

~ACTS~

Lesson 55- The Gospel goes to Corinth

Acts 18:1-17

As we have been studying the book of Acts, specifically this second half of the life and travels of Paul, we are seeing the Gospel go forth to the world. And it is progressing in the exact manner in which Jesus commanded when He said, “...*you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*” Acts 1:8. And Paul is the Apostle chosen by God to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, to the Gentiles... even as far as Rome. Today we are starting another chapter, Acts chapter 18, and we find Paul traveling from Athens Greece to its capital 50 miles west in Corinth.

But before we follow Paul over to Corinth, I want to refresh your memory on the churches he has established thus far and particularly focus on the brethren he has left in these cities creating a network of the Gospel. So far, we have seen the main hub of the Gospel form in Antioch Syria. From there Paul went on his first missionary journey and established churches in Cyprus and Galatia. Then on his second missionary journey he strengthened the churches in Galatia and traveled west to Macedonia, beginning at Philippi, where Lydia opened her house to form the first house church in Macedonia. This is also where he left Luke and he will stay there for six years; then he traveled west to Thessalonica, where, because of the intense persecution, he sent Timothy back to edify and strengthen the church. And in Thessalonica, Jason leads the house church for these believers; and then Paul travels south to Berea and then Athens, escaping persecution again, and Paul leads Dionysius the Areopagite to the Lord and he forms his house church and eventually becomes the bishop of Athens; and now Paul travels west to Corinth as he meets faithful men and women such as Aquila and Priscilla, Justus and Crispus. And we see them opening up their homes to the brethren as more churches are established. I love seeing this network of the Gospel and Paul is the one orchestrating all of this. This is his “*deep concern for the churches,*” 2 Corinthians 11:28, and he is doing all this under major persecution.

Remember in between chapters 17 and 18 of the book of Acts we must insert 1 Thessalonians 3:1–2–¹ *Therefore, when we (Paul, Silas, and Timothy) could no longer endure it, we (Paul and Silas) thought it good to be left in Athens alone, ² and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith.*

Then after Timothy travels back to Thessalonica, Paul and Silas journey west to Corinth. Which is where we will pick up today in Acts 18:1...

18:1) After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.

There is a possibility that Silas is also sent back up to Macedonia and Paul travels to Corinth alone, but we will talk about that a little later. Luke starts chapter 18 saying, **After these things...** after establishing the brethren in Athens, and placing Dionysius in charge of the brethren, he leaves this city of his own accord. There is no pressure to flee persecution, but being led of the Spirit he travels 50 miles west to Corinth.

Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia, what we call Greece today. It was the chief commercial city of Greece. If Athens was the “Eye of Greece and the mother of arts and eloquence,” then Corinth was the mother of trade and commerce for Greece. Athens’ focus was on philosophy and the gods; Corinth focused on commerce, and trade.

Corinth was on the Isthmus, a four-mile trade route that connected Rome with the east. Before this area was cut into a water canal in 1893, merchants would unload their boats on one side of the Isthmus and transport it to another ship on the other side. Smaller boats would be pushed along the path with rollers. This trade route gave the city of Corinth immense wealth and an influx of all sorts of people which lead to much prosperity, but also sexual immorality and debauchery. The fact that Corinth was on this major Isthmian trade route, gave rise to the Isthmian games. Much like the Olympics, Corinth would host these

games, and because they were so well known in Corinth, Paul alludes to the victor's crown, the Stephanus crown of victory to those who run the race, 1 Cor 9:24-25.

To be a Corinthian became a synonym for loose living, *Κόρινθιαζομαι*- to Corinthianize was to practice whoredome and fornication. Strabo tells us in the temple of Venus at Corinth there was the Sanctuary of Aphrodite which possessed more than 1,000 priestesses who would practice prostitution in honor of the goddess Aphrodite. Corinth was a wicked city filled with perverse immorality and demon worship. When Paul writes his letters to the Corinthian church, he has to deal with this perverseness that the Corinthian believers were living in, **1 Cor 5:9-10; 6:9-11, 18-20**. These are the type of people Paul begins preaching to in Corinth... sinners who need the Gospel of Jesus Christ, such were some of you, but God rescued us out from that darkness and into His marvelous light.

