

Tales of Two Cities (Acts 18:1-19:20)

Main Idea: Paul developed a team to expand the gospel in the midst of hostility. Even today, when the Good News is proclaimed, opposition is expected. However, there is comfort knowing that God promises to be there with us. When the Jews rejected the gospel, Paul proceeded to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. In order to do this, he utilized a team that had been disciplined and trained. This enabled him to be more productive in furthering the kingdom.

INTRODUCTION

All of us have some thing we love to do. No matter how busy we might be, we would make time for it. When I was growing up, I loved watching football on Sundays. Football would start at 11a.m. Church began at 9:30 a.m. After church, I did not socialize, but rushed home to watch the Oakland Raiders play. My mood for the rest of the day was dependent on whether my team won or not. My parents let me watch football on TV while I had lunch. I would start lunch early and stretched it for several hours. I loved football and I was committed to it.

As we have been studying the book of Acts, we have seen that the Apostle Paul was committed to spreading the gospel. He loved seeing people come to know Christ personally. You'll recall that the theme of the book of Acts is "O Church Arise" and to bear witness of the gospel, starting in Jerusalem and expanding to Judea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. Peter took the lead to bear witness of the gospel in Jerusalem. Philip obeyed God by bearing witness of the gospel in Samaria. Paul took the final leg by bearing witness of the gospel to the ends of the earth. Paul teamed up with Barnabas during the first missionary journey, then he teamed up with Silas, Timothy, and Luke in the second missionary journey, where the Holy Spirit directed them into Macedonia (or Greece), which is the gateway into Europe.

During the past couple of weeks, we have been on Paul's second missionary journey, where he preached the gospel in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, & Athens. Today, we will cover two cities: the final city of Paul's second missionary journey, which is Corinth, and the first city of Paul's third missionary journey, Ephesus. What we see in common with these two cities is Paul's commitment to spreading the gospel. We will look at how he went about doing that. He was not content to only bring the gospel, but he went on to make disciples and develop a team to expand the gospel.

A. Paul Is Committed to Spreading the Gospel

Paul left Athens and went to Corinth, which was probably the wealthiest city in Greece because of its two seaports. Paul was very strategic as to where he went to build a base for the Good News. He established churches in these hub areas for it to arise and reproduce. Let us turn our Bible to 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.

1. The gospel is made clear: Jesus is the Christ (18:5,28)

Here in this verse is the gospel or the Good News in a nutshell. Jesus is the Christ. Jesus, which means savior, is the Christ, which means Messiah, the Anointed One. Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth to pay the penalty of man's sin by dying on the cross to be

our savior. Three days later, he resurrected showing that God had accepted His sacrifice on our behalf. Whoever believes in Christ as their savior will be saved. Jesus is the Messiah, who came to give us hope in life. This is the Good News. If you have not placed your trust in Jesus Christ, you can do that today.

2. Paul reasoned with the Jews and Greeks (18:4,19; 19:8)

In verse 4, we see that Paul was in the synagogue every Sabbath reasoning with the Jews and Greeks, persuading them to put their trust in Jesus Christ. This was Paul's custom: to go the synagogue, where he would find Jews with whom to share the gospel. When he was in Ephesus in Acts 19:8, he did the same thing. Paul did not just focus on the Jews, but also tried to persuade the Greeks with the gospel.

APPLICATION: We have the responsibility to share the gospel to our kinsmen. But we are not to stop there. The gospel is for everyone no matter what culture they might be. May we look for opportunity to share our faith with our neighbors, our classmates, or our coworkers.

3. The gospel is presented to the Jews first, then to the Gentiles (18:5,6; 19:8-9)

In verse 6, we see that the Jews opposed Paul and the gospel. They were so upset that they verbally abused Paul, insulting and blaspheming him. When the gospel is presented, it is common to be met with hostility. Similar harsh negative response is seen in Ephesus in Acts 19:9. Upon the rejection from the Jews, Paul launched a new direction with a new targeted group. At the end of 18:8, he says, "From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

4. The gospel is received and opposed (18:6-7; 19:9)

Although there was fierce opposition, there were various people that responded positively to the gospel. They believed and were baptized. Next Sunday, we will have baptism. These believers are publicly professing their faith and proudly identifying themselves as followers of Christ. READ 18:7, "Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized." Although Paul faced opposition, God comforted him and assured him that the Lord was with him.

5. God comforted Paul and assured him that the Lord was with him. (18:9-17)

Let us read vv.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." We are to be faithful in sharing the gospel wherever we go. Opposition is expected. However, there is comfort knowing that God promises to be there with us.

ILLUSTRATION: When I was in Haiti a few years ago, we were sharing the gospel with some people that were washing their clothes in a creek. Four tough young guys questioned what we were doing. Instead of backing off, we shared the gospel to them.

Initially, they did not show any interest, but as we continued to talk, one of them called Wilford, an 18th year old basketball player, started listening to what we had to say. The Spirit of God convicted him and he trusted Christ although there was a hostile environment.

Right after God comforted Paul in a vision that He will be with him and Paul will not be harmed, a group of Jews brought Paul into court accusing him of persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the Roman law. Gallio, the governor of Achaia, rejected the Jews' accusations and said that these matters dealt with their own law and he threw them out of the courthouse. Indeed, God kept His word and protected Paul.

