

Paul's Ministry at Corinth

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[0 : 00] All right, ready for Acts? Back into Acts. And now remember, we're going to finish Acts this year, and I'm starting Romans next year, which, I thought about it this morning, is about six months.

So, I may split it up a little bit, but just so you know that's where we're going. So, welcome here for this Sunday, August 17th. My name is Kent Dixon, and it is my joy to be a refreshed pastor here today.

It's good to be back with you this morning. We had three chunks of vacation. We went to visit Michelle's mom. Then we went out to Lake Cucasusa, which is in the southeast corner of BC, and I had an opportunity to baptize someone there, and you'll hear more about that probably next week. And then Michelle and I spent a day in Radium, and then we went from Radium to Canmore. And some of you are familiar with Vernon Cathy's place in Canmore. So, some different chunks, different adventures, lots of pictures, some sleepless nights, some good rests, lots of adventures and good times, though.

So, Michelle took way more pictures than me, so I'm pretty sure her phone is now non-functional. Yeah, I keep telling her, it is a phone, not a camera. Never mind. Never mind.

[1 : 18] So, we're returning to our sermon series, Acts to All the World, and you hopefully remember that through this series, we've been exploring the New Testament book of Acts.

So, we're going to dive back into that. And a few quick reminders for you as we begin this morning. The book of Acts, you may remember, is originally a letter written from Jesus' disciple Luke to a man named Theophilus.

And Acts was actually the second letter that Luke had written to him, and the first being the gospel that we know as Luke. So, Acts is essentially part two of Luke's reporting to Theophilus.

First, of the life and ministry and death and resurrection of Jesus. And second, continuing in Acts, the story of the first 30 years, roughly, of the early church.

So, you can definitely go to the church website to listen or re-listen to any of those sermons that I've given in the series so far, so that they are all there.

[2 : 18] And you can search them by series. So, when we paused this series in July, we had just looked at Paul's sermon in Athens. That was the sermon that we had then.

And we considered the setting and content of that sermon, as well as how it was received and even the response that it created. The energy that came from it, as people listened and acted on what Paul had said.

And our sermon this morning is titled, Paul's Ministry in Corinth. Guess where Paul goes next? A little spoiler there for you. So, following his limited time at Athens, Paul traveled to Corinth.

The city of Corinth may be familiar to you, at least by name, but let's consider that for a bit. Corinth was an economic center of Greece. And it was also well known for its, this is a dubious honor, well known for its immorality.

Always a nice reputation to have, right? It's known for its immorality. And as you may know, then Corinth became an important focus of Paul's ministry as an apostle.

[3 : 26] A well-known church was established there. And the church received at least two letters from Paul that we're aware of, known as first and second, right.

Or as the U.S. president says, one Corinthians. Maybe he has a different understanding. Attended different Sunday school. So, scholars suggest that Paul's ministry in Corinth lasted approximately a year and a half.

And so, quite a lot happened during that time period. Paul worked as a tent maker, teaching in the local synagogue. And his role in the conversion of many Corinthians was notable.

Including the leader of the synagogue. Which is pretty amazing. We can also recognize how God provided for Paul during that time. Scholars suggest that it was during his time in Corinth that Paul wrote his two letters to the church at Thessalonica.

That we know as first and second Thessalonians. That's right. Okay, so our passage this morning is Acts 18, 1 to 18. So, you can turn to it in your Bible.

[4 : 34] I will put on my glasses. Acts 18, 1 to 18. And I'll read that for us now as well. After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

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. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tent maker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

Every Sabbath, he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching.

Testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titus Justus, a worshiper of God.

Crispus, the synagogue leader in his entire household, believed in the Lord. And many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized. One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision.

[5 : 52] Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking. Do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.

So Paul stayed at Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God. While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment.

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

But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law, settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things. So he drove them off.

And then the crowd returned on Sosthenes, the synagogue leader, and beat him in front of the proconsul. And Gallio showed no concern whatever. Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time.

[7 : 05] Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Sencria because of a vow he had taken.

Paul arrives in Corinth. So what happens when he first arrives? Well, Paul lived with Christians, we learn, named Aquila and Priscilla, a married couple. So he found this couple who, as Jews, had been expelled from Rome, right?

We heard that. They were living in Rome, and because they were Jewish people, they were expelled. We learn in Acts 18 that Aquila and Priscilla were the people who later converted Apollos, a man who eventually became a teacher and influential leader in the early church, a man who advanced the gospel of Jesus in the early church in those early days.

Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned by Paul in Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Timothy. The couple were tent makers then, we heard, right?

And as we know, Paul came to support his ministry partly by his own work as a tent maker, right? Maybe that's familiar to you. Tents were used by the Roman army to house soldiers.

[8 : 20] So I just slept in a tent for a while. It was probably not as nice, or maybe it was nicer. So there would have been a demand, because the Roman army was large, and they were always on the move and needed to house their troops, there would have been a demand for skilled tent makers.

Nearly everywhere Paul had traveled. So he's got a portable source of income that there would be a demand for it. So it likely made good sense, for lots of reasons, that Paul lived with Aquila and Priscilla while he was in Corinth, because they shared both a faith and a vocation, right?

It makes sense. There's a real synergy there. So during his time in Corinth, Paul also taught where? The synagogue. Great. Paul's favorite starting point.

And the text says that he reasoned with people there, right? So he debated with them. He gave his perspective. He listened to theirs. He was reasonable.

And they discussed. He debated with them and talked with them and taught them. That's what he did there. So Paul interacted with anyone and everyone in sharing the gospel, whether they were common people or even political or religious leaders.

[9 : 37] He wasn't above speaking to anyone. We can see that in Paul's ministry. He was not snobby, right? He didn't decide that the gospel was for these people, but not those.

Paul viewed the gospel as for everyone correctly, right? And so he wasn't intimidated by people's station or status. He wanted to share the truth of Jesus.

And Paul also reasoned with people on an intellectual basis. But he appealed to their hearts as well. It wasn't just head knowledge that he was looking to convey, but a heart change as well.

So Paul was really flying solo in Corinth for a while. I said to Vern this morning, Kathy is away. He's flying solo, right? So, and he nailed it, I must say.

So Paul was really flying solo for a while in Corinth. But then finally he gets some backup, right? Some support arrives.

[10 : 36] And that's his companions and partners in ministry, Timothy and Silas. So we learn that Timothy and Silas came from Macedonia to join Paul in Corinth.

So they traveled from where they were to where Paul was to meet up with them. And they brought good news about the church at Thessalonica. So they didn't just come and say, hey, Paul, what's going on?

They brought news of their own from the church that they had been working with there. And this prompted Paul to write a letter to that church, a letter that we know as 1 Thessalonians.

And it was written roughly around 49 to 51 AD. Are you wondering why the smaller number, the 49 to 51? It's because up to the birth of Christ we count down.

And then from then we count up, right? But you knew that because you're smarter than me. So our passage this morning suggests that when Timothy and Silas come to join Paul, he then, it says, he became devoted, Paul did, devoted to preaching and testifying to the Jewish people in Corinth about Jesus.

[11 : 43] So why is that? Why did he suddenly become devoted to that one task? Well, from what we know of the Apostle Paul, can you imagine, first of all, him ever being less than devoted ever, right?

He was not a, he was a all or nothing kind of guy. He would, he was all in. So maybe Timothy and Silas, when they came, maybe they were able to take some of the other tasks off his plate.

I think we get a sense of that here. Some of the other things that Paul was doing, some of the possibly administrative tasks or other things he was doing, so that he could be more focused on the teaching and preaching aspect that was needed in Corinth.

So as we'll come to see in Acts 20, in a few weeks, Paul testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and the God's prophesied Messiah, right?

So he spoke to the Old Testament prophecies and said, Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophecy. So it's safe to assume that Paul's testimony about Jesus would have related to those messianic prophecies from the Old Testament.

[12 : 52] And just as Paul had related in his interactions in the synagogue in Acts 17, we looked at that, that's a little while back, but he did the same thing there. He talked about Old Testament prophecy and made it very clear that Jesus was the fulfillment of those prophecies.

So as we know, persecution was never very far off for the early church, right, or the leaders of the early church. And we hear about that in Acts 18, 6, and 7.

And it wasn't just polite resistance that Paul faced. You know, it wasn't just like, well, we'd really rather you didn't talk about that, if you don't mind, awfully, sir. But it was open abuse that he received.

That's what we hear in Scripture. Likely more than just verbal, because it wasn't often that we hear resistance or persecution being harsh words only, right?

There's a lot of beatings involved. And Paul had experienced the same kind of response to his message when he preached in Pisidian Antioch. But in this case, I don't know if you noticed it, Paul had clearly had enough.

