

Charlie Ross was definitely the teacher's pet. His teacher... Miss Tillie Brown was his high school English teacher. ... She was young... attractive... and the heart-throb of every boy in the school. ... And everyone knew that Charlie was Miss Brown's favorite.

Because of this... the other boys made fun of Charlie behind his back. They were saying... "*Charlie better amount to something in life... or Miss Brown will never forgive him...*" But the ridicule that Charlie eventually heard... drove him to work harder. ... He studied longer and harder than anyone else.

It wasn't much of a surprise therefore at graduation... when Charlie turned out to be the senior class valedictorian. He had served as the editor of his high school Year Book... his grades were better than anyone else's ... and he was Miss Brown's pet...

It was a fairly common graduation... except for one thing. ... It had all the speeches and awards that were handed out. But when the diplomas were given... something else happened that no one expected. The year was 1901... but even for 1901... this was unheard of.

When Charlie Ross walked across the stage to receive his diploma... Miss Tillie Brown... the beloved English teacher... rose up from her seat on stage with the faculty... approached Charlie... and congratulated him personally – with a kiss!

This was too much for the other boy's in Charlie's senior class... who wished that it had been them. A handful of the boys decided to confront her after the ceremony... about her unabashed favoritism. The boldest

among them spoke out... asker her to explain herself... as to how she could show such partiality.

Miss Tillie brown stood firm. She did not flinch at all when she explained that Charlie had earned special recognition. The she looked directly at the young man... who seemed to be the spokesman for the group. She said, "*When you do something worthwhile... you will get kissed too...*" ... Then she turned... and walked away.

Charlie continued to work hard to distinguish himself after High School. Starting as a newsman... he became an icon in the news industry. In fact... Charlie Ross was handpicked by Harry S. Truman to be his White House Press Secretary.

After the election... when Charlie reported for work to President Truman... he was given a very special assignment... as his first job. ... Charlie Ross' first duty... in serving the President of the United States... was to place a call to Independence Missouri... to Miss Tillie Brown. ... You see the boy who was the spokesman for all the jealous High School seniors... the one who challenged Miss Brown's unabashed favoritism toward Charlie... the boy to whom she answered and said, "*When you do something worthwhile... you'll get kissed too...*" was none other than Harry S. Truman, himself!

The message Charlie Ross delivered from the President of the United States was... "*How about that kiss I never got...? Have I done something worthwhile to rate it now...?*" He got his kiss.

... ..

Has there ever been a Charlie Ross in your life? ...(Someone who had so much going for them... and good things just kept piling up for them...?) Some people seem to have it all... and then they get even more! We look at them and a Harry Truman type jealousy has us ask ourselves – why can't that be me...? This hardly seems fair at all.

You know... there is a verse in the Bible that seems to punctuate this unfairness. It is found in Matthew 25:29...

Matthew 25:29 (ESV)

For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

This leaves us with an even greater sense of confusion... because even Jesus says that those who have so much going for them... will have even more piled on top... and those who don't have as much will have it taken away. ... What gives, here...?

Matthew 25:29 is the teaching point to the parable Jesus had just told – the parable of the talents. ... (The one who invested his talents wisely... was given more... and the one who simply buried it... had it taken away.) ... In other words – as believers... we are given more... when we use what God has already given us... and if we fail to use what He has given us... we will suffer loss.

So if you have ever looked at a Charlie Ross in your life... and wondered why that could not have been you... the answer is... IT **CAN** BE! “What are you are doing with what God has given to you?”

In today's passage in our study through the book of Acts... we find this truth illustrated for us. ... But not only that... we will see three attitudes that we need to have... in light of what God has given to us.

The first is very appropriate for what we have just celebrated this past Thursday. It is thanksgiving. The second is passion. (LISTEN) Many believers have no passion about building up fellow believers... and speaking words of life into them. They simply show up at church on Sunday morning with little to no intentional behavior that builds others up in their faith. ... And the third is humility.

We will see all three of these in the lives of two of God's servants... who had a lot going for them... and God piled more on top. They used the abilities God had given to them... with thanksgiving... passion... and humility.

