

God's Unstoppable Mission, Part 7: The Church in Corinth

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 March 2019

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] We will spend a few minutes together in Acts chapter 18, thinking about the church in Corinth.

We're working our way through Paul's missionary journeys. Donald took us to Thessalonica and Berea last week. Hendro preached for us towards the end of last year on Paul in Athens. So we find ourselves tonight Paul in Corinth. So Acts chapter 18 at verse 1. 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 the 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 Christ. But when the Jews 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 Titius Justice, a worshipper of God.

[1 : 32] Crispus, the synagogue ruler and his entire household, believed in the Lord. And many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized. One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision, 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 for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God. While Galio was pro-council of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court.

This man they charged is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law. Just as Paul was about to speak, Galio said to the Jews, 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 had them ejected from the court. Then they all turned on Sosthenes, the synagogue ruler, and beat him in front of the court.

But Galio should know concern whatever. Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Kench-Crea because of a vow he had taken.

[2 : 50] They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined.

But as he left, he promised, I will come back if it is God's will. Then he set sail from Ephesus. When he landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.

After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and travelled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus.

He was a learned man with a thorough knowledge of the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.

He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him.

[3 : 57] On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed, for he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

Amen. Now, what is to think just for a few moments this evening about Paul, the missionary, and particularly Paul and a life lived for the glory of God.

So we're still following Paul's missionary journey. We find him here now. He's traveled 75 kilometers east of Athens to the city of Corinth. This is going to be a lengthy stop of a year and a half, we're told.

By the time he moves on, a church has been planted. When you read the letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians, you discover that church planting was a messy business, still a difficult business today. You read the letters and you discover that the church suffered from divisions. There was immorality that was tolerated. There were lawsuits. They were recovering from idolatry, but they were brothers and sisters who were still in Christ and growing in grace.

[5 : 15] And Paul was thankful for this church. He could see God at work in Corinth. He could see Jesus building his church. But tonight, as much as we're going to see the church, I want us to focus on Paul, the missionary, to focus on his commitment to God and bringing God glory in three different areas of life.

And perhaps, as we do so, it will be a chance for us to reflect. Do I approach all of life wanting to give God glory? What would need to change for me increasingly to give God glory in day-to-day life?

Let's think, first of all, about Paul's vocation. I guess some of us, especially if we know anything about missionary work, we've maybe heard of tent-making ministry, the idea that in order to do ministry, you need to go with a profession, especially in countries that are closed to the gospel. That's what you need to do. You need to go as a professional, and there, as a professional, you're able to have an influence on the people around you. That's true in Indonesia. It's true in China, true in other places.

This comes from Paul. Paul arrives in Corinth, verse 2. He meets this couple, Aquila and Priscilla, a Jewish couple who have fled to Corinth, and they're tent-makers.

[6 : 42] And so Paul has learned that trade, and so he joins Aquila and Priscilla. And what's significant is the time that he spends in Corinth, working a trade, while alongside that he's sharing the gospel.

And I think it's important for us to recognize, when we think about Paul's vocation, quality work, quality tents, were a vital step in getting faith a hearing.

Because we can imagine, because we know how quickly the news about good and bad tradesmen go around. If Paul was trying to persuade, in verse 4, it says, every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

You know, that couldn't have happened. He wouldn't have had any integrity. If somebody in the crowd is whispering, he's the guy that sold my tent really badly. Or if there was chatter over here, he was the guy who was really rude and overcharged me.

Nobody listens to the bad tradesmen. And so Paul would have worked well, and that helped his message to be heard.

[7 : 48] Paul actually gave a principle to the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 31. Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.

And so we absolutely believe that Paul applied that to his tent making. Now, for you and me, we need to think about our vocations.

And now that's wider than employment. Paul was earning a living. But our vocation, that thing that we spend most of our time doing, whether that's paid or unpaid, that will vary widely for us.

Some of us are in school. Some of us are students. Some of us are workers. Some of us are retired. But every vocation, whatever that is, gives us an opportunity to bring glory to God when we follow principles laid down in the Bible.

So when we pursue excellence and quality, when we remember that no matter in what context we find ourselves to work for the audience of one, to work for God, when we determine that whatever it is that God has set before us, we're going to do that in a way that we bless others, that we bring good to others.

[9 : 10] You know, whether that's as a manager, whether that's as a member of staff, whether that's caring for our children, whether that's dealing with the public, we want to bless others with our

integrity and our commitment to quality because we want to serve and honor God.

The entertainer toy shop is a great example of this. You know that the owners of the entertainer brand of toy shops is a Christian, and it's really striking, especially towards Christmas, they will still stay closed on a Sunday to honor God and to give workers a day of rest.

And it's recognized that they are one of the happiest shops to work with. But we're discovering from Paul, and we learn from the Bible, that to glorify God, we need the right motive.

Whatever God has set before me, I want to do it to honor him. We need to do our best. We want God to use our vocation for his glory to give faith a healing because that's how Paul used it in Corinth.

So Paul used his vocation to the glory of God to allow his message to be heard. Now let's think about Paul's preaching for a few moments.

[10:33] Verse five, we're told, when Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

So it seems like a next phase in Corinth. It's not clear whether did Silas and Timothy come with some financial resources so he didn't need to make tents anymore so he could have more time to preach.

It's not clear. But we certainly see what he devoted himself to. He devoted himself to telling the Jewish people, that Messiah that you are waiting for is here.

His name is Jesus. Let me introduce him to you from the Old Testament. Now, Dr. Luke doesn't record for us how he did that.

We can see throughout the book of Acts how often the apostles and Paul would go to the Old Testament and say what was predicted there, we see fulfilled in Jesus.

