

Sermon 1: God's Providence and the Power of the Gospel: Acts 18:1-11

Text: Acts 18:1-11 "After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them..."

Summary: The birth of the church at Corinth is a powerful testimony to God's kind providence and the power of the gospel to penetrate deep spiritual darkness.

Proposition: We must take great comfort in the way He governs the ordinary course of life.

Introduction: The city of Corinth

- Corinth was a fascinating ancient city with a unique history and culture.
- About 200 years before Paul, this city had a thriving population living on the isthmus connecting two major ports.
- The ancient city was destroyed by the Romans because of their political alliances and left desolate for nearly 100 years.
- During the time of Julius Ceasar, it was rebuilt and became arguably the most beautiful city in the empire.
- It was a Roman colony which gave it special status and attracted diversity and wealth.
- It was a cosmopolitan city which provided opportunities for people to leave their cultures, generational roots, and ethical norms, to establish an independent life of affluence in a uniquely Corinthian way.

- Thoroughly pagan
- Ambitious, wealthy, and hedonistic
- Freedom in every sense of the concept
- Shrewd political maneuvering
- A love for athletic competition
- The ancient Corinthians were very similar to the modern American view.
- In great spiritual darkness, God established a source of light.

Part 1: Its birth:

- **God disrupted Paul's plans: Acts 16:6-10** "Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them..."
- **The significance of this disruption:**
 - **His first stop, Philippi where Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned without a trial: Acts 16:12-40**
 - This was one of only two places in Acts where Paul was persecuted at the hands of a predominantly Gentile mob.
 - After this short stay, several individuals were converted and baptized and he left Luke with this young church.
 - **Second stop, Thessalonica about 100 miles away: Acts 17:1-10**
 - In this city, he spent three weeks preaching in the synagogue.
 - When the Jews in that synagogue rejected the gospel, he turned his focus toward the Gentiles.
 - Many Gentiles were converted, but within a short time, Jews in the city created an uproar and the city officials had to intervene.
 - Once the matter was settled, the young church sent Paul's team to Berea.
 - **In Berea Paul's team experienced similar blessings and trials: Acts 17:11-15**
 - The Bereans were diligent students of the word and readily received it.

- Unfortunately, the same mob that stirred up a riot in Thessalonica learned that Paul was in Berea and traveled there to drive him out of the city.
- The new church in Berea sensed the urgency of the matter and sent him away to Athens.
- As Paul fled to Athens, he left Timothy and Silas in Berea to help the new church.
- **In Athens, Paul waited for Timothy and Silas, but could not bear the idolatry he witnessed: Acts 17:16-34**
 - He preached his famous sermon at Mars Hill but received a muted response.
 - Most people mocked but a few women responded positively.
 - After little response, Paul moved to Corinth.
 - We have no New Testament record of a church being established in Athens.
- **A few important observations:**
 - Paul preached the gospel, witnessed conversions, and experienced persecution in each city.
 - He never spent extended time in a location because the persecution came too quickly.
 - In each location where a church was established, he left members of his team to help ground the new churches.
 - Each city mentioned became a prominent church in the first century.
 - This is how God does His work.

Part 2: Its growth:

- **Paul met Aquilla and Priscilla at Corinth: 18:1-3** "After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers..."
- **He preached in the synagogue: 18:4-6a** "He reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks...Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ..."
- **He turned to the Gentiles when the Jews rejected the gospel: 18:6b-8** "He shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined

hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized..."

- **God sent a vision to encourage him to endure despite opposition: 18:9-11** "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them..."
- **God providentially intervened through Galio the Roman Proconsul: 18:12-17** "When Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection...against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law...Gallio said unto the Jews...if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things..."
- **Paul left Corinth for Ephesus on the way to Jerusalem: 18:18** "Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila..."

Part 3: Its significance:

- **Most of the New Testament is directly linked back to this period:**
 - Philippians
 - 1 and Thessalonians
 - 1 and 2 Corinthians
 - Ephesians
 - The seven churches in Revelation
 - 1 and 2 Timothy
 - 1-3 John
 - The Gospel of John
 - Romans through Aquila and Priscilla
- **God providentially guided all these people: Proverbs 20:24** "Man's goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way?"
- **His ways demonstrate His care and power:**
 - **Movement:** Nearly every movement was directly connected to a disappointment outside their control.

- **Timing:** Paul wanted to go to Ephesus, but it was not the right time, because a team needed to be assembled, and churches needed to be established.
- **Protection:** In each situation, they experienced persecution and injustice, yet God intervened through ordinary means.

Part 4: Applying what we have observed:

- **There is no place too dark for the gospel to penetrate:**
 - We think this is the worst time in history.
 - We think we are observing an impossible field.
 - The gospel will transform lives wherever it is preached.
- **God accomplishes His work through all kinds of situations:**
 - Frustrations and setbacks do not stop what He is doing in the world.
 - He works despite the imperfection of His servants and their plans.
 - He works despite intense obstacles.
- **His providence superintends both the ordinary and the extraordinary:**
 - He turns persecution into a catalyst for good.
 - He intervenes at critical moments in people's lives.
 - We need to purpose to be involved in what He is doing.
 - We need to trust Him with what is outside our control.
- **He works through committed servants who are willing to suffer and persevere through difficulty.**
 - Committed
 - Servants
 - Willing to suffer
 - Persevere