We begin this morning in the 18th chapter of Acts. Paul's second missionary journey is over. ... Begun under the shadow of his unhappy separation from Barnabas... followed by the perplexity and frustration faced in trying to identify a new field of operation... Paul tried to go into Mysia... Bythinia... and Asia... but the Holy Spirit kept telling him "no." ... God had finally taken Paul across into Europe... to Macedonia and then to Achaia (or Greece.)

In these significant provinces... amid exciting and memorable events... and while facing great hardships... he had seen living churches planted in Philippi... Thessalonica... Berea... probably Athens... and Corinth.

Jewish opposition had dogged him consistently... often evincing great bitterness and a willingness to resort to violence... though some among Israel continued to make the journey to faith in Messiah-Jesus... and all the while the Gentile wing of the church was becoming ever more securely established.

But of all the cities the missionaries visited... Corinth was... on one level... the most difficult place to do ministry. ... It was a wild... aggressive... rich... and self-impressed sort of place. ... The church founded there was important in its day... but it was also a difficult church that had all the problems of a major city.

As I mentioned in last week's message... Paul was depleted when he arrived there.

1 Corinthians 2:1-3 (ESV)

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling,

Paul had gone through a great deal of difficulty on his second missionary trip — imprisonment... a beating... rejection. ... He had been uncertain of how things would come out... and he worried about the churches he had founded. ... The work of ministry and hard travel had taken a toll on Paul.

In the midst of his time in Corinth... the Lord Jesus appeared to him...

Acts 18:9-11 (ESV)

And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my

people. And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”

After teaching the word of God faithfully and pastoring this difficult church in a difficult city for eighteen months... abruptly... it seems... today we see that Paul decided that it was time for him to leave and return to Antioch. Three years had gone by since he had begun this adventure... known as “Paul’s Second Missionary Journey.”

Acts 18:18-22

No reason is given for Paul’s departure from Corinth. ... He seems to have left on his own initiative... not because of persecution... a vision from the Lord... or any kind of circumstantial events. ... His friends didn’t say, “*Paul, it’s time for you to leave.*” ... Something inside him gave rise to this event.

He traveled with Priscilla and Aquila for part of the distance... but finally he left them and went off on his own. ... You will recall that the trip he made alone from Athens to Corinth had been heavy and difficult. ...But now having left Priscilla and Aquilla... being alone was evidently a good thing.

Perhaps he was excited... joyful... anticipating his destination. ... This leg of the trip was fifteen hundred miles long over land and sea. It was no small deal. ... Once back... at his home church... his stay in Antioch probably lasted three-quarters of a year.

The second detail to observe is there were two cities Paul was determined to get to. ... But Luke gives us very little detail about his visit to these two cities here in the Book of Acts.

It says in verse 22 that when he landed in Caesarea... (which by the way) was the port city on the Mediterranean Sea nearest to Jerusalem... he went *up* and greeted "*the church*"... and afterward he went *down* to Antioch.

What church did he go up to greet and go down from? ... It was certainly the church in Jerusalem. First of all... during Paul's day... the church at Jerusalem was frequently referred to as "the church." No other church had that designation. Second Jerusalem is at a high elevation. (Paul went up to visit the church.) Third... from Old Testament days... it did not matter if you travelled from the South or the North... if you travelled to Jerusalem... you were said to be going UP to Jerusalem. It was the highest point in the world for Jews. Therefore the verb phrase in the Bible used of travel to Jerusalem is always to go up. And the phrase in the Bible for travel from Jerusalem is always to go down to some other place. ... So he went to Jerusalem and then finally back to the place where his journey started... (his home church... those who sent him out... Antioch.)

But like I said... Luke does not make a big deal about Paul's visit to these two cities. Whatever his reason... Paul had a strong motivation that pressed him toward these destinations. ... The Jews in Ephesus asked him to stay. Paul surprisingly said "no." Ephesus was one of the three most important cities outside of Rome. Strategically... it made sense to build a strong church there that could influence so many. (Corinth... which he also left... was another... and so was Alexandria.) Something was driving Paul away from Corinth... and now Ephesus... where this time the synagogue had not kicked Paul out...

