

Acts 18:1-8

“The Light Of The Gospel Comes To Corinth”

We left off listening in on Paul’s outstanding address to the Athenians there at the Areopagus which rendered different responses to the word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ Paul was extended an invitation to share what it was that he’d been seeking to promote and persuade people towards there in the synagogue, on the streets, and in the market place with anyone who’d give him the time of day. Because some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers caught wind of what he was saying, and had never heard of what he was proclaiming. So that struck a chord in them because they all lived to be on the cutting edge of the latest information, and they said, “You’re bringing some strange thing to our ears, so we want to know what you’re talking about.” They thought he was proclaiming some sort of foreign gods or something. and Paul basically said, “There’s only one God who’s foreign to you that I want to talk to you about.” You see they had a god for just about any and every thing you could think of there in Athens, you don’t have to be overly familiar with Greek mythology to be aware of that. But as Paul was combing the city streets there he found an altar with the inscription, “TO THE UNKOWN GOD.” Perhaps they’d missed one, there may’ve been a god who was foreign to them that they didn’t know of, but they didn’t want to *offend* him so they made an altar *to* him. Paul says, “It’s this God whom you worship with out knowing, the One who’s currently foreign to you that I want to share with you.” and Beginning with creation and taking them all the way through the culmination of all things (judgment) he gave them the whole thing.

The fact that God created the heavens and the earth, that we’ve all been created from one blood, that God has appointed our preappointed boundaries of our dwellings and times in which we’d live, that we might seek Him, grope for Him and find Him. But not to be confused because He’s not far from any of us; for it’s in Him that we live and move and have our being. God’s presence is all about us, He’s omnipresent, all-powerful, all things were created through Him and for Him, Christ is before all things, and in Him all things consist. and Paul said, “You know you’ve worshipped God ignorantly in the past, and God has been gracious, but now that we have the full revelation of who God is, the will of God and the ways of God manifested in the person of Jesus Christ God commands all men everywhere to repent.”

We spoke of how Jesus confronts us with accountability, because one day God will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He’s ordained, and He’s assured us of that fact by raising Him from the dead. When they heard of the resurrection they began to respond and react in different ways, Jesus has a way of drawing a line and dividing people, because you’re either for Him or against Him, you’ll either receive Him or reject Him. Some of the people began to mock, “Give me a break, ‘raised from the dead’ that’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard.” Of course the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, others resisted, procrastinated, tried to put Paul off. “Come again tomorrow and we’ll hear you then.” But Paul didn’t play those games, didn’t entertain indecision, because indecision is a decision, and there are too many people hungering for the truth and willing to respond to the hope found in Christ to waste time trying to convince someone who’s really not interested in the 1st place.

But then others received the message, gave their heart to Christ and joined Paul. But Paul didn't come back, he'd had his fill, he's shared the gospel, now it was up to them. So as we enter this episode that begins to wind down Paul's 2nd missionary journey, (city wise anyway, he's still a couple years or so from wrapping it up time wise) we read.

Vs1

It's interesting to me the radical success that Paul would have here in Corinth in the work of evangelism when you consider how extremely opposite this city was from Athens. Not so much when it came to the idolatry, but when it came to the lewdness of the lifestyle differences. As we spoke last week Athens was seen as a highly cultured, incredibly intellectual, a sophisticated and educated kind of a city. Corinth was anything but... Now it was a major metropolitan, a primary trade route with regards to shipping cargo. The route around the southern tip of Greece was treacherous and so ships coming from the east would deposit their cargo there and then it would be taken by land a few miles to the other side and then loaded back up and shipped to Rome. If you look at your map at the back of your bible you'll see that there where Corinth is, it's a very narrow land mass. So it was a commercially happening kind of a city, but the reputation of the lifestyle of the people who lived there was very debased. When a Corinthian was depicted in a play, they generally portrayed them as drunk. When someone was suspected or known to live an immoral lifestyle they were often referred to stereotypically as a "Corinthian." The temple of Aphrodite could be found there which was inhabited by 1,000 temple prostitutes who would descend upon the city every night to entice men to engage with them in the ritual worship of Aphrodite and they'd use the money they made to maintain the temple. It was the Grecian sin city, it was our Las Vegas or something like that, just a wicked city.

