

I. Introduction

Good morning! Last week we took a look at Paul's message to the philosophers in Athens. After that, Paul moved on to the city of Corinth. Athens was a town of religious people who worshipped all of the gods of Greek mythology and of philosophers who spent their time debating ideas. In contrast, although Corinth had plenty of idols, it was a major port - a sailors' town.

Let's look at a modern map for a moment. As you can see, southern Greece consists of a peninsula. The Peloponnese Peninsula is a bit larger than Shikoku Island, but the connection to the mainland is only a narrow isthmus. Corinth is on the isthmus, near the narrowest point. You can greatly shorten the travel distance from the Aegean Sea to the Ionian Sea by taking a short cut through the 6.4 kilometer Corinth Canal. Work on the canal was actually started in the first century AD, but it was stopped for centuries and the canal was not completed until 1893.



The canal is relatively modern, but the route across the isthmus is ancient. In ancient times, ships were transported across using a wheeled cart system that travelled on a prepared track. In addition to being shorter and faster than going around the peninsula, it was also much safer since the seas to the south were rough and dangerous. The remains of this system can still be seen today. The Diolkos, as it was called, made Corinth a naval port that connected two seas.



In Paul's time, Corinth was a large city of 200,000 people or more. Many remains from the ancient city can still be seen today. The first photo shows the city as seen from above. The second shows some of the more important ruins. Throughout the Roman Empire, Corinth had a bad reputation. Prostitution, violence, and every kind of vice were common.



The large number of sailors continuously passing through the city certainly contributed to the problems in Corinth. However, the center of immorality was the Temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, pleasure, and fertility. This photo shows a few ruins of the temple, which stood on a hill, high above Corinth. Visiting sailors and townspeople streamed up and down the hill as they visited the 1,000 temple prostitutes employed for what the Corinthians called the worship of Aphrodite. Paul's letter to the Romans was probably written in Corinth and his scathing condemnation of immorality in Romans 1:18-32 may have been a description of what Paul saw in Corinth.



In Athens, the Apostle Paul was greatly distressed by the vast number of idols. But when Paul came to Corinth, he must have been shocked beyond words by the rampant immorality of the people. Let's read Acts 18:1-17 and see what happens.

II. Scripture Reading (Acts 18:1-17, NIV)

1 After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all

the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, 3 and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. 4 Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. 5 When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

6 But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." 7 Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. 8 Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized. 9 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. 10 For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." 11 So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

12 While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. 13 "This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law." 14 Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, "If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. 15 But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law--settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things." 16 So he had them ejected from the court. 17 Then they all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and beat him in front of the court. But Gallio showed no concern whatever.

III. Teaching

Shortly after Paul arrived in Corinth, he met Aquila and Priscilla. They were also recent arrivals in the city. They had moved there when the Roman emperor Claudius expelled all of the Jews from Rome. **Acts 18:3** says, **“and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.”** In that time, all Jewish men, even rabbis, were expected to learn a trade. Now Paul found it necessary to work and since his trade was tent making, it was natural for him to join others who worked in the same trade. Aquila and Priscilla were probably already believers in Jesus. After this, they became close friends of Paul and church leaders.

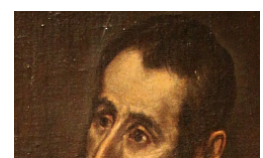


Paul set the example of earning his own way by working with his hands when he arrived in Corinth. Today, you can find missionaries around the world who choose to earn their own way by working in secular jobs while on the mission field. Such missionaries may be businessmen, English teachers, or computer programmers, but they are all called tentmakers, because they are following Paul's example.

Paul set the example of working with his hands to support himself when necessary. But we should also be aware of the limitations of that approach. **Acts 18:4** tells us, **“Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.”** In Athens, Paul taught in the synagogue on the Sabbath and also went to the marketplace daily to preach to whoever would listen. But in Corinth, at least at first, Paul seems to have been able to minister only on the Sabbath days because he was busy making tents the rest of the week. The tentmaker missionary always struggles to find time to do ministry. Because of this, Paul probably only worked as a tentmaker when he had no other source of support.

Acts 18:5, **“When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.”** Silas and Timothy caught up with Paul in Corinth and after they arrived, Paul stopped making tents and preached full time. Paul was able to do this because they brought support funds for Paul from other churches with them. We are not directly told this in Acts 18, but it is clear in **2 Corinthians 11:8-9a**. Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth and said, **“I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed.”**

So it seems clear that Paul accepted support and only worked at making tents when support funds ran low. I think the lesson from Paul's work at making tents is that a missionary should do ready to whatever



is necessary. If a missionary has enough support, then by all means preach full time. But if financial support falls short, don't give up, get a job and work at whatever you can until more support arrives.

Just as Luke does not tell us that Silas and Timothy brought support money with them, Luke also does not directly tell us how Paul was feeling at this time. However, later on when Paul wrote back to the church in Corinth, he included this comment in **1 Corinthians 2:3**. **"I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling."** I wonder if El Greco was thinking of this verse when he painted Saint Paul with this sad face.

We tend to imagine Paul as always being bold and courageous in his ministry. But Paul portrays himself as being weak and fearful. Many Bible scholars even think that Paul was seriously depressed after he arrived in Corinth. Paul had already suffered beatings and imprisonment, rejection and criticism, and the discouragement of limited results in Athens. It was a long walk taking several days to get from Athens to Corinth. Paul would have been tired when he arrived. I am sure that his feet hurt. His pockets, apparently, were empty; he was out of money. And his mind would have still been filled with the distressing scenes of the idol worship of Athens. When Paul arrived in Corinth and encountered the rampant immorality of the city, it would have been yet another heavy blow to his mind and spirit. It is easy to become depressed when we contemplate the sins of the world. And soon Paul found himself in conflict again with the Jews at the synagogue, the very people who should have received his message with joy.

