

- **We are continuing in ACTS, Paul's second missionary journey.**
- **We just left Athens, where Paul delivered his famous speech about the Unknown God. Now, Paul is back on the road, and our next stop is CORINTH.**

✠ Next stop, Corinth

Acts 18:1-4 *After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.*

- **Ok, let's give a little context.**
- **Corinth was about 40 miles west of Athens (map). Very large city for its time, around 200k people**
- **It had a major port, a hub of commerce, and was an important Roman administrative city**
- **Corinth also possessed a small but significant Jewish population. Combining this with its location and influence, Corinth- like Philippi- was a strategic location to plant and grow the Gospel.**
- **THAT SAID, Corinth was NOT a culture friendly to the Gospel, either from Jewish community or the highly secular Greek and Roman communities, not to mention Corinth was a center for pagan worship of Aphrodite.**
- **So Corinth was a prosperous city, and known for its immorality. Several commentators have noted that Corinth was the Las Vegas of its day.**

- **INTO THIS ENVIRONMENT Paul enters with the message of Jesus, and from the minute he arrives we see the Spirit at work- providing Paul with a key relationship that will become very important- an Italian Jewish couple Priscilla and Aquila.**

² There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome.

- **Here we have an important timeline marker. Claudius was the Roman Emperor at this point, and his expulsion of the Jews from Rome in AD 49 is a well attested historic event. Combined with other evidence, we can very accurately place Paul's time in Corinth to about AD 50 to 52... 17-19 years since Jesus resurrection. REAL PEOPLE, REAL EVENTS.**
- **A little more context. Historical records tell us Claudius evited Jews from Rome because conflict had arisen inside the Jewish community, causing riots and civil disturbance, over the identity of someone named CRESTUS.**
- **Almost every scholar on this agrees the ancient historian here misspelled the Latin name for Jesus, and IN FACT, the riots in Rome arose for the very same reason they had arisen in almost every city Paul had visited, and was about to arise here in Corinth- it was the message of the resurrection and Gospel of Jesus Christ.**
- **Claudius reacted by just expelling all Jewish families. In Corinth, something different will happen.**
- **In any case, Aquila and Priscilla were among those driven from Rome, and it's very likely they had become believers while they were there.**
- **SO- Paul meets Priscilla and Aquila, it turns out they were leatherworkers like Paul, and they open their home to him.**

Paul went to see them,³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.⁴ Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

- **Up to this point, the pattern in Corinth is familiar. Paul finds common ground, God provides a home from which to work and minister, and Paul engages the Jews in the local synagogue. BUT THIS TIME, something changes.**

† A change of focus

Acts 18:5-8 When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁶ But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

- **Interesting! Paul has been opposed by the Jews virtually everywhere he has gone! On first read, it seems like he finally loses his temper, completely giving up on the Jewish people altogether. But that’s not really what happened here.**
- **FIRST, Paul had already been preaching to gentiles, so that was not new. Also, when he leaves Corinth and travels to Ephesus, he will first go first to the Synagogue, just like before.**
- **You see Paul’s change of focus here- which we can’t deny was a frustrating and emotional event- was still led by the Spirit. Paul’s deep desire was for people to hear and respond to the LIFE GIVING truth of the Gospel- and when he met nothing but resistance, he chose to focus his efforts away from his own people- had to have been gut wrenching- and instead focus his efforts on people where God was bearing fruit.**
- **So, in an almost humorous move that had to drive the Jews crazy, Paul leaves the Synagogue, and goes.. next door.**

⁷ Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God.

- **Titius is a gentile who worshipped the Jewish God- he opens his home, and Paul picks up right where he left off.**

⁸ Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.

