

Acts 18

The Gospel for Different Minds

The Book of Acts is continuing to take us through iterations of the gospel effort, and how that changed the further away from Jerusalem they got. Acts 16, ironically featured a young disciple named Timothy, the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother. He represented *the intersection* of both cultures. Everything written in Acts prior to chapter 16 was heavily Jewish. After chapter 16 it becomes more and more Greek/Gentile based. It's a little different. The Jews were focused on authentication, while the Gentiles wanted evidence and facts and supporting details.

Accordingly, Paul found himself presenting evidence for the case for Christ that he was making in chapter 17. One thing that becomes clear with apologetics, is that many people say that they would believe in Jesus if we could prove our claims. Many times that is a smoke screen. They are often cornered with undeniable facts, and revert to an agnostic or atheistic position over philosophical reasons. There is a lot of intellectual dishonesty thrown out there. We have to be care about chasing other peoples rabbits.

⁶ *“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. (Matthew 7)*

Building a Church in a Las Vegas Atmosphere

Read Acts 18:1-17 : Paul spent a year and a half in Corinth. Every city seemed to have its own unique issues and complexities. The ancient world had an idiom: “Living like a Corinthian”. That phrase described a person living for pleasure and moral laxity. Corinth was a prosperous seaport and land trans modal transportation hub. There was a lot of money burning holes in men’s pockets, and people living in anonymity far away from home. It was full of sailors and traders from different lands. It was an immoral place, full of prostitutes and other pleasures and pastimes.

The local idolatry was obviously focused on sexual immorality. When you study idolatry; it ends up being nothing more than a personalized authorization encouraging what you are predisposed to do. That is why the idols represented valued practices (war, pleasure, fertility, etc..). It is very interesting that Paul found himself at the headquarters of sexual sin in Corinth. The Greeks had their temple to Aphrodite located in Corinth. It was dedicated to the establishment of erotic pleasures. The temple prostitutes were there to promote sexual promiscuity

as Greek societal virtue. They would solicit patronage and gifts from the pilgrims and travelers. They also would offer a sample to what they were promoting. Interestingly, Paul would immediately-after this find himself in Ephesus, where the Roman version of sexual immorality, Diana (Artemis) was located. The Temple of Diana was not known for temple prostitutes like Aphrodite, but it did try to use forms of pornographic art and other presentations to put the spectators and worshipers in touch with their sensuality. These temple activities were not just like some Las Vegas destinations, they were all out tourista industries, with food and music, and art displays, and souvenirs, and money collections. It was big business and it promoted tourism to the area. This particular visit was in 51-52 AD. Paul wrote 1st and 2nd Corinthians shortly thereafter in 54 and 56 AD.

1st and 2nd Corinthians, understandably had much to do with controlling sexual sin. There was even an incest problem in the church. There was also an issue with self-promotion amongst the church leaders. There was another issue with saints suing each other. Accordingly, Paul had to do a deep dive on the types of love and how Christian love is nothing like erotic love. Paul also had to try to build some level of holiness amidst this *street fair* mid set. The saints should not directly or indirectly support idolatry, but if they had to eat food dedicated to idols that was OK, since there was essentially no such thing as an idol. 2 Corinthians had more to do with redemption for all types of sinners. This whole chapter is about ministering to the lusts of the flesh; and the prior chapter was heavily on the boastful pride of life and the pride of intellectualism.

Paul meets two new super friends; Priscilla and Aquila. They were a married Jewish couple who had been kicked out of Rome, along with all of the other Jews living there. In AD 49, Claudius kicked the Jews out of Rome because the religious Jews attacked the Christians over the arguments over the gospel. You cannot even say that antisemitism is always a learned thing. I just finished watching a special on how for centuries the Ethiopian Jews, isolated from any white culture experienced sever antisemitism from black locals!

