



gracefellowship

Series: Crossroads: Between Kingdom and Culture
Date: February 4, 2024

Title: Welcome to Corinth
Passage: 1 Corinthians 1:1-3

Scripture Reading: Acts 18:1-17

This morning we are kicking off a new series in the book of 1 Corinthians and we are calling it “Crossroads: Between Kingdom and Culture.” The passage that was just read for us in Acts 18 describes aspects of Paul’s ministry in Corinth and the birth of the Church in that city during Paul’s second missionary journey. This morning I want to set the stage for the book and the direction we take as we are going to walk through it.

Let’s begin by reading the first three verses today and then I’m going to set the stage for the series.

:: 1 Corinthians 1:1-3

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are going to come back to some of this next week, but I want you see a little of what Paul sees when he writes to this church. He tells them, you are “sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people.” The problem is they weren’t living up to the calling to be holy people. The word “holy” means set apart. They were meant to be different in their pursuit of the Kingdom of God than the culture around them. It’s the same calling we have today. We are people who are called into relationship with God through Jesus and we are meant to be holy- set apart as citizens of God’s Kingdom. But after we come into faith in Jesus we continually stand at the crossroads of the Kingdom of God and the culture around us. And our culture doesn’t look all that different from the culture of Corinth.

Here’s what I want to do this morning to set the stage for our study:

1. Describe the history of Corinth and it’s culture.

2. Detail the issues facing the Corinthian Church.
3. Discuss Paul's approach to dealing with the church in Corinth.

CORINTHIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE:

The first thing we need to know is that in 146 BC Rome demolished Corinth when they made the foolish decision to join a group of cities/nations who wanted to rebel against Rome. When Rome invaded Corinth under the leadership of Lucius Mummius, they completely defeated the Corinthian forces. All the men in the city were killed and all the women and children were sold as slaves to Rome. Then the city was burned to the ground. For almost 100 years Corinth was a desolate wasteland and was largely uninhabited. In 44 BC, just before his death, Julius Caesar commissioned the rebuilding of the city of Corinth. Why? Location. Location. Location.

- Corinth was positioned in the perfect location for trade routes and shipping routes. (3 Images: Corinth Map 1, 2, 3)
 - o If you wanted to trade between Italy and Asia Minor, going through the Corinthian Gulf was faster than sailing around the Peloponnese Island.
 - o The only issue is the waterway doesn't go all the way through- there is a landmass called the Isthmus of Corinth that is about 4 miles wide separating the two gulfs. Sailors would come to port on either side of the Isthmus and would unload their goods and transfer them to the other side of the Isthmus to a separate ship, or the entire ship would be transported from one side of the Isthmus to the other. (Image: Isthmus Tracks)
 - o This opened enormous opportunity and revenue streams for the Roman Empire, but also for individual citizens.
- When Corinth is rebuilt it was also repopulated. Primarily the population was made up of freed men, slaves who had been able to work off or purchase their freedom, and sailors. Due to the trade industry that flowed through Corinth, the city became a boomtown! Our best way to think about this may be the gold rush in California in the mid 1800s. And similarly to what we experienced in this country, Corinth experienced- hard working blue-collar people became vastly wealthy overnight. But it was what might be called "new money," these weren't people who came from wealthy and power and they didn't always know what to do in the new position they found themselves in.
 - o Where vast amounts of money are available, lots of forms of debauchery also become available!
 - Corinth was known for its sexual perversion- prostitution at the Temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty- was world-renowned. All over the Roman Empire if you said someone played the Corinthian, it meant they were sexually immoral.

- It was said that there were 1000 temple prostitutes for Aphrodite in the city.
- Many other forms of immorality became popular in Corinth- gambling, drunkenness, crime- go watch the movie Tombstone and you'll get an idea of what types of things were taking place in Corinth!
- Corinth also developed their own version of the Olympics called the Isthmus Games, which took place every two years. Guess what happens when you get some of the best athletes in the world together who are young and at the peak of their athletic prowess? There is no limit to indulge your sexual appetite- and in the Grecian world, the athletes usually competed sans clothing.
 - The Olympic games today still breed this type of sexual immorality. You just don't see it on NBC!
 - I found an article this week that was originally written prior to the Rio Games in 2016. The author wrote an expose on immorality at the Olympics and said:

“Illicit sex is glorified amongst athletes, and the instruments of such debauchery are made freely available.