Many of the commentaries that I read in preparation for this message said that it was the fact that Paul needed to get back to his two starting points – Jerusalem and Antioch. They make a point that this show how important it is for us to stay connected to our roots. ... Maybe! But I don't think that was what was happening.

I think the reason is given to us (as an anonymous looking detail) at the end of verse 18...

Acts 18:18b - *At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.*

Now let's examine the type of vow that requires a hair cut... which Luke merely assumes we already understand... and therefore does not give us any further detail. Here are some of the details he takes for granted that we would know.

There is very little question that this is a Nazirite vow described in Numbers 6. ... It was a voluntary thing. A Jewish believer could... out of gratitude to God or other reasons... take a vow to be subject to this particular way of discipline. ... Paul was not abandoning grace for law when he undertook it. The vow was not a matter of salvation but of personal devotion to the Lord.

J. Vernon McGee writes:

There are a great many folk who find fault with Paul because he made a vow. They say that this is a man who preached that we are not under law but we are under grace, and so he should not have made a vow. Anyone who says this about Paul is actually making a little law for Paul. Such folk are saying that Paul is to do things their way. Under grace, friend, if you want to make a vow, you can make it. And if you do not want to make a vow, you don't have to. Paul didn't force anyone else to make a vow. In fact, he said emphatically that no

one has to do that. But if Paul wants to make a vow, that is his business. That is the marvelous freedom that we have in the grace of God today.

The Nazarite vow had originally been a life-time abstinence from wine and the shaving of the head. But by the first century (Paul's Day) the Rabbis had developed a Nazarite Vow to express thanksgiving... that only lasted 30 days. If a person wanted to make this vow... but was away from Jerusalem... the hair could be cut... but the hair clippings had to be saved and brought to Jerusalem within 30 days... and be placed in the fire that is under the sacrifice of the fellowship offering at the Temple.

Paul had been through a difficult time on his second missionary journey... and the Lord had used him to establish significant churches in Galatia and Europe – in spite of all the difficulty! Paul was voluntarily expressing his gratitude through a Nazarite vow.

Now once he got to Jerusalem to complete this vow... he would need to pay a large amount of money **and** also purchase an animal to sacrifice. (This is probably why Luke did not draw too much attention to it. It would be like blowing trumpets like a Pharisee at his offering – something Jesus forbid.)

This voluntary vow from the time of the initial haircut... to the sacrifices in Jerusalem... involved other requirements... where Paul would have had to pay close attention to his daily routines. He had to avoid all contact with grapes... grape vines... and vinegar and wine.

In the Mediterranean Basin in the time of Paul (and to this day)... grapes were everywhere. ... Grapes in some form or wine were served with almost

every meal. ... Wine vinegar was used as a preservative for many foods. As you passed through the countryside you regularly encountered vineyards. ... So in order to carry out this vow... you couldn't go through the day on autopilot... so to speak. ... You had to be aware of your surroundings and circumstances. ...If you were walking down the road and there was a vineyard alongside it... you might cross to the other side so that you didn't brush up against grapes by accident... or step on a leaf. ... If you were served a meal... you would pick through each dish to find out if there were grapes in it... and remove them before you ate... or push away any food that was preserved with vinegar. ... You could easily be in five or six settings throughout the day... where you would have to attentively stand back... withdraw... graciously decline... and so on.

Now here is the point as to why someone... like the Apostle Paul... would do something like this. ... By paying attention to what life brought him... he would be reminded of the Lord. ... Keeping this vow would give him repeated opportunities in the discipline he undertook to be reminded of the Lord... to attend to Him... to worship Him... and to thank Him.

And how do we do it...? Oh! We set aside one day a year where we gather together with friends and family... watch football... stuff our faces with turkey and pumpkin pie... and then go pushing and shoving through shopping malls! ... (Not much of a parallel, is it?)

There are more disciplined ways that we ought to be showing our thanks to the Lord. This is what I believe Paul was doing. And it took priority over strong ministry that was happening in Corinth... and in Ephesus.