Not only is Paul committed to spreading the gospel, Paul is committed to making disciples. Let us turn to Acts 18:11, "So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God."

B. Paul is Committed to Making Disciples

1. Discipleship is a slow process; it takes time (18:11: 19:10)

Paul was not only interested in new converts, he was committed to making disciples of Christ. Discipleship is a slow process. It takes time to help a believer to mature in Christ. Paul spent 1 ½ years investing his life in the believers at Corinth. At Ephesus, he took a group of believers and spent two years with them.

2. Discipleship involves personal attention (18:23)

One cannot rush a person to become a disciple. Developing a personal relationship with God can not be done by telling the disciple what to do, but by modeling what to do. One can instruct at a distance, but can only influence up close. Discipleship is much more than taking a class, but having someone show you personally how to grow in your faith in the Lord. Lessons are much more caught than taught. Discipleship involves personal attention. After the 2nd missionary journey, Paul went back to the different churches to follow-up with them in the 3rd missionary journey. In Acts 19:23, Paul traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

3. Discipleship involves personal correction (18:24-26)

There should be such a close relationship between the discipler and the disciple that the discipler would care enough to correct his student. In Acts 18:24, Apollos was introduced as a learned man that had a thorough knowledge of Scripture. He spoke with great fervor. However, he knew only about John's baptism and was not familiar with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. After Aquila and Priscilla heard his preaching, they noticed that there were some misinformed teachings. Instead of correcting him upfront, they invited him to their home to correct him. They cared enough to confront. They did not hesitate, but took care of it immediately. v. 26 says, "He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and

explained to him the way of God more adequately.” When we confront someone, let’s not do it publicly. It is best done privately.

Discipleship is a slow process. Discipleship involves personal attention as well as personal correction. Fourthly, discipleship involves personal encouragement as recorded in Acts 18:27.

4. Discipleship involves personal encouragement (18:27-28)

We not only need to know what to do, but we need to be encouraged to carry it out. Apollos wanted to go to Achaia to preach the gospel and the brothers encouraged him to go and wrote disciples in Achaia to welcome him. Satan works hard to distract us from following Jesus with discouragement. We all need encouragement to stay on target. Discipleship involves personal encouragement.

5. Discipleship involves learning from Scripture and passing along what one has learned (18:28; 19:9-10)

In Acts 19:9-10, while Paul was in Ephesus, he took his disciples aside and had daily discussions with them from the Word of God. This went on for 2 years. As a result, all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. Discipleship involves learning from Scripture and passing along what one has learned. Spiritual growth cannot take place apart from the Word of God.

ILLUSTRATION: Akhil, a new believer a couple of years ago, was so hungry for the Word of God. Dan Tung took him aside and taught him scripture. Earlier this year, Dan teamed up with Akhil to teach a Sunday school class together.

Lastly, discipleship involves changed lives.

6. Discipleship involves changed lives (19:18-20)

Ephesus was recognized as the magic capital of the world. In Acts 19:18-20, through the ministry of Paul, a number who practiced sorcery believed and confessed their evil deeds. They brought their scrolls and burned them publicly. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. God desires to change us inside out. Discipleship involves changed lives.

We have seen Paul committed to spreading the gospel. We have also seen Paul committed to making disciples. Lastly, we see in this passage that Paul is committed to developing a team to expand the Gospel. No matter how gifted one might be, he has limitation of time and resources. To multiply our effort, it is best to train a team to do what we do.

C. Paul Is Committed to Developing a Team to Expand the Gospel

1. Paul took Aquila and Priscilla under his wing (18:1-3;18-19)

When Paul first arrived at Corinth, he found Aquila and Priscilla, who were also tent makers like Paul. They had something in common, by which they could bond together. They worked together. Through this relationship, Paul disciplined them and took them

with him to Ephesus. In Acts 18:18-19, he ministered there for a short period of time and he went on to Antioch, but he left Priscilla and Aquila there in Ephesus to continue the ministry that he started. It was there that they took Apollos aside to teach and correct him. We see reproduction through discipleship. In addition, Aquila and Priscilla expanded the evangelistic team by adding Apollos to it.

2. Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos under their wing (18:24-26; 19:1)
3. Paul took some of John the Baptist's disciples under his wing (19:1-7)

Paul was constantly looking for potential believers to disciple and add to his outreach team. In Ephesus, he found some disciples that only knew of John's baptism, but not the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He took them under his wing to train them. Afterward, these twelve men were ready to take the gospel wherever they went.

4. Paul took Ephesians' believers under his wing (19:9-10,18-20)

In Ephesus, some rejected the gospel, but others received it. Paul took these believers under his wing to train. He met with them daily discussing the Word of God for 2 years. Afterward, we see them going out throughout the province of Asia with the gospel. In 19:10, it says, "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord." Paul was actively building a team to expand the gospel. He was so much more productive this way.

CONCLUSION: May we pray and ask God to give us the same passion and commitment as Paul, who was committed to spreading the gospel, making disciples, and developing a team to expand the gospel. Our community so desperately needs the Lord today. Would you pray daily that God will give you opportunity to share the gospel? Would you look actively for a discipler or someone to disciple? Would you pursue to build a team to expand God's kingdom?