A trend of supplying condoms to athletes began at the Seoul Games in 1988 when 8 500 condoms were distributed. That figure went up to 50 000 at the Barcelona Olympics in 1992. In the 2000 Sydney Olympics, organizers had to order 20 000 more after the initial allocation of 70 000 ran out. London 2012 saw that figure spiking to 150 000.

Rio 2016 is now being billed the “raunchiest in history” with some 450 000 condoms being doled out...” (<https://jamiat.org.za/the-shocking-moral-depravity-of-the-olympic-games/>) Translation: There's a lot of extra-curricular activity going on at the Olympics!

In a couple weeks the Super Bowl will take place in Las Vegas, Nevada. When we lived in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex the Cowboys hosted the Super Bowl in their new stadium. We learned during that time, through a partnership we formed with an organization called Traffick911, that the largest event that attracts sex trafficking in the United States is the Super Bowl.

Welcome to Corinth!

We can look at a culture like Corinth and like the current culture we live in and we can make one of two choices: separate from the culture altogether and try to form a holy huddle with other Christians, or engage people in the culture and bring the gospel of Jesus into all the things happening around us. Paul moved to Corinth and used his skills as a tentmaker to establish relationship with people and plant a church right in the heart of one of the most depraved places in the Roman world.

This is why we have adopted our new Vision Statement as a church: We want to...

GFC Vision:

Be a community being transformed by the gospel who love and serve where we live, work and play.

When Paul started sharing the gospel in Corinth and people began following Jesus you can imagine many of them had some pretty messed up lives! They had grown up in a culture that celebrate certain things and now were embracing a Kingdom that had a totally different agenda! The whole reason we get the letter of First Corinthians is because there were tons of issues that crept up in the church and Paul had to address them.

Paul spent about a year and half in Corinth before he moved on in his missionary journey. What we are going to see next week is that Paul received a letter telling him about the mess that was unfolding in the church as people were living at the crossroads between the Kingdom and the culture.

ISSUES FACING THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH:

Paul's letter addresses five major topics that the people are struggling with at Corinth as they learn to follow the ways of Jesus while still living in a very pagan society. And they didn't have the benefit of having the Bible to address their issues- Paul was writing it in real time! We've had First Corinthians for a couple thousand years; they got it hot off the presses! And Paul writes some really scathing things to the church! In fact, this letter hurts a lot of people initially because it deals with issues of sin that are really personal and really intense. In fact, Paul addresses that in his second letter.

:: 2 Corinthians 7:8-11

⁸ Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—

⁹ yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us.

¹⁰ Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

¹¹ See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.

So, what were the issues facing the church?

The issues Paul addressed:

1. Divisions and Factions

2. Sexual Sin

3. Food and Idols (How to resist being a stumbling block to fellow believers)

4. Worship Gatherings

I know you can't imagine that people had different ideas about how worship

gatherings should go, or what kind of music they should sing, or who should teach, but there were lots of issues causing chaos in the church that Paul had to address.

5. The Resurrection and Afterlife

These are the themes we are going to see play out as we go through this letter together. And we are going to follow Paul's approach to dealing with these issues:

Define the Problem

Respond with the Gospel

The gospel of Jesus is what holds the power to change lives. And if the gospel can flourish in a place like Corinth, it can flourish anywhere! So, join us throughout this series as we look at how the gospel speaks to the different issues we face as we live in a culture dominated by sin, but are citizens of a Kingdom that calls us to be holy! As we go through this series I hope we will learn any time we stand at a crossroads where the option is pursue sin and self or pursue righteousness and Jesus, we will learn to look for the power of the gospel to speak to that situation and point us in the way of the Kingdom.

- Pray