- **Amazingly, the synagogue leader himself becomes a believer, and many gentiles did.**
- **This is remarkable- here in Corinth- probably the most pagan city Paul has visited yet- the ministry is extremely successful, many come to know the Lord. The Corinthian church will become one of the largest community of believers outside of Israel.**
- **Now, at this point, Paul and his crew might have been getting nervous- because this was about the time the big riots normally broke out. If you’ve been keeping count, Paul has now been run out of six different cities.**
- **But instead, The Lord speaks to Paul in a vision, giving him...**

† Two commands and two promises

Acts 18:9-11 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” ¹¹ So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

- **Luke doesn’t tell us that Paul was discouraged, but the timing of this vision indicates that Paul NEEDED to be encouraged. The encouragement Paul receives from God is incredibly relevant to us today.**

- Do not be **AFRAID**

- **FEAR NOT!** This may be one of the most consistent and resounding messages throughout all scripture! We are called to be people of WISDOM, discernment, but not of fear.
- We live in an unsettled time- many things going on that fill people with fear- as disciples of Jesus, we need to ask ourselves the question- where is there fear in my heart? What impact is this having upon me, those around me... how is God leading me to give this fear to him- what does that look like?

- Do not be **SILENT**

- This too is a powerful theme of scripture- as God's people, to not be silent? But if God calls us to keep speaking- what is he calling us to speak ABOUT? I'm coming back to that.
- Then there is God's great promise to us all- you don't have to be afraid, and you can have the courage to be obedient, because I, GOD, AM WITH YOU.

- I am **WITH YOU**

- And then, God makes a promise that isn't necessarily for us, but was for Paul, in order to carry out God's purposes at that time. God said, "Paul..."
- I will protect you. Important! This promise is to **PAUL**.
- As we know, Paul has been attacked and harmed before, and it will happen again- in fact, Paul's witness to the gospel will cost him his life.
- The deeper principle here is that everything Paul is doing is really not his work. It is God's work. Paul is being obedient, and he is being obedient out of the sincere desire of his heart- but the prime actor here is God, by the Holy spirit working through Paul, but also working around Paul.
- God basically says "Paul- you're not the only thing I've got going on here. I'm at work in a broader way than even you understands. So don't be afraid- here in Corinth, you are safe. So be bold!
- And SO, Paul IS bold- and after about 18 months, the resistance against him finally comes to a head. IN THIS last part of the story from Corinth, we see an important reminder for us today about...

- † God, governments, and the most important thing

Acts 18:12-17 While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment.

- The greek here is where we get the term "Bema Seat"- a throne of Judgement- term shows up in Revelation. In Roman Society, the Bema seat was a place where the highest judge for the city or province, who delivered judgements to which there was functionally no appeal. Pauls opponents are seeking to silence him once and for all.

¹³"This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law."

- Not clear what they meant by 'law'. Context suggests they were referring to their own law- the old covenant- which Paul clearly was confronting with his message of the NEW COVENANT. But, it's also possible they were accusing Paul of violating ROMAN law, since they had dragged him before the Roman authority. What law would that be?
- It was Rome's custom to allow people of conquered provinces to worship according to their own faith and customs. BUT, the religion had to be recognized and approved by Rome.
- What Jewish leadership in Corinth might have been arguing is that Gospel was not recognized by Rome, thus Paul was preaching an unauthorized religion.

- **But Gallio doesn't buy it, because in his mind, the emergence of the church was just another branch of Judaism- and by this argument he essentially declares that Rome didn't have a problem with the new Christian faith.**

¹⁴ Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to them, "If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. ¹⁵ But since it involves questions about words and names (**name of Jesus**) and your own law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things." ¹⁶ So he drove them off.

¹⁷ Then the crowd there turned on Sosthenes the synagogue leader...

