

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

R₂L – Resolved to Live: Reaching a Pleasure-centered Culture for Christ Acts 18:1-17 (Part 1 – 18:1-6)

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Perhaps you have been sensing a pattern as we have been looking at the life of Paul and his approach to reaching people for Jesus Christ during his second missionary journey. Thus far we have seen many similarities as he sought to reach a pagan people for Christ in Thessalonica, a pluralistic people for Christ in Athens, and now, this morning, we will come to see Paul reaching a pleasure-oriented culture for Christ in the city of Corinth.

Let me begin with giving you a picture of this place where we find Paul and his missionary team. Verse 1 begins with, **“After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth.”** It will be in this city of hyper-depravity that we see how the Lord reached into the hearts of minds of sinners to bring them to salvation. Corinth has been regarded as the most sensual, pleasure-seeking city in the first century world. And so, by understanding this, we can learn how we can reach a pleasure-centered culture for Christ.

Let me point something out to you about sin and sinners. Not all sinners sin alike. Because of this, we cannot always use the same approaches or arguments to reach sinners for Christ. Last week we noted that the Athenians were steeped in philosophy, intellectualism, and pluralism. The Athenians would have considered themselves refined, cultured, and sophisticated. But they were still sinners needing salvation from the Lord. But those in Corinth, just some 50 miles west of Athens, were a very different kind of sinner. Rather than “refined”, the people of Corinth were blatant, literally sex-crazed and depraved sinners. Two words might be used to describe Corinth at the time of Paul; wealth and wickedness

Corinth was a wealthy city. Unlike the small 30,000 people population of Athens, the port city of Corinth boasted over 200,000 people. While Athens had been influential in the past, Corinth had bypassed her and became the capital of Achaia. Julius Caesar had invested in the city some hundred years before Paul arrived, having given it the status of a Roman colony. Corinth was home of the Isthmian Games, second only to the Olympic Games. Power, prestige, pleasure, fashion, recreation and wealth were the aim of life in Corinth. But there is another word that more aptly describes Corinth.

Wicked. The Greeks loved their theater and whenever a Corinthian was played on the stage, he was shown drunk. The Greeks actually coined a verb, “to play the Corinthian,” which meant “to live a life of lustful debauchery.” The verb “to corinthianize” meant to go out and act as a harlot. To be called a “Corinthian woman” was to be harlot.

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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On the city’s hill above the people was the Acropolis, the home of the temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Living in the temple were 1,000 priestesses of Aphrodite, which were nothing more than sacred prostitutes. Every night these women came into the city to give themselves in the name of pleasure and religion. If the term “sin-city” were every aptly applied, it would be applied to Corinth. Let me remind you that Paul wrote his letter to the Romans while living in Corinth. Why is this important? Because of what Paul wrote in Romans 1:24-25, a bit of a commentary on what he saw. He wrote, **“24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.”** Corinth was the epitome of a pleasure-centered culture.

Why do I press this matter? Because our culture is not far behind that of Corinth. America is in many ways like ancient Corinth, suffering from moral decay and cultural decadence.

¹[In her book, “Of Thee I Zing”, Laura Ingraham speaks of going to the shopping mall as a painful experience. Everywhere there are signs of cultural barbarism: preteen girls dressed as streetwalkers; disheveled boys wearing pants below their underwear; mothers in ultra-tight jeans and low-cut shirts, often with faces distorted by plastic surgery, walking around with their scantily clad daughters; teenagers covered in tattoos and with noses, ears, eyelids, bellybuttons and tongues littered with metal piercings. This is not “individual expression.” It is the degradation of self - the expression of a hedonistic, neo-pagan, pleasure crazed social order that is stripping off its Judeo-Christian moorings. The human body is no longer respected but is defamed.

Manners and behavior define a culture. The higher they are, the more refined, the more elevated become a peoples’ public morals. For centuries, Americans understood this. No longer. In movies, television and music, swearing is rampant. Hours are spent in social networking and “texting.” Social skills, are eroding. Handshakes, politeness, proper greetings, civilized decorum and courteous behavior increasingly are things of the past. Many people are unable to speak proper English. They simply grunt and talk in half-sentences, usually adding adolescent phrases such as “you know” and “like.”

Our children are increasingly spoiled and overindulged. They lack basic respect for parental authority, which means they have no respect for neighbors and strangers. They are conditioned that they must have the latest consumer goods - from PlayStations to iPads and iPhones to Gucci. Before our eyes we are raising an illiterate, narcissistic generation who thinks being rude and coarse is chic - sorry, “cool.”

