

God, Master Weaver
An Introduction to 1st Corinthians
Acts 18 and Selected Passages

This morning we will continue our introduction to 1st Corinthians... it is vital in our being able to understand what the Apostle Paul has written in his wonderful book to have the context and background of not only the city and church at Corinth... but the reason and motivation behind Paul's writing the book.... that is what I hope to deliver to you this morning and next Sunday.

1st Corinthians was written to a certain people at a certain time in history in certain circumstances..... and if we understand that context we will be able to apply it to ourselves, in our day and in our circumstances....

Today...again... we will not be opening the book of 1st Corinthians... that will be next week... by the way... I suggest you read the entire book this week... that's really not that big of a task... it will take you maybe an hour... but you will see where we will be going and most likely if you read through it... you will begin to have some questions that you may desire to have answered.

Paul addresses many relevant topics for us... but they are set in the time, circumstances and place of 1st century Corinth, so they need a bit of context for us to understand... you may be puzzled when you read about head coverings for women... or the speaking of tongues and spiritual gifts in the church... What are those all about?... how do they apply to us today?...do they?... we need context!

Next week we will be looking at chapter 1 verses 1-9.... But this morning...we will be going primarily to the book that has the history of the early church including the history of the church at Corinth... Acts chapter 18.

Let's pray

Do you know why you're here this morning?... I'm sure all of you have an answer to that question...but I also know that none of us know all the gazillion events that had to take place... and did take place... that resulted in your being here.

Many of you know who Timothy Keller is... Keller is a Presbyterian pastor who started Redeemer Presbyterian church in New York City...of course has become well known through his many books and preaching, speaking.

Maybe fifteen years ago I heard him give a great illustration on how God weaves together countless events in our lives...all for His and our good...in other words... your being here this morning is way more nuanced than you will ever know!.

It's Romans 8:28 2 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

We love that verse... it comforts us...but we have no idea all that goes into the execution of that...just how many things God causes...I thought there was little chance I could find Keller's illustration... but after a little internet searching I found it and was very excited... I want to share it with you...it is from a message he preached to his church on a Sunday evening...these are his words:

Do you know why we're here tonight?... There are a lot of reasons. All kinds of people have done so much to make this ministry and this church happen... but we could certainly say if Kathy and I had not come to New York 18 years ago or so to start the church, none of this would be here.

Well, why? What's the reason we came to New York to start the church? Because we joined a Presbyterian denomination that not only encouraged but gave us the freedom and set a priority for church planting. Well, why were we a member of that Presbyterian denomination? Because my last semester in seminary I took two courses with a professor who convinced me I was theologically a Presbyterian, and that's the reason I went into the denomination. That's the reason I planted the church.

But why did I take those two courses? Because, at the very, very last minute, this man was able to come and teach those courses in spite of the fact there was a bureaucratic snag at the top that was keeping him from getting his visa. He was British. The only reason he came and taught those courses, the only reason it changed my theological views, the only reason I joined the Presbyterian denomination, the only reason I planted the church, the only reason we're here tonight is that bureaucratic snag was suddenly opened up at the last minute and he was able to get there in time to teach me those courses.

Well, what opened his snag? What happened? The answer is one morning the dean was praying and saying, "I don't know how we're going to get this guy here in time to teach these courses this semester." His prayer partner was a young man who was a student at my seminary at the time, and he also happened to be one of the sons of the sitting president of the United States at the time, who was Gerald Ford.

When he asked the dean what he was praying about and the dean told him, he says, "Well, you know, I have a name you could talk to that might get you through the bureaucratic snag." And it did. It worked. So why did he have the power to get rid of that snag so that man could come, so I could have that course, so I could change my views, so I could join the Presbyterian Church, so I could come and plant this church, so we could be here tonight? Only because Nixon resigned. Gerald Ford never, ever, ever, ever would have been president unless Nixon resigned.

But why did Nixon have to resign? Because of the Watergate scandal. Why did the Watergate scandal happen? Because the people who were bugging the Democratic Party's offices ... The

night they bugged it they left the door open, and because a night watchman noticed a door was unlatched, he went in and it was all discovered. If that door had just been closed two more inches, we wouldn't be here tonight. Everything would have been changed....