- **Real quick- We're not sure who Sosthenes was. He could have been a Synagogue leader who believed the gospel, OR, he could have been one of the Jews trying to accuse Paul. In either case, he is in the wrong place at the wrong time, and the crowd- likely full of anti-semitic gentiles- very common in Romanized cities- turned on him. and beat him in front of the proconsul; and Gallio showed no concern whatever.**
- **In other words, Gallio didn't care about the fate of a Jew at the hands of the crowd, whether they be Christian or not.**
- **Now- you have to squint a bit to see it, but there is an important point here. As we've discussed before, Paul- and the new Christian community- operated below the radar of the Roman political authorities.**
- **Only time the Romans paid them any attention was when the Jews tried to accuse them of wrongdoing- WHICH the Roman authorities mostly rejected.**
- **The point is that the church did NOT SEEK TO ENGAGE THE POLITICAL INJUSTICE OF THEIR TIME. They were busy changing their societies and culture, but they didn't do it through political change, but through changing the hearts of PEOPLE through the message of the gospel and the hope of Christ.**
- **As such, Rome didn't see the church as a threat, and for this first generation of the church, they were able to grow and flourish essentially with the protection of Rome, not the opposition of Rome.**
- **NOW, as you well know, Rome would come to persecute the Christians, but NOT because the church was seeking to change the governmental systems. Rather, the believers allegiance to God above all things came to be seen as a threat to the allegiance to Caesar and the state.**
- **But if you study the early history of the church during the Roman persecutions, a fascinating reality is that these persecutions were almost wholly ineffective- one reason being the local Roman populations, for the most part, protected their Christian neighbors from the persecutions. For while the Emperor and higher levels of Roman Govt. hated the Christians, the Roman people themselves viewed the Christians as model citizens, even as friends, and they respected them and sought to protect them.**
- **I'm going to paraphrase from the author of my primary academic source material- Darrell Bock- an imminent conservative theologian and scholar.**
- **"As important as it is that our society operative in ways that lifts up humanity (governmental systems), nothing lifts up society more than a community filled with people whose hearts are right before God."**
- **In other words, the true power to transform society isn't law, it is the Gospel, the hope of Christ, and the Love of Christ being expressed through the lives of Disciples of Christ.**

- Again paraphrasing Bock, “We must not confuse congregation and country. We must not confuse being part of the body of Christ with belonging to any political party or ideology- for they ARE NOT SAME.
- Faith in Christ transcends politics because Christians- and people who NEED THE HOPE OF CHRIST- come from every part of society, culture, and political viewpoints- AND GOD IS the father and source of life for ALL BELIEVERS, regardless of our societal, cultural, or political backgrounds.

‡ Don’t be silent... about what?

- WRAP UP with coming back to God’s command for Paul to NOT BE SILENT. Just WHAT WAS IT God wanted Paul to keep on speaking- and if we seek to apply this to the church today, what is the message WE are called to keep on speaking... WHAT are we not to be silent about? Verse 11...

Acts 18:9-11 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” ¹¹ So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God

- What we are called to proclaim- to not be silent about- is the Word of God. The Gospel. That IN CHRIST, people who are broken, afraid, hurting, captive to sin and searching for hope will find redemption, mercy, love, kindness, goodness, acceptance, and identity.
- And joined with the work of the Holy Spirit, these people will come to see the truth of Christ because they see- and receive- these attributes of Christ from US- in how we live in our relationships with them.
- A few years ago I volunteered at the Young Life camp in Buena Vista- I ran the massive dishwasher deep in the kitchen. Now, when you volunteer at a Younglife camp, there’s a phrase they pound into your head, and it’s this: EVERYTHING SPEAKS.
- How you set the table speaks. How you make sure the dishes are clean speaks. How we honor and treat these kids from all walks of life SPEAKS- it tells them that they matter, they are loved, that they are valuable, to us and most importantly, to God.
- Church- when we consider the Call of God’s word NOT TO BE SILENT- to KEEP ON SPEAKING the hope of the Gospel- we need to remember that EVERYTHING about us speaks.
- In the midst of our community that is overwhelmingly ignorant of the undistorted message of the hope of Christ and Goodness of God- by HOW WE LIVE and the WORDS WE SAY, because EVERYTHING SPEAKS- may we be telling our community that they are valuable, they matter to us, and even more, they matter to the God who loves them and gave His life for them, that they may believe, and live.
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