So if you are feeling low about yourselves, you have got friends here in this church. You have got people who think the world of you. And if you have good news and things are going well, we rejoice with you and we praise God that he has been so, so good to you. So Paul's experience reminds us that the Christian life is often hard, but for that reason we need each other and that togetherness should always, always, always be part of our church. You can always say, I am finding things difficult. I am struggling. I am weak. That is what it is all about, to support and help one another. Imagine a child coming home from school and you know they are struggling with their homework and you say, do you need some help? No, no, I am fine. No, no, there is nothing wrong. I am fine. No, no, leave me alone. That is not helping anybody. You know the child needs help. You know the person, the parent wants to help. Whereas the child says, I do not know how to do this. Can you help? Yes, of course we can. No problem. Everyone helping one another, supporting one another. That is the way we should be. So that is the first point that we emphasised in this section. But secondly, and dear me, I am running out of time and I have only done half the same one, but anyway, never mind. We are nearly there. We will stop at one. Maybe. The second thing that we learn from Faisula Anakula is that God can use us through our jobs. That is the brilliant thing about this passage. The means that God used to help a dejected Paul was fellowship through making tents. It was not a missionary conference. It was not a communion weekend. It was not a theological debate. It was an ordinary job. That is what God used to help Paul. That is what he used to bring

Priscilla and Aquila and Paul together. The key point is that our jobs are an amazing, amazing opportunity for the work of God's kingdom. Paul refers to Priscilla and Aquila as his fellow workers. I love that phrase because it has a double meaning. They were his fellow workers, because they were all tent makers, but they were his fellow workers, really, because they were fellow workers for Jesus. You are exactly the same. Your job is an amazing opportunity to reach out with the gospel. Whatever your job is, if you are not officially in employment, if you are retired out of your housewife, you are still working. I put that under the category of jobs as well. It is not just for people in paid employment. You are all active every day.

You are weekly routine. The work that you do, these things have a double meaning. You might be a teacher. You might be a weaver. You might be a builder. You might be an engineer, but you are also a worker for Jesus. It is quite amazing. Every Sunday, God brings his church together, as we are together here today. Every Monday morning, he scatters us. He puts us into the schools, into the mill, into the loomsheds, into the workshops, into the council offices, into the shops. God says, I want the people who are at my church on a Sunday in all these places on a Monday. There, they serve me in their daily lives. It is so important to remember this, because sometimes jobs can be heavy going. You are doing the same thing every week.

It can be quite heavy going. One week goes into the next, into the next, into the next, and sometimes you think, is there any point to this? Why am I doing this? Maybe you feel like that. Maybe you feel like your job is a bit heavy going. Maybe you feel like you don't really know what you want to do with your life. Maybe you feel like you've squandered your life. You must remember that by following Jesus, your job, all of a sudden, has amazing purpose and amazing potential, because there's huge, huge opportunities to serve and glorify Jesus in your job. Tomorrow morning, you can show that you are different by working hard. By simply working hard with a good attitude, you show that you are different. You can stand out from your colleagues by being patient and encouraging. I know this isn't related to work, but I always remember playing football as a youngster, and I remember once we played this match, and Ergoley made a stupid mistake. The ball came towards him and he went to kick it and he completely missed it and the ball went in. Now, everybody's starting screaming at him. The guy knows he's done wrong and he's humiliated and he doesn't need to be hammered for it. But if you tell the guy, look, chin up, we'll press on, we'll work together, don't worry. Now, that's a football example, but that's the same in work. If somebody makes a mistake in work, they don't need to be told that they're an idiot. They already think it and feel it. But if you tell them, don't worry about it, we'll bash on together, I'll give you a hand, we'll sort it out. You can make such a difference. You can stand out by being patient and encouraging.