So Paul comes to Corinth and finds a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who happen to have the same trade as him...

2) And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.

It is possible that Paul was by himself in Corinth and had sent Silas back to Macedonia, possibly Philippi. And through God's providence, Paul finds this amazing couple named Aquila and Priscilla. This husband-and-wife team become dear friends of the Apostle Paul. They had traveled from Rome to Corinth because in the 9th year of Claudius' reign, Claudius **commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome**. This would have been around 49ad.* A Roman historian named Suetonius (71-135ad) wrote about the lives of the Caesars and wrote about this event saying, "Claudius drove the Jews from Rome because they were incessantly raising tumults at the instigation of a certain Chrestus." There is debate about who this "Chrestus" is, however Tacitus was a first century historian that called Christians "Chrestianos." So Chrestus could have been a name that Romans used to refer to Christ. As we have seen in the book of Acts, the Jews were always inciting the city officials to do their dirty work against the Christians, and I think Claudius finally had enough, and kicked them out of Rome. This may have given rise to a larger than normal population of Jews in Corinth. Later after Claudius died, Jews were allowed back into Rome, of which we see Aquila and Priscilla move back there after living in Ephesus, Romans 16:3-5. But while in Corinth, they open their house to the Apostle Paul...

3) So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.

Paul was a tent maker by trade, and needing financial provisions in this new town, he finds a fellow Jew who owns a tent making business. This is God's providential hand bringing this couple into Paul's life. Many times Paul worked with his hands to provide an income so as not to be a burden on the brethren. He did this in Thessalonica, 1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8, and he is doing the same thing in Corinth and makes mention of this in his letters, **1 Cor 4:12; 9:12**.

Aquila and Priscilla probably owned their own business as tent makers and they gave Paul a job, and allowed him to stay with them for 1-1/2 years. And through this, they became such good friends that when Paul left to Ephesus, they followed him there, Acts 18:18, 26. Aquila and Priscilla are such amazing people because in every city they live, they always established a house church for the believers, 1 Cor 16:19; Romans 16:3-5; 2 Tim 4:19.

4) And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

* Paulus Orosius, *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII*, Book VII, chapter 6

Paul is in Corinth, working as a tent maker during the week, staying with Aquila and Priscilla and preaching the Gospel every Sabbath in the synagogue, reasoning in the synagogue, διαλέγομαι- thoroughly explaining in a logical manner that Jesus is the Christ. And he is doing this to the Jew first then the Greek. And there are Jews and Greeks who are being persuaded and believing in Jesus. As I said earlier, it is possible that Paul was alone without Silas or Timothy in Corinth, because now Luke mentions both of them coming back from Macedonia...

5) When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.

When Silas and Timothy rejoined the Apostle Paul, it seems to have strengthened him. Some scholars suggest he was preaching a softer message at first, but then when his companions arrived, he began preaching Jesus as the Christ. But I disagree with this. Paul always preached Truth, **1 Cor 1:17-18, 23; 2:2**. But there was a certain joy from Timothy returning from Thessalonica that gave Paul strength when he found that the Thessalonian church was standing strong, **1 Thess 3:6-8**. Notice Paul says that Timothy came to “us.” Silas seems to have joined Paul first, then Timothy. And now at this time, Silas and Timothy have both arrived in Corinth with Paul and the Spirit begins pressing on the Apostle Paul, compelling him to do something. There is debate among scholars as to what Paul was compelled to do. The Alexandrian texts replace τῷ πνεύματι with τῷ λόγῳ translating this verse to say that he was compelled to the Word. But Paul was already compelled and driven to preach the Word, The Spirit is what is compelling him. Luke uses this same word in **Luke 12:50** describing Jesus’ passion. The Spirit is impressing in Paul’s soul to do something, and I think the answer is in verse 6...