All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose. Even Watergate happened for you. You know what? Very seldom do we even get a millionth of a millionth of a millionth of a glimpse of how God is working all things together for good to those who love God, but he is...

And guess what?... the reason I was able to tell you that story and that you heard it was because of Watergate!

I shared that with you because for us to understand the message of 1st Corinthians... we need to understand how and why the book came about in the first place... the story behind 1st Corinthians is every bit a God woven story as is Keller's.... God in His sovereignty and His providence literally weaves all things together for His own good... and ours as well.

That means all of our decisions and His sovereignty... that's mind boggling!

For us to be sitting here this morning...embarking on a new study of 1st Corinthians is a result of a decision made by an ancient Roman emperor, Claudius...and a gazillion other factors....

After Jesus had ascended to heaven forty days after His resurrection... and shortly after the church exploded at Pentecost... and Christianity began spreading like wildfire... so did opposition to this threatening new religion...

[everything I just said was the result of countless God ordained and orchestrated events that began before the world was even created!]

We get the history of all this in the book of Acts...early on we see Peter and John are arrested by the Jewish leaders for preaching Christ's resurrection... as many were becoming Christians... many were being persecuted for their new beliefs...

Stephen as Acts 6:8 describes as **full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people...** so great were the wonders and signs that the Jewish leaders arrested him on the charges of blasphemy...over this man Christ who Stephen was claiming to be the Messiah.

Stephen is sentenced and stoned to death...becoming the first recorded martyr of Jesus Christ... and we wonder... "*why didn't God come to His side and save him?* ...after all... he was preaching the word!

Acts 8:1-4

8 Now Saul approved of putting Stephen to death.

And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles. 2 Some devout men buried Stephen, and mourned loudly for him. 3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and he would drag away men and women and put them in prison.

Acts 11:19—So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews alone.

Do you see what is happening?... God had allowed—even orchestrated—the death of Stephen to spark the spreading of millions of Jews throughout the Roman Empire to serve as a key part in the rapid spread of the gospel.

As Jewish Christians were forced to flee Jerusalem due to persecution, they were able to travel to almost any part of the world and find a Jewish population (who had been dispersed all over the world due to persecution) and each city would build a Jewish synagogue... from which the fleeing Jewish Christians would go to share the gospel of Christ.... This spreading of Christian Jews made it all the way to Rome joining other non-Christian jews.

In Rome... the Jewish population had grown substantially... as did the Christian jew population. Claudius was the emperor of the Roman empire... we know some about him and these times through the ancient historian Suetonius.

Suetonius reports that the Jews and the Christian Jews began rioting... not just occasional but all the time... the riots were instigated by a person named Chrestus... most scholars believe that there never was a Chrestus.... That Suetonius erred in his name... it was “Christ”...he had gotten one letter wrong....

So the Jews were most likely arguing and rioting over the issue of the Messiah Jesus Christ.... Claudius got uptight and decided to kick out all the Jews in Rome... so thousands of Jews are again displaced... many just went to other Roman towns in Italy.... But two of them ended up going all the way to the city, Corinth.... A husband and wife named Aquila and Priscilla.

I am sure that Aquila and Priscilla were really disheartened to leave their home... their occupation... they were tentmakers by trade... the literal word is “leather workers”... part of leather work was making tents.

Tents came from goat hides... the goat hair would be extracted and woven into what they called cilicium to make tents.... After the city Cilicia which had a very large tent making industry.... Guess where the apostle Paul was from?.... Cilicia!... and guess what Paul did for a trade?.... tent maker!...keep that in mind.

So Aquila and Priscilla's lives are turned upside down... they flee to Corinth and start life all over again.... There is a lesson for us in their plight... Have you ever had your lives turned upside down?... maybe lose everything and wonder what in the world is God doing?... doesn't He care?

Well... God wanted these two special people to relocate to Corinth for His great purposes... what great purposes they were!... we're going to see all that in a few minutes... He needed to move the Jews...and specifically Aquila and Priscilla out of Rome to help spread the gospel!

As all that is going on... after Paul's conversion...this persecutor of the church who was a tool for God to move the Jews all over the world.... Paul is now an apostle of Jesus Christ... and his mission is to plant churches...

