

Romans 16:3-5a Aquila and Pricilla

Romans 16:3-5a *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.*

We're going to follow the real life story of this Spirit-filled married couple, in their successes and tribulations, and in their wholehearted dedication to the Lord. They laboured together in the gospel, lead and hosted the church (assembly) in their home, and who showed hospitality to travelling preachers like Paul (Romans 12:1). This resulted in a powerful ministry for the Lord. You may or may not identify with Aquila and Prisca, but we can all learn from this godly couple.

We will pick up their story in Acts 18v1-4. Luke calls Prisca by her full name Priscilla. Paul used the shorted form probably because he knew her so well. Aquila was a Jew, so it is most likely Priscilla was Jewish as well. Aquila was a native of Pontus, an area located on the southern shores of the Black Sea. Wherever you were born, whoever your parents were, these things in some (unexplainable) way have been determined by God, *that we should seek God, and perhaps feel your way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for "In him we live and move and have our being'* (Acts 17:26-28, Romans 10:8-9).

We don't know for sure how Pricilla and Aquila *found Him*, whether it was before they got married or after; whether it was before they met Paul or after. But we know they lived in Rome, and in my view it is likely they came to Christ before they met Paul, and quite possibly before they were married.

In AD 49 (exact date uncertain) Emperor Claudius commanded all the Jews to leave Rome (called the Edict of Claudius, Acts 18:2). As a result the Jews, many of whom would have been believers in Jesus, had to uproot and leave. Priscilla and Aquila had an established family business as tentmakers, and in effect they became refugees..

They moved to Corinth, no doubt attracted by the work opportunities. They probably arrived several years before Paul. As enterprising people they would have quickly set up their business again in Corinth, making and mending tents used during the Isthmian games, and mending sails from the busy port of Corinth. It is also possible they could have used their workshop as a means of outreach for early evangelism in Corinth.

Then Paul arrived in Corinth (18:1), and as a believer and fellow-tent maker he immediately made friends with Priscilla and Aquila. Paul earned his keep by working with them. Then Silas and Timothy arrived in Corinth (Acts 18:5). With this strong team it was possible to establish the church in Corinth. The following 18 months must have been an exciting time (Acts 18:11). But even with this strong team, the Corinthian church was far from the perfect church and it had many problems!

Then opposition arose. Paul decided to move on, and took Priscilla and Aquila with him (Acts 18:18-19). Paul then went on to Syria while Pricilla and Aquila stayed in Ephesus. We know they opened their home to regular church meetings, because writing from Ephesus, Paul said, *The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord* (1Corinthians 16:19). This reminds us that the church is an assembly of people, not the building (1Corinthians 3:16). Priscilla and Aquila were obviously gifted leaders of such groups, I'm sure attracting saints and sinners alike! But they still attended synagogue. One Sabbath a fine Jewish preacher from Alexandria (in Egypt) called Apollos was speaking in the synagogue (Acts 18:26). However for Priscilla and Aquila there was something missing. They didn't go home

and discuss what a stupid sermon it was! Instead they took Apollos to one side and explained to him *way of God more accurately*. This phrase has caused perplexed many. However, it seems that Apollos know only of a baptism of John unto repentance, and he did not know of the baptism of the Spirit. John the Baptist declared, *I indeed baptized you in water, but He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit* (Mark 1:8). Baptism in water is an act of obedience to the Lord. But it is most important to be baptised (immersed) into His Spirit (see also Acts 19:1-7). We can see how Aquila and Priscilla were instrumental in Apollos' life at just the right time (like converting a future Spurgeon!)

On his third missionary journey Paul came back to Ephesus (Acts 19:1), and it is very likely that Priscilla and Aquila offered him hospitality for these three years (Acts 20:32-35). It is probable, in discussion with Priscilla and Aquila, that it was during this period Paul saw the importance of going to Rome. By the time Paul wrote Romans 16, Priscilla and Aquila were themselves back in Rome, may be to prepare the way for Paul. Claudius had died (AD54), and this allowed the Jews to return. Paul asked, *Greet the church in their house* (Romans 16:5). Clearly Priscilla and Aquila had once more opened their home for regular Christian meetings (Romans 12:6). Wherever Aquila and Priscilla lived, they tirelessly used their gifts to serve the Lord with all their heart, and build up the body of Christ. Paul described them as, *my fellow workers in Christ Jesus* (Romans 16:3b). Even though Paul was an Apostle, he didn't set himself above them or anyone else in the body of Christ.

Priscilla and Aquila risked their lives for Paul (Romans 16:3b-4) although we don't know how. It is possible they helped Paul during the riots in Ephesus, or we may also have a clue from Paul's extreme experience in Asia (2Corinthians 1:8). Not only Paul but also *all the churches of the Gentiles* were extremely grateful for their act of heroism. It reminds me of heroes from World War II who risked their lives to save Jews from the gas chambers, like the family of Corrie ten Boon, and Nicholas Winterton. May be Paul had Aquila and Priscilla in mind when he wrote Romans 5:7-8. The heroic act of Priscilla and Aquila to save Paul was Christ-like. But it was Christ Himself who loved us, and died for us while we were still sinners, to make atonement for our sins (John 15:13-14).

In AD 64 disaster struck, and Rome burned. Tacitus describes the fire: beginning in shops where flammable goods were stored, in the region of the Circus neighbouring the Caelian and Palatine Hills of Rome. The night was a windy one and the flames rapidly spread along the full length of the Circus.

The population fled first to areas unaffected by the fire and then to the open fields and rural roads outside the city. It was rumoured that Nero started the fire deliberately, and then blamed the Christians, which started a terrible persecution. Many Christian including Priscilla and Aquila, who were now getting on in years, were caught up in the terrible fire, and most likely, once more, lost everything. I can imagine they were encouraged by the teaching of their dear friend and colleague, Paul in Philippians 3:7-11.

We know Priscilla and Aquila left Rome and returned to Ephesus, because Paul later writes to Timothy, *greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus* (2Timothy 4:19). This time there is no mention of a church meeting in their house. May be they lived with Onesiphorus, or may be the church at Ephesus was now becoming more established. We don't always continue doing what we have always done.

May we like Priscilla and Aquila be those who offer our whole lives as a living sacrifice to God, use the gifts God has given to us. And may there be an increase of Aquila's and Priscilla's in the church today.