This relocated couple goes on the road with Paul, training and teaching believers. In fact, they mentored Apollos, the great gospel speaker. They had a home church, as was the custom. Today, home churches are the most common method of fellowship where the gospel is illegal. Home churches are popular in China, Iran, Vietnam, India, North Korea and Egypt. Paul met this couple in his trade. The Gentiles could care less about protocol and traditions, like the Jews. In fact, it was much easier to minister to the Gentiles. They had not been prejudiced by religion like the Jews. Sometimes it is easier to work with a blank slate. Most Jews knew

just enough to be dangerous and draw incomplete and convenient conclusions. Either go all in and find the truth, or don't pretend to be interested.

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. (Revelation 3:15-19)

Tent Makers

We are also seeing evangelism breaking away from a synagogue-only targeting. We are moving away from religious settings to very worldly settings. Now, we are looking at a lot of workplace evangelism. Paul had become a skilled tent maker, in order to support himself. Tents and sails were in very high demand with sailors, travelers and the military. Sails and tents are bought and sold to travelers, who will take the gospel to new places. It is strategic for trade routes and highways.

This may have led to Paul getting to know Lydia, a seller of purple fabric. Many of Paul's scriptural analogies come from comparing a tent to the human flesh. Like lust and pride, all sins are baked into us from birth. There is no need to teach an infant how to throw a tantrum. Paul was able to use his vocation as a tent and sail maker to the benefit of the gospel.

If you think a little bit about tent making it becomes a little more relevant. Moses referred the tabernacle as the tent of meeting. It has confused many Christians, but the Tent of Meeting is not the Tabernacle. Moses met God in the Tent of Meeting to gain direction and talk things over. Anyone could do as the priests could in this special tent. We could not enter the tabernacle; but we could meet with God in the Tent of Meeting.

⁷ Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting." Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp (Exodus 33:7)

The Tabernacle was only open to Aaronic Priests. Both meeting places were considered tents. They were mobile worship centers, just like our bodies.

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. ² Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, ³ because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Corinthians 5)

I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, ¹⁴ because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. (2 Peter 1)

Paul wanted to be chargeable to anyone. Many charlatans traveled around claiming to be bible teachers, just to get free room and board.

Paul focused on the Jews, proving that Jesus was the expected Messiah. After much consternation from opposing Jews, Paul washed his hands of trying to help them. He would now focus on the Jews. This was his actual directive from God had been in the first place. God spoke to Paul, reassuring him to keep preaching in Corinth. He would be safe.

⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” (Acts 9)

Sharing the gospel in Corinth may have been like ministering in Amsterdam or Bangkok or Sodom.

¹⁴ He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

¹⁵ The Lord said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. ¹⁶ Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. ¹⁷ Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. ¹⁸ Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.” (1 Kings 19)

Read Acts 18:18- Paul is now splitting off from the saints and taking a personal journey back to Jerusalem. He made a vow to God, causing him to shave his head. He could have been taking a Nazarite Vow of personal dedication to God. Afterwards, he went back to the field headquarters at Antioch. Then Paul went on to Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the saints. This is the beginning of Paul’s third missionary journey.

Paul met a bible teacher named Apollos who was from the church in Alexandria, Egypt in Ephesus. He was a great public speaker, who spoke with passion and persuasion. He would be like the first televangelist, attracting all kinds of attention. Interestingly, Apollos theology had a blind spot regarding the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He only knew of the baptism of John the Baptist. What is the difference? The baptism of John the Baptist was a contrite repentance to prepare to meet God. It is a desire to get right and be holy. It included a ceremonial sin washing. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is different. It is when God washes over you with his presence, filling up your senses and communicating his love to you in more than words. It is an overwhelming sense of God's presence and his empowerment for the Kingdom with spiritual gifts and joy.

The Holy Spirit can be in one of three positions to a person. He can come alongside as a helper, encourager and brother. For believers, He can seal you inside which is the promise of salvation and eternal life. He can also baptize you and shower you and flood you with power and love and energize you for service.