There are many books written about spiritual disciplines... written by Evangelicals... about undertaking a withdrawal or putting oneself in a restriction of some kind for the sake of the Lord. And the response that they get is mixed – just like the commentaries I’ve been reading about Paul’s act of taking a vow... here. ... Some criticize Paul for mixing law and grace in his actions. And some Evangelicals today criticize those who exercise some disciplines in their walk with the Lord. So let me say this...

The kind of spiritual disciplines we encounter in this text are not for battling with sin. ... There are other kinds of restrictions that we undertake because some things are wrong in themselves. ... For example... we do battle with our tendencies to be greedy and lustful... to gossip... to be jealous... and so on. ... We are told to put to death the things of the flesh and to be raised again with Christ... to put off the old self and put on the new (Colossians 3:1-10). ... But that is not in view here.

Grapes are not a bad thing. Of all the kinds of produce on the earth... grapes are some of the most honorable in the Bible... as a matter of fact. The discipline of fasting doesn’t mean there is anything wrong with food.

We might choose solitude as a spiritual discipline... pull away from our friends and spend time in silence... not because there is anything wrong with our friends... or we should always be quiet. ... Fellowship and speech are good things. ... But we make a choice to withdraw from them because we want the opportunity to give the Lord first place... to hear His voice... to turn away from other calls for our time and attention.

It struck me that one thing that might be similar to a Nazirite vow in my own life is to keep the car radio off... when I drive into Bend to teach at the college. I usually listen to news radio to catch up on local events. But maybe... it would be a good choice for me... to keep it off sometimes... This would be a restriction that would give me the chance to be grateful... to sing a hymn... to offer a prayer.

There may be things in your life... and in my life... where saying “no” to something offers an opportunity to say “yes” to the Lord. ... For you it might be purposefully turning away from your computer and spending less time on social media... watching less television news... less talking on the phone... or missing some meals. ...There are many ways to enter into a discipline that gives you a chance to recognize and appreciate the daily presence of the Lord. ... (I am not suggesting any form of legalism. Legalists are trying to win God’s favor. No. Do this because you already have God’s favor.) It should be something that you will need to pay attention to. Something you volunteer to do... not out of being forced or obliged... but out of thanksgiving to the Lord.

Finding purposeful ways to demonstrate our gratitude to the Lord... is one way that I believe we can see the principle be true in our lives that “*To him who already has... more will be given...*”

Thankfulness is the first way. We see it in the life of Paul. Passion is the second way. We see this in the life of Apollos. He was passionate about getting the word out... about what he knew. ... We are about to see that his knowledge was seriously lacking. He was missing vital information. But he travelled the Roman Empire to tell others what he did know.

Acts 18:24-28

God gave increase to Apollos' already abundant – and well-employed talents!

Our passage here describes Apollos as a man who was a paragon of ability and talent. We are given a vivid picture of a well-qualified public speaker. He would have made Charlie Ross look like a nobody.

What did he have going for him. Well... first of all... he was an Alexandrian by birth. ... A while ago I mentioned that Corinth and Ephesus were two of the world's leading cities during the 1st Century – for commerce and trade. Those were the business centers. But Alexandria was known as the 1st Century capital for intellectuals.

In Paul's day there were three cities that stood out as the intellectual centers of the world – Athens... Rome... and Alexandria. These were the Harvard... Oxford... and Fresno State of the world! (Can you guess where I went to college...? OK... So maybe not Fresno State... but Alexandria was known as the **PREMIER** intellectual center of that day. ... Books and scrolls were scarce... but Alexandria had the world's largest library. Nowhere on earth was there such a large collection of data... about history... philosophy... medicine... mathematics... rhetoric... and Jewish literature. (About 1/3 of its population was Jewish.)

Apollos could not get a better education anywhere. (Not even if Fresno State existed...)

When it says in verse 24... that Apollos was an “eloquent man”... it literally means that he was well-educated. He graduated from the best of the best schools in the world!

But notice also... that in verse 24... it also says that he was “competent in the Scriptures.” But don’t be fooled by this word “competent.” It is more than adequate. It means “mighty.” Apollos was “mighty in the Scriptures.”