Paul wrote his letter to the Romans from the city of Corinth and so when you read there in ch 1 of the moral uncleanness of man, how that being given over by God (because of their refusal to acknowledge God) to the lusts of their own hearts, how that man debases himself and dishonors his body. He speaks there of homosexuality, committing what is shameful, "...*being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;*" Rom 1:29-31 This is the Gentile corruption he spoke of when he wrote to the Romans from Corinth, so it's almost as though we have a mirror there of what he was up *against* and being exposed *to* while he was there. But all that to say that here in Corinth his ministry will excel, which you wouldn't really expect. But when he was in Athens and speaking to a highly cultured people, a people who were "open to reason" sophisticated and educated, you'd think, now these people will surely respond to Christ. But isn't it amazing how often those whom you think will come to Christ never do, and the one's you think don't stand a chance are born again when someone shares the forgiveness of God in Christ with them?

To me this is just another reminder of the love of God, how that there's no sin so grievous, no act so atrocious, no behavior so abhorrent but that God can't *forgive* you and give to you everlasting life if you'll just receive Jesus. It's a practical picture of where sin abounds, grace abounds still more. and So God sends Paul into this pit of the moral declension of man to shine as a light in that dark place. and What do we learn (I used to say it all the time) that Christ is able to save not only to the uttermost, but unto the *guttermost* those who come to God through Him. Jesus didn't come to call the righteous, but the sinner to repentance, it's not the well that's in need of a physician but the sick. Isn't that good news?

Now that doesn't mean we need to seek out sin-infested venues to visit. Paul didn't go to the bar to be a light down there, he didn't go to the strip joints to share Christ with those gals, he didn't go into the Temple of Aphrodite to try and reason with a 1,000 prostitutes. The bible says were to, "*Abstain from all appearance of evil.*" 1 Thess 5:22 Which is to say if it even looks on the surface a bit shady, just steer clear of it altogether. But we understand that we can't leave the planet, and by default by being in the world (yet not of the world) we're going to be around ungodly people, be a light, show them Christ. That's what Paul was about there in Corinth, showing and sharing Christ.

Vs2-3

So when Paul came to an area, if his intention was to be there any length of time at all, he got a job and provided for his own way. Paul was trained up as a rabbi, and Jews in general were big on teaching their kids a trade, but rabbis very specifically required it so that they'd always have something to fall back on when times were tough. and They never took money from their disciples, so often times they'd utilize that trade to support themselves. But Paul didn't have a big missions organization behind him, sponsoring his work in the mission field and so he often employed his trade as a tentmaker/leather worker to get by.

Now, this was really an exception, Paul was really careful to set the standard, and be above board so high that he could never be accused of peddling the gospel for money, or seeking to take advantage of the people for personal/self-centered gain. and Above and beyond that he often provided for the rest of his missionary team when they were with him. But as I said this was an incredible exception, most of the apostles didn't do this; they'd receive their sustenance financially from the church. and Paul recognized and endorsed the rightness of that. As a matter of fact he recounts that in his letter *to the Corinthians*, leave the book of Acts and turn to 1st Cor 9:3-14.

Then he goes on to speak of how even though it's completely scripturally acceptable he didn't usurp any of those rights that he might present the gospel with out charge so as not to abuse his authority in the gospel. He just safeguarded himself from accusations of ill will, of being a charlatan, or only in it for the money. In his 2nd letter to the Corinthians he spoke of how he received money from other churches specifically so that he could give the gospel to them free of charge; how that the churches in Macedonia sent aid to him (which we'll see in a minute) and he did what he needed to do in order not to be a burden to them.

That's right, the last thing that ministers of the gospel should be to the people is a burden, if I'm a burden to this fellowship and not a blessing than something is direly wrong. (and I'm getting a little personal here but) when the board is discussing issues that have to do with my salary, I make it very clear that I appreciate to whatever degree the body is able to bless my life, I want to provide well for my family just like everyone of you do. and For some reason it seems to be ok for people to make a good living in just about every field that they're occupied with but unless the pastor is living in a cardboard box somewhere he can't be spiritual, he must be carnal. and I've never really understood that mindset, someone who works to maintain your physical well being, we want them to be paid well. I've always said I don't want the guy who's massaging my heart (God forbid) keeping me alive to be disgruntled in that moment over his salary. But the guy who's called to help maintain your eternal well being, we often have a different conviction about his wage. But the point is that though I appreciate whatever is being done for me, the last thing I want is to be burden to the body here, I don't want there to be a strain paying the bills, or supporting whatever missions we feel led to get behind or whatever because of my pay check. Paul refused to be a burden to those to whom he was ministering, whether it meant his abounding or being abased, he desired to be a blessing to the people, so when he was planting a church, or ministering in a certain town for a season, he didn't make a big deal of it, just employed his trade.