He started out in Antioch, Syria... with Silas... made their way to Galatia... setting up fellow believers in these cities to spread the gospel... crosses the sea over to Troas and Philippi.... All was well until persecution caught up with him.

He was chased out of Philippi... went to Thessalonica and was persecuted terribly... he had to run for his life... he flees to Berea... set up a church there... those who persecuted him in Thessalonica chased him down in Berea.... And eventually fled all the way to Athens.

Notice that all the difficulties, persecution, and hardships Paul went through.... Moved him from city to city... country to country.... Churches getting set up... the gospel is spreading... God's working it all out!

He's alone in Athens... Athens is the intellectual hub of the world at that time... he didn't stay there long but he was waiting to meet up with Timothy and Silas... he had left them while in Berea... as soon as Timothy and Silas got to Athens... Paul tells them to turn around and go back to Thessalonica...

Timothy goes to Thessalonica and Silas goes to Philippi to check on the Philippian church... I'm telling you this so you can see how this all gets pieced together...Paul is getting very worn down... he's a bit discouraged... he preached in Athens... seemed to be making some headway but only a few received the gospel... he went away discouraged.

Paul leaves Athens by himself... and goes down to Corinth.... By the time he arrived at Corinth he was pretty much done!... he's been chased halfway around the world... persecuted over and over again...

Paul sat down and wrote a letter to the Thessalonian church... what we know as 1st Thessalonians... and in that letter tells the Thessalonian church to “**not get weary in doing well**”... he was writing out of his own experience... he was preaching to himself to not get weary...discouraged disheartened while working for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul is weak... even physically ill...and he's in Corinth!... he is smack in the middle of sin city!...Corinth has been described as *the most debauched and debased city in the entire world in that day.*

The name "Corinthian" actually became a common term for being immoral...to be called a Corinthian was an insult... if someone called a woman a "Corinthian" they would be calling her a prostitute.... If a man was called a "Corinthian" he was a most immoral person.

Corinth is in Greece... but Greece was part of the Roman empire and rule during this time... so really it was a Roman city in Greece....there are two major areas that make up Greece connected by a narrow piece of land...an isthmus... only four mile wide in the narrowest section... on each side of this isthmus are two major seas.... Two major trade routes.

Anyone traveling from Athens to southern Greece had to go through Corinth..... Instead of trade boats going around Southern Greece... a very dangerous journey... they would actually carry their boats across the four miles of land to the other sea....

You can see that Corinth was situated ideally for trade... and it was... because of that... it became an extremely wealthy country... and with wealth usually comes excesses... and there were many excesses in Corinth...

Corinth had a huge amphitheater that held 20,000 people... the acoustics were perfect... a man could speak on the stage and all 20,000 could hear what he was saying... Corinth was the host of what was known as the Isthmian games which were nearly equal to the Olympics.

The major contributing factor of Corinth's immorality was that on this giant hill in the city was the Acropolis... on top of the Acropolis was the massive temple to the goddess Aphrodite... the goddess of pleasure.... Sex.

There were over 1000 temple prostitutes that worked from the temple of Aphrodite... every evening the temple prostitutes would descend from the Acropolis and infiltrated the city to practice their trade... to worship meant to be with prostitutes...

To really get the picture of Corinth... all we have to do is read what Paul wrote to the Romans in his epistle to the Romans... ROMANS WAS WRITTEN IN CORINTH... we would not have had this vital book of Romans had Paul not gone to Corinth!

Paul... tired... sick... fighting discouragement wrote this... a description of what he was seeing and experiencing...Romans 1:

Read Romans 1: 8-9; 24-32

What a cesspool! No wonder Paul was a bit disheartened... And God knew that!... God Knew that Paul would need some encouragement... some support... some fellowship with other strong Christians... Paul wrote in Philippians that “**My God shall supply all your ... what?....needs!**”...and He did for Paul in Corinth...

Let’s see a few things God provided for Paul...

1. God comforted Paul through the fruit of his ministry... While Paul was in his hurting condition in Corinth... news was sent to him that the church he planted in Thessalonica was flourishing... it was growing... people were coming to Christ... their faith was getting stronger and stronger!