[14 : 03] Enough. He rebuked the abusive people. Now, if someone's coming at you aggressively, do you say, oh, yeah, come on, right? You try to de-escalate generally.

No de-escalation here. Paul had had enough. And he essentially, right there in Scripture, tells us he washed his hands of them. He said, your blood is on your own hands.

And he walked away. So it's interesting, then, just as he had done in Pisidian Antioch with the Jewish listeners, when they rejected and abused him, he immediately turned to a different audience.

Did you catch that as well? He turned to the Gentiles. No delay. No hesitation. No hesitation. And fortunately, we learn in this passage, Paul didn't have to go far because he found a receptive Gentile audience next door to where he had just been, at the home of a man, Scripture tells us, named Titius Justice.

So what happens when that's shared? Well, not surprisingly, the gospel bears fruit with that audience. We learn that a man named Crispus, who is the leader of the synagogue, as well as his entire household, along with other Corinthian citizens, they believed in the Lord and were baptized. [15:24] Scripture, that passage tells us that. And it's interesting, this man, Crispus, is mentioned again in 1 Corinthians 1.14. And if you take note of that, you can look it up.

Paul says there that he personally baptized this man, Crispus. So there's a real connection there that developed over time. And despite being rejected and even abused by some of the Jewish people who heard his message, many people, as often happened that we've heard, believed and were baptized.

So the young man I baptized last week, I think it was last Sunday, it's all a blur, is Gabriel West. So he is Joanne Kineshita's grandson. So Gabriel wasn't able to be here, he's still headed back from his vacation, but he'll be here next Sunday.

So I said to him, when we were talking about his baptism, kind of the day before, the morning of, kind of thing, I said, so did me harping on baptism over and over penetrate and make you feel convicted?

And he said, well, I felt convicted already, but he said, he said, I felt like it was time. And so he said, the fact that you were emphasizing baptism and making those connections and making it clearly important made me want to do it.

[16:44] So despite facing resistance and opposition, even persecution from some people, in the middle of all of that, Paul and his companions were still successful in preaching and communicating the gospel.

And Paul also received some encouraging confirmation from the Lord that led to a longer term stay in Corinth. Have you been encouraged by the Lord?

No nods, a few smiles. Yeah, I hope so. I hope so. So it could have very well been, would you have been discouraged by what was going on?

I sure would have been. Paul probably felt discouraged and frustrated. He had a short fuse, angry even, anxious about this mixed reception, right?

I have the good news. I have news that will change your life, change your eternity. And you won't hear it, right? You could see him becoming anxious about, Lord, why won't this be received?

[17:47] Why won't people, why are people angry? Why are people opposed to it? Welcome to our world now, right? But God encouraged him. God appeared to Paul in a vision we learn, and told him not to be afraid or to stop preaching the message that he had been given.

And God says this, for I am with you and no one will attack you to hurt you, for I have many people in this city.

I love how God says that to him. I have many people in this city. You may not know them, but I've got your back through them, so trust me. Remember that God knows what will happen in any and every situation.

Sometimes it's really easy to forget that. We have that kind of knowledge, that kind of wisdom and protection and insight in our corner 24-7, and yet we worry.

Interesting. Paul knew that the gospel preaching in Corinth would be successful, right? God told him he would protect him. He told him he would give him opportunities.

[18:58] He told him that many people would hear and obey. But going back to what I said a moment ago, there's also a sense here that God had some secret agents at work, right?

Some people behind the scenes. You ever had circumstances like that happen in your life? Where you learn, oh, I didn't know that person was a Christian, and they were in the background changing circumstances somehow.

Or you can see God at work through people or through circumstances. I mean, I can't claim credit for this, but they're God winks. I don't know if you've ever heard that before.

When a situation happens, when clearly God is at work, it's God saying, right here, I am right here, reminding you that he's with you and he cares for you.

So there were people God had, God was letting Paul know, that they were faithful folks who would potentially guard him and protect him as he carried out his mission.

[19 : 57] Jesus said, or God said, I've got you, and I've also got people on the, boots on the ground, if you will, who've also got you. So Paul remained, I think with this encouragement, Paul remained in Corinth preaching and teaching for a year and six months, we get a sense, during which scholars suggest he wrote 2 Thessalonians, roughly 51 to 52 AD.

So here we go again though, right? Things are going well until they're not. So no sooner does it seem like things are going well for Paul in the ministry that he's doing, then persecution ramps up again.