[11:32] So perhaps, thinking about this morning, perhaps he was saying, Jesus came as the Son of Man, spoken of in Daniel chapter 7, that one with glory and power and authority and the right to rule and worship.

Perhaps he would have gone to Ezekiel 37. Jesus is the shepherd king in the line of David. He is the one who is sent as God to shepherd his people.

Perhaps he would have gone back to the Exodus story. Exodus 12. Jesus is the Passover lamb, the one who is sacrificed for you and for your redemption.

Perhaps from Psalm 16, as the apostles often did, Jesus is that holy one speaking of who the Lord did not allow to see decay because he rose from the dead after three days by the power of God.

But what's clear is that he is reasoning in the synagogue, so he's reasoning from the Bible, showing that God's Savior is Jesus, that those promises and predictions in the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus.

[12:48] So Paul, who'd been raised to know the Old Testament Scripture, he knew his Bible and he used that knowledge so that he could reveal the glory of Jesus to the people who were listening.

What we discover in Corinth, as we've seen so many times, is that many of the Jews didn't want to know. In verse 6, we discover that some oppose Paul and become abusive. And then we see Paul following the teaching of Jesus when he shook out his clothes and said, your blood be on your own head.

It was Jesus who said, don't throw your pearls before swine. The gospel is a precious treasure. If people don't want to know, there comes a point where it's time to move on, to share it with a more willing audience.

It was Jesus who said to the disciples, go from place to place. And if there's a place that doesn't accept your message, shake the dust from off the sandals of your feet and move on. And so Paul does that.

In a sense, he moves out from the synagogue and begins to teach. Just around the corner, he moves next door. And he begins to share with a new audience, but it's the same message.

[14:02] Jesus is Lord. And many believe and are baptized. Time and again, we see in the Bible that this principle, that it was Donald that was saying this to us last week.

There's always a response to the word of God. Nobody ever remains neutral to the word of God. The Puritans had a saying.

They said, the same sun that melts the ice hardens the clay. So some of us, we hear the message of Jesus, the Savior, and it causes us to love him more.

It causes us to love him for the first time. Whereas others hear about sin and judgment and the need to turn to God. It just washes over.

And in that case, there's a hardening. And so here we find Paul determining to share the gospel from the Old Testament to show the glory of Jesus in his preaching.

[15:06] And that's the same call on us today as God's church. We are called to show Jesus is the Savior that everybody needs.

to present him as that shepherd who loves us, who gave his life for us, and now walks with us. That Jesus is the temple.

He's the only place where it's possible for us to meet with God. He fulfills that spiritual longing that so many have. That Jesus is the risen King, the one who gives eternal life to all who will believe.

Have we heard the gospel? Have we responded to that gospel? And are we seeking to share that gospel so that others might turn and believe?

So we find Paul, he's working, and then he's preaching, and things are hard. He meets with opposition and abuse, but he stays, and he stays for a year and a half because of a conviction that he has.

[16:15] Let's think about Paul's conviction and where it comes from. In verse 9, one night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision.

Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking. Do not be silent, for I am with you. No one is going to attack and harm you because I have many people in this city.

So his conviction comes from God's word. Here, he heard it in a vision. For us, we hear God in his word. The message comes, don't be afraid.

But of course we see, and we've already seen in Paul's missionary journey, he had good reason, humanly speaking, to be afraid. The gospel message always provoked opposition and attack.

He was told, stay and keep on speaking, and he needed that sense of conviction because other times there was a clear sense that now is the right time to move on.

[17:14] He has this confirmation from God. I will protect you. I will use your ministry. I have plans to build my church here in Corinth.

But of course, Paul still has a choice. Will he respond to the word of God or not? Will he listen?

Now, if he was motivated by a sense of personal glory or personal comfort and safety and security, Corinth might not have been a great place to live in because he was already beginning to feel attacked.

But how does Paul respond? He's convicted by the word of God. He has convictions that he should listen to God. Verse 11, so Paul stayed for a year and a half teaching them the word of God.

God speaks, Paul obeyed, Paul listened. Paul cares for the glory of God. He trusts the word of God, so he stays.

We read from verse 12 onwards that there is opposition from some influential Jewish people, but he keeps on speaking, and Jesus builds his church.

[18:21] So when Paul leaves, verse 18, Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time, then he left the brothers, the brothers and sisters. So by the time he leaves, there's the beginnings of a church.

God has been faithful to his word. So Paul is a man with the courage of his convictions. He is concerned for the glory of God. If God says go, he's going to go.

If God says stay, he's going to stay. There's a wonderful verse. Paul spoke to the folks in Athens. Acts chapter 17, verse 26. If you flip back one page, the very bottom of the page, Acts chapter 17, verse 26. There's this wonderful truth.

From one man, God made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth, and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

[19:19] So here's a wonderful reality for all of us. Times and places are set by God for his glory. So Paul has already come to understand that God has planned his location.

God has planned our location and our vocation. And along with that, God has given us a particular temperament, particular gifts, particular areas of influence.

Why? So that we might pursue his glory, just as Paul, in his time and place, pursued God's glory. This is good news.

Our life matters to God. Our days are numbered and planned by God. Our place and situation is prepared by God. And so we can trust God to provide for us, to protect us, to help us persevere in what he has set before us.

So we see in Paul a man who lived for God's glory, whether he was working, whether he was preaching, whether it was just his conviction saying that this is a place where I need to be. [20 : 30] So again, for ourselves, perhaps it would be good for us to reflect what needs to change in my life, in your life, so that more and more we might reflect that same concern for God's glory in our own lives.

you