

“Meet The Risk Takers”

October 27, 2019

I Corinthians 16:15-24

I appreciate the opportunity to present a message from God’s Word again today. So, thank you.

Please find with me the eighteenth chapter of Acts.

I want to begin today with a story about a man named Hudson Taylor. One day, when Hudson Taylor was just seventeen years old, he went into his father’s library. His dad was Chemist. He was searching for something to read. He had tried and tried to be a quote “good Christian.” But, he felt it was to no avail.

That day Hudson found a small tract and picked it up and read it. Inside it he read these words “the Finished Work of Christ.” “Why did the author say 'the finished work' instead of the propitiatory work?” was the question that came before him. “What was finished?” he asked himself; “a full and perfect atonement and satisfaction for sin was made, and the debt was paid,” he mentally replied. “Then,” he thought, “If the work of atonement is finished, if the mighty debt of sin is paid, what is there left for me to do?” And he acknowledged his sin to the LORD and asked to be saved. [Found on <https://www.wholesomewords.org> “Conversion of J. Hudson Taylor: Founder of China Inland Mission by Henry Pickering].

Seventy-five miles away, his mother was visiting some friends. At the very moment in his father’s library, she had an overwhelming desire to pray for her son. She turned the key in the lock on her bedroom. And, on that same day, she was determined to stay on her knees before the LORD until her son was saved. And, after a number of hours, she felt a peace come into her soul and got up from her knees. Ten days later

Mrs. Taylor arrived home to find her son Hudson telling her that he had repented and found salvation in Christ alone.

Four years later, in September 1853, Hudson Taylor set sail on the Lammermuir for China. He was twenty-one years old. The trip would take him five months. When he arrived in Shanghai, China, the Taiping Rebellion, one of the bloodiest wars in human history was in full swing. He began his ministry.

Eventually, Hudson Taylor would make eleven trips to China, and on and off, spend 51 years there. He would learn to speak five Chinese dialects. And, he brought 968 missionaries with him to China. Today, notwithstanding persecution, the Church in China stands as one of the strongest in the world.

One of the many historians who wrote Hudson Taylor’s story was a woman named Ruth Tucker. Here’s her description. *“No other missionary in the nineteen centuries since the Apostle Paul has had a wider vision and has carried out a more systematized plan of evangelizing a broad geographical area than Hudson Taylor.”*

Here’s Hudson Taylor’s approach to the ministry there. *“When I get to China, I shall have no claim on anyone for anything; my only claim will be on God. How important, therefore, to learn before leaving England to move man, through God, by prayer alone.”*

Now, when it came time for Hudson Taylor to describe the work, here’s what he wrote. *“I have found that there are three stages in every great work of God. First, it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done”* [Leslie T. Lyall, A Passion for the Impossible].

“Unless there is the element of extreme risk in our exploits for God, there is no need for faith.”

I’ve titled today’s message “Meet the Risk Takers.” Shall we pray?

When you think about risk-taking, you probably consider the daredevils. We might name the people who undertake extreme sports: Robbie Kinevil, Jonathan Goodwin, Jackie Chan, etc. You see risk takers as tightrope walkers and slackliners and cliff jumpers. Or, you might consider Bill Gates a risk taker like who dropped out of college to create Microsoft or Elon Musk who invented the first all-electric car, the Tesla.

But, what about Scripture? So, are there risk takers in your Bible? It's likely that you've heard or read about the Christian couple, Priscilla and Aquila. But, would you consider them risk takers?

So, what's on my heart today is this. The Bible describe this couple, Priscilla and Aquila, as risk takers. Their story is given to us in four passages. Find with me Acts 18:1. Acts 18:1 *"After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; (2) And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.*

(3) And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers."

Now, I want to mention one caveat here. When I use the term risk taker, I'm referring to those who take a calculated risk; not someone who takes foolish and unnecessary risks and does crazy things willy-nilly, without forethought.

First, then, God's risk takers adapt; verse one. In this case, look with me at Aquila and Priscilla.

Acts 18:1 *"After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; (2) And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them."*

One of the qualities that makes you what you are is adaptability or your inability to adapt to change. And it's your

circumstances will God uses to develop Christlikeness in you.