There is no doubt that this man was highly trained in logic... rhetoric... philosophy... science... and the arts. And his understanding of Scripture was not just “sufficient” – he was powerful in them.

Then we go into verse 25... and we read that Apollos was “fervent in spirit.” This word literally means “burning” or “boiling over.” He was passionate! Add to his education and abilities – strong enthusiasm.

The only material Apollos had... on which to use his intellectual aptitude... was the Old Testament Scripture... and not the reports about Jesus’ death and resurrection. Everything he knew about the Messiah... he had to piece together from the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament prophecies.) ... But it can be done... and Apollos did it. He put it all together and he preached Christ accurately.

With his learning and logic on fire!... Apollos took what he did know... out to others. He had a burden to spread this important information. He was (as Luke writes)... “boiling over”... So he travelled around the Roman Empire expressing the truth that he knew. He wanted others to know it too! His passion had him invest his understanding into the lives of others – rather than just keeping it to himself... and staying in Alexandria. ... I find this a remarkable passion! Don’t you...? ... He had not heard about the

Great Commission that Jesus gave to His followers – to take the Gospel into all the world. His (“boiling over”) passion drove him to do it.

We see in Apollos our second example of “to him who has... more will be given...” (LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING)... Passion is something that I am convinced is a missing ingredient and the reason why many believers see God give others more... than what they are receiving...

So many believers fear what they do not know... so they are unwilling to use the gifts that God has given to them... and intends for them to use in ministering to others. They come to church on Sunday mornings and think they have a voice that is only good enough to embarrass themselves... so they barely mouth the words of songs. It is all about not humiliating themselves... It is never about helping to stir a passion in fellow believers by contributing to a worshipful atmosphere. ... They don't try to meet new people and try to encourage them... because they fear they might say something stupid. ... They hear the calls that we need help in our AWANA program... and KIDS Church... but they ignore them... because they have no sense that they need to tell others – what they already do know...

If you have several Charlie Ross' in your life... who are passing you by... maybe you need to find more purposeful ways to express thanksgiving to the Lord. Or... perhaps it is a matter of not stifling your passion for the truth that you know. A third reason that it could be... is seen in the lives of Aquilla and Pricilla... and Apollos. – It's their humility! ... Why would God give more to someone who is not humble...?

Acts 18:26

This dear couple... did not scorn Apollos *in public* for his inadequate preaching. They did not start talking behind his back... or scorn or reject him in any way. Rather... instead... they pulled him aside and lovingly gave him the truth that he was missing. Aquilla and Pricilla had no part (what-so-ever) of the **nit-picking** mentality that mars so many churches today.

They didn't embarrass him. ... They did not try to show off in front of others... because they knew more than the golden-tongued orator... (the smart guy who graduated Magna-Cum Laude from Fresno State!)

I have been told that the most dangerous Christian... is the person who has just completed his first seminary Greek class. (And I don't mean dangerous to the enemy – Satan. ... I mean the most potential for harm **to the cause of Christ.**) ... I am pretty sure that I personified that statement.

My poor wife was embarrassed on more than one occasion as she would endure me taking my Greek New Testament to church with me on Sunday mornings. I listened to every reference to Scripture that Pastor Bill made... and checked to see if he was right. ... Boy! What a pride-filled menace I was! I would sometimes catch Bill after the sermons and say something like... *“Now Bill... you were treating the verb in verse 20 as a passive subjunctive... but clearly its not! It is active indicative...”* ...I cringe today... when I think back on my futile attempts to correct – without a lick of humility.

Unlike me... during my first year of seminary... Aquilla and Pricilla had a method for correcting... that was beautiful... and life-giving. They lovingly pulled Apollos aside and gently taught him what he was missing.

But now... stop and consider the scene from Apollos' vantage point. He was well educated. What could these two tent-makers teach him...? They did not go to the University of Alexandria. They were not of his eminent stature.

We might expect this man of many talents and abilities to pass them off... "Who do you think you are trying to correct me...? ... But since Apollos did not respond that way... we can only deduce that he also possessed great humility.

Matthew 25:29 (ESV)

For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

Are you using what God has given to you... with thanksgiving... passion... and humility...?