If you're the boss, then you can be an amazing witness by showing concern for your staff. You can be an amazing witness as a boss by showing your staff that you care about them, that they're welfare matters and that you want to support them and help them. Not that you're trying to squeeze every hour and every bit of energy from them, but by showing them that you really value them and care for them. You can bring joy and enthusiasm and vitality to work because Jesus is your savior. You can have that wonderful, wonderful attitude that shows that you have got something amazing in your life and you can show people that you love them by taking an interest in their lives, asking how they are, asking how their kids are, asking how they're getting on, showing some practical love towards them. And you can pray and pray and pray for the people you work with because they need prayer because if they are without Christ, they are going to hell and you've got to pray for them and I've got to pray for them and let's pray and pray and pray and pray and pray. Now, all of those things I've mentioned, you can do every day. Every day you can do those things. Every day you can work hard. Every day you can be patient. Every day you can be enthusiastic. Every day you can show your love to people by taking an interest with them. Every day you can pray. Every single day you can do those things. But sometimes, not every day, but some days you might get to speak to people about the gospel. Now, that doesn't happen every day.

[31 : 50] It doesn't happen very often, but sometimes these opportunities arise. Sometimes they might ask a question. Sometimes you might get to invite them to something like the buffet weekend or something like that, or sometimes you might even just get talking about the gospel. Now, sometimes these opportunities arrive. Now, if you're anything like me, you find these moments terrifying because somebody starts talking. You get this opportunity to speak about the gospel and you think, here's the opportunity I've been waiting for and before you know it, you've blown it because you've gone into panic mode and it becomes all awkward. At least that's what I do and I so often muck it up because you think, what if I make a mistake? What if I get this wrong?

We're talking about the gospel. This is what I should be doing, but I don't know what to do. And by then you've gone into such kind of hyper mode. It's all awkward and difficult. It can be scary and difficult when these opportunities arise, but I want you just to try and remember two things and I really will finish with this. First of all, it is okay to say, I don't know.

Always remember that. Someone asks you a question about the gospel, about the Bible. It is okay to say, I don't know. I actually don't know the answer to that question. I'll have to go and check that. And you can say, I'm not certain about that. Don't ever, ever be afraid to say, I don't know. Or you can even turn into an opportunity and say, well, I'll tell you what, I don't know, but how about I ask Thomas to preach about it and we can go to church together and see what he says or something like that. But it's okay to say, I don't know. A lot of people feel very, very intimidated because if I get asked a question, I get asked questions half the time and I don't know the answer to them. I don't know answer to a lot of questions and nobody does. It's okay to say, I don't know. The second thing is always remember that the gospel is good news. That's what the word gospel means. Good news. We've got good news for people. And so if you're talking about the gospel, tell them how good it is to be a Christian. Tell them how Jesus has changed your life for the better. Tell them that he's given us hope in a world that is so clearly in an absolute mess.

Tell them that it's just brilliant, brilliant to be a Christian. Always, always, always emphasize the good news. So often we've done the opposite and we've hummed it on the bad news. And when we get the chance to speak about the gospel, people tend to speak about judgment. And that question has been technically true, immediately gives the impression that we are looking down on everybody else. The gospel message is good news. And so we are saying we've got good news for you and we want to share it with you. So for example, somebody might ask you a difficult question. They might say, if God is in control, why bother praying? That's a difficult question. And you might not be able to answer that question. But you can say, I don't know how to answer that question, but then you can give them the good news. I don't know how to answer that question. But one thing I do know is that prayer has made such a difference in my life. I am so thankful that I can talk to God.

I'm so thankful that he listens to me. I'm so thankful that no matter what I'm going through, God helps and God hears. We've got good news. So always remember that. So those two things, it's okay to say I don't know. Always remember that we've got good news. Just tell them that Bina Crescent is brilliant. And maybe that's all you can say. It probably is. When I was converted, I knew next to nothing. I was young. I was about 14. And I didn't really know much of the Bible.

[35 : 32] And I didn't know much theology. But I knew that knowing Jesus was brilliant. And sometimes that's all people need to hear. That's our good news. And that's what we must say. So no job is pointless.

Your job is not pointless. Your job is mission work. So tomorrow morning is not another dull Monday. Tomorrow morning is the day when you can go out and make a massive difference to the world because that is how God works. That's how he worked through Priscilla and Aquila. And that is how he can work through you as well. Amen. Let us pray.