He wrote to them from Corinth saying... 1 Thessalonians 3:7 **for this reason brothers** [we’ll talk about that reason in a few minutes]... **in all our distress and affliction** [that’s how we know he was having a tough time in Corinth!]... **in all our distress and affliction...we were comforted about you through your faith.**

Paul takes his eyes off his horrible situation and focusses on what God is doing through the people in Thessalonica that was a result of his past ministry.

2. God hooks him up with some new friends.

Read Acts 18:1-3

Because of the emperor of Rome Claudius... this married couple was waiting in Corinth... unknowingly to be just the support Paul needed to continue with his ministry!... how they got together is a bit speculative but likely.

Historical records tell us that people would gather weekly in the synagogues ...they would sit among others of their trade or profession... so the shepherds sat with other shepherds... potters with other potters... tent makers with other tentmakers... it’s possible this is how Paul met up with Aquilla and Priscilla.

All evidence points to Aquilla and Priscilla were already Christians when they met Paul...so Paul, Aquilla and Priscilla work together in their trade.... And Paul lives with them in their house...this is so important!

Never underestimate the value of hospitality!... Paul... discouraged and distraught are taken in to their house.... nourished... physically and spiritually.... now this is wonderful... not only did Paul find some friends... got physical and spiritual support.... But they started a church right there in their house!

The Corinthian church started in the house of Aquilla and Priscilla!....we know just a pinch of all the intricacies that God wove together to birth the church at Corinth... but what we do know... is it not amazing!

Much can be said about this couple... what I want us to see is how God uprooted their lives... tore it apart... took them away from home, friends, maybe even family.... Their occupation.... And moved them without anything to a wretched city in Greece....

Then uses them mightily in the support of the apostle Paul... and in the launching of the church in that godless city..... but they did not stop there!... get this... listen to Romans 16:3-5... remember... Paul wrote Romans while in Corinth... this is a letter to the church in Rome:

3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus... Priscilla and Aquila had done their job in Corinth... they are back in Rome...there was a new emperor and he was allowing the Jews to come back.... See the master weaver in this!... so they go back to Rome... what for?...listen to this:

4 who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; 5 also greet the church that is in their house.

Aquilla and Priscilla had started the Corinthian church in their house... they go back to Rome and they start another church in their Roman house... but don't think they planted down their roots there in Rome...

Because at the end of 1st Corinthians... 16:19 as Paul signs off in his letter he says **The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord with the church that is in their house.**

Where's that church?... Paul writes to the Corinthian church while in Ephesus!...I don't know about you but there is a whole lot of encouragement I get from the example of Aquila and Priscilla...

- Don't get too comfortable with your furniture, your house, your garden and even your friends... God may have something for you to do in His kingdom that is far more important than your creature comforts...
- Don't be distraught over losing your stuff... having to move... maybe forced to move... God has a plan.
- This world is not my home I'm just passing through... I think the example of Aquila and Priscilla is what the writer of Hebrews was saying in Hebrews 13:14-16

14 For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.

15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. 16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Before Aquila and Priscilla left... they worked with Paul in the tent making trade... back in Acts 18 it says in verse 3 **and because he was of the same trade, he (Paul) was staying with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent makers...**

Paul... a missionary setting up churches had to work! there's much to say about all that... Paul did not want to be a burden on anyone.... He did not want the non-Christians around him to think he was in ministry for the money... he had to work.... That is why it says in verse 4 that **he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath**... not every day... he had to work!

He wrote in 1st Thessalonians 2:9 (again written from Corinth!)... **For you remember brothers, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be any burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.**

2nd Thessalonians 3:8 **Neither did we eat man's bread for nothing**... you know... true pastors and those who minister God's word don't do it for money.... A few years ago I was asked to preach in a small SBC church in Pierce who was without a pastor... after I preached here Sunday morning I went to Pierce to preach Sunday night...

After I was finished preaching... a well meaning deacon of the church came up to me and asked me "*how much do we owe you?*"... what?... five cents a word?... a dollar a minute?... I could retire!...seriously!

God didn't stop with Aquila and Priscilla in supporting Paul... new friends are wonderful... but old friends are tested and true and a true blessing.... Remember Timothy and Silas?... In Athens Paul turned them around and Timothy went back to the church in Thessalonica and Silas went to the church at Philippi...