As we studied last week, **(1 John 4:18) "Perfect love casts out fear."** This is true and sure. And, Paul certainly knew the perfect love of Jesus. But we are all human and we live in a fallen world, and even Paul does not seem to have been able to keep his focus on the perfect love of God all the time. But the Lord came to Paul in his time of discouragement and gave him fresh encouragement. **Acts 18:9-10, "One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: 'Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.'"**



I am pretty sure the Lord would not have give Paul this vision unless Paul was discouraged nearly to the point of giving up. The Lord would not have said, **"keep on speaking,"** unless Paul was in danger of becoming silent. As we read a moment ago, it seems that Paul was attacked and dragged before Gallio the proconsul shortly after this. But the Lord had promised that Paul would not be harmed, and it was Paul's accuser who suffered violence instead of Paul.

Notice the three parts of verse 10. (1) The Lord is with Paul. (2) The Lord will protect Paul from harm. (3) The Lord has many people in the city. We always have the promise of the Lord to be with us, but here Paul is also given a word of protection and a promise that his ministry in Corinth will bear much fruit. And the Lord also gave Paul new friends and coworkers in the ministry, Aquila and Priscilla.

Paul stayed a year and a half in Corinth and many people came to faith and trusted in Jesus for salvation from their sins. Ministering in Corinth wasn't easy. If you read Paul's letters to the Corinthian church, it is plain that there were lots of problems. But there was fruit, new friends, and much reason to give thanks to the Lord.

Soon there was a church in Corinth. In addition to Aquila and Priscilla and Silas and Timothy, who had all come from outside of Corinth, there were new believers in the city. Titius Justus welcomed the church into his home. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed. Many more Corinthians believed and were baptized. And from the greeting in 1 Corinthians 1:1, we know that Sosthenes also became a believer – the same man who had become synagogue ruler after Crispus and who was beaten at the court after Gallio rejected the accusations against Paul.

Later on Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth, saying in **1 Corinthians 15:58**, **"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."** I think that Paul is sharing from his own experience here. In Corinth, Paul overcame depression by continually focusing on the things of God and serving the Lord. When we serve the Lord, we know that God will use our work for His Kingdom. This gives meaning and purpose to our lives, for regardless of the problems we face, we can be sure that our efforts are not in vain. Wholehearted service to the Lord helps us to overcome depression because it takes our mind off



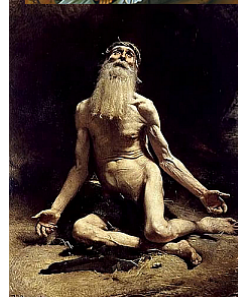
of our problems and focuses our mind and heart on loving God and loving others. As we draw near to Jesus His love touches us anew, and we can find new joy, new hope, and wonderful peace.

Many of God's servants experience severe trials, including battles with depression. Let's consider a few examples. In **Numbers 11:14-15**, Moses cried out to God saying, **"I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now--if I have found favor in your eyes--and do not let me face my own ruin."** Moses was so burdened by the problems of leading Israel that at one point he wished to die.

And then there is Elijah. Immediately after an incredible and miraculous victory over the prophets of Baal, Elijah ran away and hid because he was afraid of the revenge of Jezebel. **1 Kings 19: 3-4** record what happened, **"Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, LORD,' he said. 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.'" Once again we see a great servant of the Lord brought down low, even to the point of desiring death.**



And then there is Job. Job lost everything and suffered greatly, far more than any of us. And in **Job 3:1-4**, we read, **"After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. He said: 'May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!' That day--may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine upon it.'" Job was brought to the point of wishing that he had never been born.**



IV. Conclusion

What about us? Perhaps you also are suffering with discouragement and depression. I know some of us here are. There really are a lot of bad things in the world that can get us down. But don't give up. From the beginning God's people have suffered severe trials. But go and read the stories of God's people. Look up the verses I shared and read the pages that follow those low points. Paul was down, but the Lord lifted him up and gave him new strength. Moses was overwhelmed by the heavy burden of leading the people, but the Lord answered Moses' cry and gave him 70 elders to help with the work. Elijah was ready to die, but then the Lord came and spoke to Elijah in a gentle whisper and assured him that he was not alone, for the Lord had reserved 7,000 in Israel to Himself. Job suffered almost beyond belief, but God returned double to Job of everything that he had lost and made Job a symbol of restoration and hope.

The love of the Lord is eternal and perfect and we can be sure that God will restore the lost years and all that has been lost. And our trials are not without meaning and purpose. Concerning trials, **1 Peter 1:7** tells us, **"These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."**

There is purpose, meaning, and great blessing in serving the Lord and working for His glory and for His Kingdom. If we persevere, we will overcome, for the Lord is with us. And if we are faithful in serving, we will see fruit, for the Lord blesses the work of His servants.

Eating right, sleeping well, getting sunlight and exercise – all of these things can help us in the fight against depression. Sometimes medicines and counseling can also help. But the most powerful weapon against the discouragements of this fallen world is to simply focus on Jesus and on serving Him. Let's close with **Hebrews 12:1-2**, **"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."**

Let's pray.

V. Prayer