

STARTING A CHURCH IN SIN CITY

Text: Acts 18:1-11

1. THE CHANGE OF VENUE

Acts 18:1

Athens was the seat of the intelligentsia; Corinth was the seat of immorality. To be called a Corinthian was to be known as one with no moral restraints. Paul was lonely, having stood alone in Athens, and now he has crossed over to Corinth and began again to be on a new battlefield. The requirement for the servant of the Lord is to be prepared for whatever comes next, therefore, it is imperative to be prepared for every good work. In II Timothy 2:19b Paul said, "... Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Then Paul wrote to Timothy in II Timothy 2:21, "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." II Corinthians 9:8: "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

Colossians 1:10: "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." A warrior is trained to fight on the level plane as well as on the mountain. The warrior can handle the sword or the spear. He can fight in the heat or the cold. By the same token, God's servant must be ready and prepared.

2. THE DYNAMIC DUO

Acts 18:2, 3

We are introduced to the spiritual power of team of Aquila and his wife, Priscilla. According to Jewish tradition the congregants in the synagogue sat according to their professions. It seems likely that Paul sat near this couple upon first visiting the local synagogue. They, like Paul, were tentmakers--specialists in leather working. And from everything we can observe, they were both fervent believers. Oh how Paul needed some strong Christian fellowship! For the rest of Paul's ministry, this great couple was often mentioned as his helpers in the work. I Corinthians 12:7, 27: "For the body is not one member, but many...Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

I highly suspect by the time Paul got to Corinth he was experiencing discouragement. He was alone and God knew he needed spiritual friends.

Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10: "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up."

3. THE CONSISTENCY OF PAUL

Acts 18:4

Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Romans 3:1, 2: "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the

oracles of God.” Paul had this tenacious quest to bring the interpretation of the Word to those whom God had vouchsafed the precious Word of God.

4. THE REINFORCEMENT OF THE BRETHREN

ACTS 18:5

Students of the Scriptures say that during the time Paul was at Athens and now in Corinth his son in the ministry, Timothy ended up in Thessalonica (I Thessalonians 3:1, 2) and Silas was in Philippi (Philippians 4:15, 16). Now the team meets up again in Corinth. For Paul, this was just in time. II Corinthians 11:9: “And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself.” Paul no longer needed to work secularly, because the offerings from the Macedonians freed him up to serve the Lord continually in the Word (Acts 18:5; Acts 6:4). Acts 18:5b: “...Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.” The word “pressed” is translated from the Greek word *synechō* which means “to hold together.” In I Thessalonians 3:6-9, we find Paul is comforted and freed up to preach Jesus and teach the Word. The visit of the brethren with love, help and funding held the work of God together. This principle of supporting those in full time Christian service has a precedent in Scripture: I Corinthians 9:7-14.

I Timothy 5:17: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.”

5. THE TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES OF REJECTING CHRIST

Acts 18:6: “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.” Man has freedom to make his decisions, but he does not have freedom over the consequences. Galatians 6:7, 8: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

Paul’s action of shaking off the dust from his garment harkens back to Mark 6:11: “And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.” Paul considered the rejection of Jesus, as presented in the power of the Holy Spirit, an act of blasphemy. Matthew 12:31: “Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.”

“...Your blood be upon your own heads...” is a reference to the utmost responsibility that a person owns in the matter of personal accountability. We see this phrase appearing in Joshua 2:19; II Samuel 1:16; I Kings 2:37. The most tragic of all uses of this phrase occurs in Matthew 27:25: “Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.” This was of course at the crucifixion trial of Jesus.

When a person rejects Christ, they have forfeited the blessing of freedom and chosen the bondage of slavery to sin. Acts 18:6a says it best, "And when they opposed themselves...." Thus, you become your own worst enemy.

6. THE INEVITABLE RESULT OF SPIRIT-LED EVANGELISM

Acts 18:7-10: It is almost humorous--Paul declares he is leaving the witness to the Jews and sets up shop at the house of Justus, right next door to the synagogue! Paul really never leaves his devout love for his brethren according to the flesh. Romans 10:1: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." And then, lo and behold! The chief ruler of the synagogue gets saved and immediately follows Christ in baptism. This illustrates once again the power of the Word of God. Isaiah 55:11: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

Our risen Lord promises to accompany the bold witness of His people! And then Christ reminds us in Acts 18:10, "For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city." There are those whom God knows will be saved. Let us therefore, take heed to Galatians 6:9, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

7. THE KEY TO DISCIPLESHIP

Acts 18:11: "And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them." From time to time I will meet a person who has a solid testimony of a time and place where they appear to have truly trusted Christ as Savior, yet you would not see any evidence. It often comes down to what Peter was talking about in I Peter 1:1-9. If one does not stay in the Word and add to their faith, the result is a very sad one. II Peter 1:9: "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." Going back to the key to discipleship, consider I Peter 2:2: "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." Then listen to Isaiah 28:9: "Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts." To move from the milk to meat as Hebrews 5:12-14 teaches us, we must follow the admonition of Isaiah 28:10: "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little." This makes for a strong individual Christian and it also strengthens the church as a whole.

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