When he got to Corinth he found a guy by the name of Aquila who was married to a gal named Priscilla who were of the same trade so they all worked together and he no doubt exchanged his room and board for a percentage of the business intake. But vs 2 tells us that the reason Aquila and Priscilla were there was because they'd been excommunicated from Rome when Claudius commanded all the Jews to get out. Now that happened around 49A.D. Exactly where that was in relationship to their moving from Italy to Corinth we don't know but that gives you a bit of a guidelines as to what point in history Acts 18 is taking place. and The record tells us that he did that because of all the disruptions that broke out of which a certain "Chrestus" was at the root. Most commentaries think that that in reality points to a Roman misunderstanding/corruption/confusion of the word "Christ" and that the message of Jesus as the Christ in Rome was causing upheavals in the Jewish community just like it did in every other Jewish community that Christ was preached and because of all the disturbances, riots, and upheavals that was taking place over the issue amongst the Jews in Rome that Claudius just banned them all from even being there. Now whether or not that's accurate, I don't know, but it is a possibility. But in reality its just the divine providence of God bringing this couple to Paul to serve alongside of him in the work of the ministry. As we continue in the book of Acts we'll see that they become valuable players in Paul's team, as you read his epistles (Rom, 1st Cor, 2nd Tim) their names will surface in a positive light. Paul told the Romans that they risked their own necks for his life. and Every Pastor thanks God for the Aquilas and Priscillas that come into their lives, families who have dedicated their hearts, their hands, and their homes to the service of the Lord.

So I see it sort of like when Jesus was born and the decree went out that all the world should be taxed, and that forced Joseph and Mary to go to Bethlehem to register. But in reality it wasn't Caesar Augustus that was in control, the scripture had prophesied hundreds of years previously that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem. So the fact is that God was the one in control simply setting the stage for the fulfillment of the scripture. That's sort of what's happening here in that Claudius may've made a decree that all the Jews were to leave Rome, but the reality is that God wanted Paul to hook up with Aquila and Priscilla for a season to work together as a team in the ministry. So they hooked up, are working together throughout the week and vs 4 tells us.

Vs4-5

So though secular employment isn't a bad thing, with regards to one's ability to function effectively in the sphere of ministry it does have its drawbacks. Because he was occupied with his outside employment throughout the week, it limited his interaction with people in any in depth kind of way to the weekends. Because when you're employed somewhere to work, you're there to work, not preach. Often times people think that they're being persecuted for righteousness sake when they get written up, or fired from their jobs because they were all the time sharing Christ in the factory rather than doing what they were hired to do. But the fact is, it's a bad witness to put what you've been hired to do on hold to share Jesus with a work buddy. You've been hired to work, the best witness you can be is to be the hardest worker in the plant, now on your breaks, at lunch, after work, whatever, share all you like, but with regard to work time, work! That's what Paul did, but then he dedicated his weekends to the ministry, reasoning from the scriptures with the Jews and the Greeks persuading them in his exposition of the word. Now vs 5 informs that the Silas and Timothy finally caught up with him here in Corinth (he'd sent for them while he was in Athens) and having come from Macedonia that's how we're able to piece together along with what he wrote in 2nd Corinthians that they came to him with financial support from the churches in that region. and When he received it (again he never demanded it, and refused to ask for it, but when it was given to him he humbly received it) he was able to quit making tents for a while and devote himself to full time ministry.

That's what this phrase, "Compelled by the Spirit" means. You say, "How does it mean that?" That's a good question, I'm not sure why the King James translators translated this phrase like they did, the word for "compelled" there means "to be fully occupied" or "kept in" and the word "Spirit" there is in fact the word "Logos" in the Greek which means "Word."

So I'm honestly not sure what was going on there with that translation and I think virtually every other translation has it to the effect of him being occupied fully with the word, which is correct. When they came to him with the gift, he ceased his trade and occupied himself fully with the Word. and with fresh wind and fresh fire being encouraged by the good news they brought him (as he writes to the Thessalonians) he began to preach that Jesus was the Christ all the more fervently.