When you were first saved, you found the wonderful joy of knowing the LORD. Everything was perfect. Or, so you thought. Then, along came circumstances that tried your faith. Why? Because God engineers our circumstances to teach and train us in trust. It's the main ways to grow in Christ. He intends that you become like Christ. So, since He's sovereign, He can, and does, change you by changing your circumstances.

Here's what I mean. How did this couple get to Corinth, Greece? Look again at the passage. Aquila was born in Pontus. The Kingdom of Pontus is in Turkey, just south of the Black Sea.

Often when you study the Bible, you discover some connections you'd never see just by reading it. Here's what I discovered this week. Acts tells the story about the Jews in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, when God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell His people. On that day all of the Apostles began speaking in other languages to the people who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. The Bible says that Jews had come from everywhere, including, that's right Pontus, up here in Turkey.

Now, there's no specific statement that Aquila was there that day. But, isn't it very likely that whoever was there on that Pentecost took the message of the Gospel back to Aquila's hometown?

What we do know is that risk-takers adapt. And the Bible tells us that Priscilla and Aquila had traveled some 1,800 miles from Pontus to Rome (likely on the Egnatian Way; and likely about ninety days; the Romans had constructed over 50,000 miles of road in the first century); verse two. Acts 18:2 *"And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, **lately***

*come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from **Rome**;) and came unto them.”*

And the distance from Rome to Corinth is just over 600 miles, which tells you that this couple had already spent a lot of time on the road.

Now, both Aquila and Priscilla were Jewish. And both of them had found the LORD when someone had brought the Gospel to them. But, when Emperor Claudius Caesar Augustus (A.D. 41 to A.D. 54) became upset with the Jews, he expelled all them from Rome. So, circumstances changed and they had to travel again. They had to adapt.

And folks, circumstances are just circumstances to the average person. But, to the Christian, circumstances are God’s means to change you and to grow you. And He, in no way, wants you to get exasperated over your circumstances. Does He allow untoward circumstances? Absolutely. But, every circumstance in your life is custom-made. They can be compared to a piece of wood in the hands of a skilled carpenter. And the excellently-skilled Carpenter of Heaven will use those very things that affect you, even those “circumstances beyond your control” for your benefit.

One writer puts it like this. *“The most adaptable people are the risk takers ... Any change, any loss, does not make us victims. Others may shake you, surprise you, disappoint you; but they can’t prevent you from acting, from taking the situation you are presented with and moving on. No matter where you are in life, no matter what your situation, you can always do something. You always have a choice...”* (C. Fowler)

And, this was the exact case for Aquila and Priscilla.

First, God’s risk takers adapt.

Second, God’s risk takers have a sense of purpose; verse three.

Acts 18:3 “*And because he was of the same craft, he abode [lived] with them, and wrought [worked]: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.”*

Paul could see that this couple had a sense of purpose. They, like Paul, had a tent-making business. So, as one man puts it, they weren’t lazy. And it just so happened that this was the exact same business the Apostle Paul was engaged in as he traveled throughout the Roman Empire. Apparently tent-making was an extremely versatile business. Tent-makers could easily travel from place to place and always be able to earn an income wherever God moved them.

Now, what does Luke tell us here? That, when Paul arrived in Corinth, he stayed at the home of Aquila and Priscilla. Why? Their sense of purpose coincided with Paul’s. They had become Believers in Christ.

And they, like Paul, had grown up in Jewish homes. And so Paul connected with them. They, like the Apostle Paul, used their business contacts to reach out with the Gospel. So, when the Messiah came into their lives, they were changed. But, whereas their purpose had been running a successful business. Now, they were using their lives and their business and their home to advance the Kingdom of Christ.

So, yes, they worked hard and they served others. They served people with the abilities and talents God gave them. But the also, reached others with the truth of the Gospel. They had a sense that it was God’s purpose for them to get the Good News out through their tent-making work.

Here are Christians joining other Christians in the same business and carrying the same Good News to their neighbors and business acquaintances.

Now, let me show you just how far this couple were invested in using their lives for the LORD’s Kingdom. Look with me at verse eighteen.

Acts 18:18 “*And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow. (19) And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: ...*”

From Pontus to Rome (1,800 miles) to Corinth (600 miles) and now to the seaport city of Ephesus. That's another 350 miles.

And what becomes of Aquila and Priscilla? Paul moves on to Asia Minor and back to the Church at Antioch. But, what becomes of his new friends? He leaves them with a responsibility; to teach the Christians in Ephesus.