This is interesting I think... another example of the Master Weaver... one thing that Paul praised the church at Philippi for was that they supported him materially... Paul did not want to be a burden on anyone... that's why he worked... but he also realized that if he is working he is not preaching...or teaching... or "missionizing".

So... the church at Philippi was so generous as to take up offerings for the ministry of Paul... so he could put his full attention to preaching the word.... Setting up churches...he writes this at the end of Philippians 4:15...

15 You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the [a]first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone;

Now get this... this is great... Timothy and Silas make their way to Corinth... Timothy brings news to Paul about how the church at Thessalonica was growing... we read that earlier in 1st Thessalonians 3:6... how Paul in his affliction was comforted by that news.

But what did Silas bring back with him?... back in Acts 18:5

But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia...Paul began devoting himself COMPLETELY to the word, solemnly bearing witness to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.

Timothy came to Paul with great news about the church in Thessalonica... and Silas came with a large love offering that enabled Paul to stop making tents day and night and preach the word!... do you see the intricacies of events God wove together!?

Something else that I find interesting... As soon as Paul does start preaching full time... he immediately has great resistance... hostile resistance... don't think for a minute that if God sends you and supports you in full time ministry it's going to be a cushy, breezy, easy job!

Paul goes into the synagogue and this is what happens..... Acts 18:6

6 But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood is on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

There comes a point you don't waste your time trying to convince people of the gospel of Jesus Christ... this is Paul's final point with these obstinate Jews...so he shook his garments... *I'm done with you... from now on I'm preaching to the gentiles.... The non-Jew... those who don't know God but will be open to Him..... stuck in their legalistic ways....I'M LEAVING YOU!*

So Paul leaves the,... And goes **ALL THE WAY TO NEXT DOOR**... to Titius Justus's house... and from that point on Paul preaches to the gentiles.

Read verse 8

Paul met new friends in Aquilla and Priscilla and they changed the world starting churches... He finds great encouragement and support through his old friends Timothy and Silas... and most of all...

3. Paul gets his ultimate support and encouragement from God Himself!

Read verses 9-10

God sent him new friends and partners in ministry... Aquila and Priscilla... He brings his close friends Timothy and Silas to his side... bringing with Silas financial support so that he could minister full time..... and He promises Paul His protection.... **PREACH THE WORD PAUL!**

Paul stays in Corinth for nearly a couple of years... a very challenged church...He continues his missionary journey going to Ephesus... as the church at Ephesus gets established...Paul hears

reports of all sorts of problems that have literally “fleshed” out in the Corinthian church.... What happens so often is that the church starts to mirror the culture around them....

The Corinthian values began infiltrating the church and what is left is a bunch of Christians living carnal lives!.... if you remember last week... to have true pleasure, satisfaction and joy in life you move away from the flesh and mover towards God... *The Fading of the Flesh and the Flourishing of the Faith*....The Corinthian church was doing the reverse.

AS we go through 1st Corinthians we will see a church that has:

- Factions and dissention between its members.
- We will hear about how those outside the church see the cross as “foolishness”... that human wisdom is superior to God’s.... Lord help them!
- There’s even incest in the church!... a man having sexual relations with his “father’s wife”.... Either his mother or step-mother.
- The church is tolerating sin... within the church!
- There’s sexual sin...rampant divorce... marriage disputes.
- There are disputes over food... what is ok to eat and what is not.
- Disputes over male and female distinctions.
- There’s division over the Lord’s Supper.... The manner in which it is received.
- All sorts of problems with spiritual gifts...
- Arguments over the importance of Christ’s resurrection.... And on and on

Today our culture doesn’t look all that different than the Corinthian culture of Paul’s day.... The church doesn’t look all that different than the church that Paul writes to in 1st Corinthians.... This is an important book for us today!

No... it was not an accident that brought you to church this morning... for some of you God had to organize a plethora of events to drag you in this morning!...seriously... God in His sovereignty...and in His great love for us... wove together the events of all of history to bring this wonderful book to us...

And the grand weaver is not finished with us!

Keller, T. J. (2013). The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church.