We learn that not only were the Jewish people opposed to and abusive about Paul's actions and message, they were, it seems, united in their perspective.

They took it very seriously. So I think as human beings, we get passionate and we unite around causes and passions and all sorts of things.

And that's what happened here. So these folks may not have agreed on everything, but they agreed that they couldn't stand Paul and were not going to put up with what he was saying. So whether it was something personal against Paul, maybe solely that they were taking offense at his message, or a bit of both.

[21 : 21] Maybe they didn't like him and they didn't like the message. The Jewish people here, we learn, hated Paul and wanted him to be punished. Right? They wanted him to be shut down and silenced.

So they brought their charges against Paul before a man named Gallio. He was the regional Roman governor of the province of Achaia in Greece. So it's interesting that, to me, that just as Pilate resisted convicting Jesus of charges, does this sound familiar at all?

Jewish people brought Jesus up on charges to a Roman official. We see that Gallio also resisted the pressures of a contingent of Jews who wanted Paul convicted and likely jailed, punished in some way.

So throughout history, we can see and recognize times when political leaders have been more than happy to take credit for or steal the limelight for themselves. Right?

Even if it means compromising their own ethics or caving to pressure. But Gallio, it's interesting here, he refused to even entertain the case brought to him against Paul.

[22 : 37] Right? He didn't say, I'll think about it, I'll get back to you. He right away said, this is a Jewish issue related to Jewish customs, Jewish laws, and religious matters.

I have no interest, Gallio says, in wading into this. Not my problem. Not my circus, not my monkeys. Gallio is clear that since there was no clear legal or criminal issue at play, very clear on that right in our passage, he wasn't going to take any action.

He wasn't going to do anything. You may want me to do something, but I'm not gonna. Right? Gallio didn't only deny the case and refuse to entertain charges against Paul.

Our passage tells us that he drove them off. Right? He didn't say, no, I'm not listening. I'm not listening, and get out. Right?

That's a pretty strong response. So he seems to be quite annoyed that the Jews brought this case against Paul to him in the first place. He's annoyed that they wasted his time.

[23 : 41] He viewed it as a religious issue, and he had no interest in getting involved with what he viewed to be religious matters related to Jewish theology.

Not interested. So the crowd was clearly riled up by everything. They immediately reacted with anger and hostility.

We can recognize that in this passage. And they turned on a man named Sosthenes, and he was the synagogue leader. And they beat him in front of Galio, in front of the proconsul.

So were they thinking, oh, you're not going to listen to our case? What if we grab this guy and beat him? Then maybe you'll listen. Think it worked? We learned that not even that drew Galio's attention or action.

Not interested, still. Go ahead, beat the guy. Not my problem. It seems that the abuse and persecution, though, must have eventually cooled down. There isn't a great amount of detail in the passage.

[24 : 42] But we learned that Paul stayed in Corinth, it says, for a time. Right? I said, theologians say roughly a year, year and a half. So things obviously cooled down enough for him to stick around.

Right? He felt safe enough to stay. And he remained dedicated and committed to his role as a gospel preacher and teacher in Corinth at that time. So the passage we've looked at this morning and the story we've explored this morning reminds us of some important things.

No matter what a person's social standing or status might be, their education, their age, their spiritual state, current spiritual state, or other circumstances, whatever they might be, the gospel is for everyone.

God is calling us, you and me, to join him in sharing the message of his love and grace with a world that so desperately needs him.

And whether we're specifically called as vocational servants of the Lord, like Paul and his companions, or me, I suppose, or we consider ourselves to be everyday folks, right?

[25 : 58] We're out there every day as a follower of Christ. We have a role to play in sharing the gospel with family or friends or anyone we meet.

Sharing the gospel, having someone come to know Christ and have their eternity secured. Don't you want everyone you know to have that gift? I think we hold it, right?

We hold it, and we cherish it, and that's good, but we forget to share it. You have the power, through Christ, to change someone's eternity by sharing that message.

I ask you to do it. And hopefully I'm correct in saying that the gospel of Jesus Christ has changed your life. Is that correct?

Changed your life. Is that relationship with Jesus the one that you treasure most? Please, don't keep that to yourselves.

[27 : 02] As followers of Jesus, until he returns, friends, we have got a job to do, but we have the Holy Spirit's power and strength and encouragement to help us do it.

We have nothing to fear. And that job is to bring light to the darkness. To declare the truth of Jesus Christ until he comes again.

Amen. Amen.