It's obvious that Priscilla and Aquila had a deep sense of their purpose in the LORD's Kingdom.

And there's more. See with me Acts 18:24 “*And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. (25) This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.*

(26) And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly [accurately].”

A man one who was mighty in the Scriptures, Apollos by name, arrives in Ephesus. And Aquila and Priscilla listen to him teach and see that he needs further instruction in the things he was teaching. So they take him aside and teach him the way of God quote “more perfectly,” more accurately.

Can you see their deep sense of purpose? They were tent-makers. They connected with people. They served people. They worked hard in their business. And they were teachers; especially the Bible.

The word “perfectly” here is also translated as “diligently.” Do you remember what Herod said to the wise men who were looking for Jesus? He said this. Luke 2:8 “*And*

he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child ...”

It's also translated “circumspectly.” Ephesians 5:15 “*See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise...*”

Now, remember, they didn't have the New Testament yet. So, what were Aquila and Priscilla after? They wanted Apollos to understand what the Old Testament Scriptures said about the Jewish Messiah.

You see, it's simply important to have a sense of purpose. Yes, tent-making was important. But, so is teaching. And this Christian couple certainly exemplified that.

And the result was this. They began a Church in their home at that time. I Corinthians 16:19 “*The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.*”

Paul wrote his first Epistle to the Corinthians, as you may know, from the city of Ephesus. So, when Paul left Ephesus, he left the Church in good hands, the hands of Aquila and Priscilla, which met in their home.

First, God's risk takers adapt.

Second, God's risk takers have a deep sense of purpose; verse three.

So, by now you are beginning to think. How does this couple fit into the Book of Romans? Let me show you this.

Third, God's risk takers are willing to lay their lives down.

Find with me Romans 16:3 “*Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: (4) who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.*”

Paul's letter to the Romans closes with greetings to those he knows in Rome.

From Pontus to Rome to Corinth to Ephesus and now Paul is sending his greetings to his friends in Rome. And who is among that list? His friends, Aquila and Priscilla.

And how does Paul refer to them? He says they were his co-workers. Romans 16:3 *“Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers [co-workers] in Christ Jesus: ...”*

And they were more than co-workers. Look again at this passage. Romans 16:3 *“Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: (4) who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.”*

Here’s how Paul describes his friends *“who have laid down their own necks for my life.”*

These folks put their life on the line for Paul. They are the risk takers, for sure. All of the Churches had been affected and influenced by Aquila and Priscilla. And, so, as Paul sends off his letter to the Roman Church, he sends greetings to his friends from Corinth.

And who had laid down their necks for Paul? This couple. Just what had they done for Paul? They had taken risks for him, which certainly means they counted Paul a close friend. Most of us wouldn’t put our necks on the line for someone we didn’t trust.

So, I’m sure, Paul considered them risk takers; just as we should.

They had given Paul a place to stay in Corinth. They had joined him in the work and business of tent-making. And when he left Ephesus, he entrusted the work of ministering to the Saints to Aquila and Priscilla.

But, what else? At some time Paul was in danger. And his two friends came to his rescue. Was it physical danger or spiritual danger? We aren’t told.

What their lives tell us is this. They lived a life of self-sacrifice. They were God’s risk takers.

Now, finally, Who laid His life on the line for you and me? The best answer is Jesus Christ. 1 John 3:16 *“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”*

No doubt, your life is full. You are busy. We all are. We are living in the busiest time in history. Yet, we are also here to adapt to the circumstances God places us into. And we are here to maintain a sense of purpose; living with His purposes in mind.

Let me close with this word from Hudson Taylor, the risk taker in China.

“With God, nothing is impossible. We admit that we believe this reality, but do our actions state otherwise? Man’s impossibilities are the avenues through which God proves Himself mighty. These impossibilities become simple difficulties. Then, through the working of the Holy Spirit in and through us, God accomplishes His Kingdom purposes in ways we never thought possible.” [From David Joannes, *The Mind of a Missionary*].

Let’s take our example from this Christian couple.

So, what will it be this week? Will you pray this prayer with me “LORD, I am Yours. Draw me closer to You and living your life through me. Let me be Your risk taker.”

Shall we pray?

Hymn # 410 “Standing On The Promises”