Vs6

Couple things we need to see here, #1 underline that phrase, “The opposed him.” Whenever God is blessing your ministry, persuading people, adding to His kingdom and all, not only will that increase your *opportunities*, but it will also increase your *opposition*. When Paul was writing to the Corinthians about his outreach in Ephesus he said, “*For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*” 1 Cor 16:9 Great and effective doors make for many adversaries. Why? The enemy doesn’t care for you invading his territory, liberating his slaves, so as difficult as adversity is in the ministry, be encouraged if things aren’t always going smoothly. Spurgeon used to say, “The devil never kicks a dead horse!” The point being that if you weren’t alive and being effective in your service to the Lord, the enemy would leave you alone, keep your life running smoothly in a non-effective manner. So when adversity visits your life in your service to the Lord, take heart, you must be effective.

The 2nd thing I want you to see is this phrase, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean.” What does that mean? It takes us back to Ezekiel 33, lets turn there quickly (Vs2-9) The point is that if we don’t do our part in warning people of impending judgment, the salvation that’s found in Christ, we’re accountable for that. But if we tell people how they can be saved, and they reject the message, than you’re clean and they’re accountable themselves. You’ve told them, they’ve rejected it. Paul is saying here, “I told you that Jesus is the Christ, you’ve willingly rejected that message, I’m innocent and blameless before God concerning you, your blood be upon your own heads.” So if you want to make sure you’re blameless before God, don’t be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, give it to people as God opens those doors, and then let them decide for themselves, but at least they could never say, “No one ever told me.” They’ll be accountable, and you’ll be innocent.

Vs7-8

Now Paul was called to the Gentiles, but he had a real heart for the Jews, and even when he ministered to the Gentiles he did so in such a way as to try and provoke the Jews by jealousy to come to Christ when they saw what God was doing in the lives of the Gentiles. When he wrote to the Romans (which he wrote from Corinth) he says, “*For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.*” Rom 11:13-14 So when he rejects their rejection of him and tells them he’s innocent of their blood, what does he do? He starts a home study to the Gentiles in a house right next door to the synagogue, now you talk about stirring emotions and provoking to jealousy! “I can’t believe what he’s doing! He’s meeting with Gentiles right here in plain sight!” and They could watch and see what was happening, they began to see lives change, hearts turn towards God, I love the description given to Justus, “One who worshipped God.”

What a good thing to say of someone when you're trying to specify something about someone so that a chief characteristic might be brought out. When people describe you, what do you think they say? "That one who's always rude, or in a bad mood." "The one who's always got something critical to say" "The one who's always down and depressed, the black hole of emotional need who refuses to be satisfied." Wouldn't it be cool if when people were talking about you, you were referred to as, "One who worshipped God?" "One who walked *with* and was devoted *to* God."

But what was the result of what Paul did? "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household." He watched what was happening, was drawn *to* and believed *in* the Lord with his whole family, provoked, and saved. As were many of the Corinthians, and we read of them here that many of them, "Hearing, believed, and were baptized." You might underline that and draw attention to the order, because it's right. 1st you hear the Word, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, then having heard, you're able to decide to believe or not, many of them did. and Then believing, they wanted to proclaim publicly the transformation of their heart inwardly through baptism. That their identification was in Christ, it's not the other way around. Some people teach that if you're not baptized, you're not saved, but they weren't baptized in order to become Christians, but having already become Christians they were baptized to confess their death to self, and new found life in Christ, the Savior in whom they had put their trust.

So the light of the gospel comes to Corinth, and it's shining bright right now, God is doing a great work. and God wants to do a great work in you as well, that the light of the gospel might shine through your life to a hurt and dying, dark world around you. Don't be ashamed of the gospel, but proclaim the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, that people might hear, believe and be saved. Will you meet adversity, absolutely, but God will be with you, so speak and don't keep silent (But that's next week).

Prayer Points: God give us boldness to be the light in this dark world that You've called us to be. Help us to lead our lives in such a way that You according to Your will might use us in a great and effective way for Your own Glory. That we might live in such a way as to be identified as one, who worships You, is in Love with You, one who serves You with our whole heart. God we thank You that there's no sin so atrocious, no behavior so belligerent, that You aren't willing to forgive, and have a desire to reconcile us to Yourself.

If you're here today and perhaps you've been apart of things that you're ashamed of, or you've led your life in a manner that you thought could never be forgiven, God is able to save even to the guttermost those who come to Him through Christ, God loves you, wants to forgive you. Give your life to Christ, maybe you're not that bad, if you've blown it as much as one time in your life, you need forgiveness. Let God forgive you today, don't harden your heart, come to Him now and He'll wash you white as snow.