6) But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

I think this compulsion by the Spirit is emboldening him to stand against the Jews and their blasphemous attacks and go to the Gentiles. And this also happens to be at the same time Silas and Timothy return from Macedonia giving him joy and encouragement. This is again God’s providence working these situations into His perfect plan, giving Paul the strength to go to battle. This is what the word **opposed** means, ἀντιτάσσω- literally to determine against or to arrange in battle array. These Jews hated Paul and wanted to kill him, and they begin arraying themselves against him and blaspheming him. But emboldened with the power of God, Paul **shook his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”** He tells them that the guilt of their own bloodshed is on their heads. They are committing spiritual suicide by rejecting Jesus. He says your destruction is on you... I am clean because I have told you the Truth, but now I go to the Gentiles. This is what God told **Ezekiel 3:18-19**. Paul was the mouthpiece for the Holy Spirit, but now in their rejection, the Spirit turns him toward the Gentiles. This happened in Antioch Pisidia, **Acts 13:46; 51**.

7) And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue.

Paul didn’t go very far... just next door to the house of a Gentile proselyte named Justus. I think its possible that the Spirit did this to provoke the Jews to jealousy, **Romans 11:11**. This seems to have worked because the Gospel prevails and there becomes a prominent convert from this synagogue...

8) Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

The conversion of Crispus makes many others awaken to the Truth and they hear and believe and are baptized. Later when Paul writes 1 Corinthians, he mentions Crispus as one whom he baptized, **1 Cor 1:14**. So the Gospel is bearing fruit, but I believe this opposition from the Jews is wearing on Paul. Paul

was an amazing man with a tenacious character, but he was still human, and this second journey had been hard. He was beaten and sentenced to death in Philippi, persecuted in Thessalonica, chased out of Berea, and now the unbelieving Jews are trying to kill him again. But in our weakness, He is made strong, and the Lord speaks to Paul in a vision...

9-10) ⁹ Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; ¹⁰ for I AM with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.”

The fact that Jesus comforted Paul with these words shows that Paul was struggling with some type of fear of being persecuted for preaching the Gospel. Jesus says, **Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent**. Paul’s entire life was filled with persecution, but the grace of God continued to strengthen Paul to speak the Word. Not only did Jesus speak to him directly in this night vision, but the companionship of the brethren was also a comfort to Paul. He mentions this later in his 2nd epistle to the Corinthians while on his 3rd journey at the coming of Titus, **2 Cor 7:4-7**. I am sure the coming of Silas and Timothy gave Paul great comfort and boldness to continue to preach the Word.

Jesus encourages Paul by sending Silas and Timothy and speaking to him in this night vision. And notice what Jesus says in verse 10... **for I AM with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city**. Paul said this in the book of Romans... “*If God be for us, who can be against us?*” Romans 8:31.

This is a promise that we as Christians all have... **JESUS IS WITH US**. *Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world*, 1 John 4:4. And Jesus gives Paul a promise that no one will attack him to hurt him. Paul must have been struggling with this fear that he would be attacked, beaten and even killed, but Jesus assures him of his safety because Jesus says, “**for I have many people in this city**.” The harvest was ripe in Corinth and God had big plans for Paul in this sinful city. So after hearing these words Paul obeyed...

11) And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the Word of God among them.

This is the longest he has ever stayed in a city on his missionary journeys so far. And during this time the enemy tried to come against him, but the Gospel prevailed and Jesus’ promise held true, and no one attacked or hurt him for 1-1/2 years. The enemy tried, but God’s hand was on the Apostle Paul. Notice their attempt in verses 12-17...

12-17) ¹² When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, ¹³ saying, “This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.” ¹⁴ And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. ¹⁵ But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters.” ¹⁶ And he drove them from the judgment seat. ¹⁷ Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things.

Sosthenes was another ruler of the synagogue. Either the replacement to Crispus or just another ruler in the synagogue. But here this was the favor of God keeping the enemy from harming Paul. In other cities, the crowd had been stirred up to persecute Paul. This was a common tactic by the unbelieving Jews. But this time, Gallio isn’t persuaded, and he protects the Apostle Paul. This judgment allows Paul to stay in Corinth and establish the church himself, teaching the Word daily to the brethren and probably having church in Aquila and Priscilla’s house.

And it was in this year and a half that Paul begins writing his first epistles... 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Galatians. Next week we will start to look into the letters to the Thessalonians.