America is sliding into a cultural abyss. This is a betrayal not only of our children and grandchildren, but of our forefathers. Since 1776, Americans have spent precious blood and treasure to sustain our experiment in limited government and individual liberty. We did not make such sacrifices so that Hugh Hefner and MTV morality could triumph. In front of our eyes, a social revolution is taking place - one that threatens to drown us in a moral cesspool.

Is this what our forefathers, who believed in God, the Bible and morality fought for? If this what our parents and grandparents struggled for? Is our current American culture the Greatest Generation had in mind when they stormed the beaches at Normandy? So we could aspire to be like the Kardashians or land a role on “The Housewives of Miami?”

¹ Material in [BRACKETS] through pg. 4 adapted from Jeffery T. Kuhner’s review of “Of Thee I Zing” by Laura Ingraham

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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No, this is not why U.S. troops perished in France liberating Europe from Nazi occupation. It also is not why Americans gave up their lives in Korea and Vietnam or continue to bleed in Iraq and Afghanistan. No one is willing to die - nor should he - for the Playboy philosophy. The reason is simple: It leads to cultural suicide.

Radical leftists have championed personal liberation and a godless society since the 1960's. They began what they called the "long march through the institutions" and they have succeeded. They now occupy the commanding heights of our culture - the dominant media, universities, public schools, Hollywood, television, the entertainment industry, nongovernmental organizations and the arts. Even many religious institutions have been infiltrated.

What does our culture look like? Nothing but a filthy cesspool and a sea of misery. Abortion has butchered some 50 million unborn babies. Millions have died from AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases all out of increasing sexual decadence and promiscuity. Out-of-wedlock teenage births have skyrocketed. Divorce has soared. The family has broken down. Drugs, pornography and permissiveness are rampant. Homosexuality and sodomy have been elevated to the sacred status of marriage. In some school districts, such as in New York City, 10- and 11-year-old students are being taught all manner of sexual practices. In short, we have created a culture of death.]

Is our culture anything like that of Corinth? Indeed it is! And while the picture is dark and depressing, I call you this morning not called to mourn and hide, but we are called to reach this Corinth like culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ, knowing that God will work through our obedience and gloriously save people from such a depraved pleasure-centered society.

My goal is not to depress us about how bad things are around us. My goal is to answer the question, *How can we reach a pleasure-centered culture with the gospel? How can we reach unsaved people in places where sin is so blatant?* The Word of God gives a simple, hope-filled answer in our text.

Paul took the gospel to Corinth, reaching what we might call the most depraved of sinners. Paul had a long ministry in Corinth and would write at least four letters to the Corinthian church he started. We have two of his four letters in the New Testament. But here is the hope of reaching a sin-saturated, pleasure-centered culture. Listen to what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 - **9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.**

I love verse 11, "Such were some of you" past tense. Now these were washed and justified. The point, *where the gospel of Jesus is preached, God can save any kind of sinner.* And this is the main point of our text, answering the question, how can we reach a pleasure-centered culture like Corinth or like ours for Christ? From what we see Paul doing in Acts 18:1-17, there are two things we must do. These two things will not be anything new. You have heard these before, but they bear repeating. The first is found in our text, summarized there in verse 5, reading that Paul was **solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.** Beloved, **we** must preach, we must proclaim, we must make known, we must expose, we must reveal, we must talk about, and communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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God’s Word alone is powerful. God’s Word will deliver enslaved people. But to do so, we must unleash it. We must make it known. We must *preach* it. When I use the term “preach” do not merely think of an activity behind a pulpit. To preach simply means “to herald the good news,” and we can do that in a variety of ways and settings, we can do it in a church, we can do it in our homes, we can do it in the marketplace, we can do it anywhere and everywhere. This morning we will note where Paul heralded this good news and then try to make some applications.

I. We must herald Christ (1-6)

Notice in verse 4 that upon arrival in Corinth, where did Paul go first? We read, ***And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.*** Of course, this was Paul’s pattern, his custom. When he entered a city, he found the synagogue because he knew that there would be people interested at some level with his message. The city of Corinth evidently had a sizeable Jewish population. He would enter the synagogue; mention his credentials as a trained rabbi in the school of Gamaliel, which would then give him an opportunity to teach. And he taught them about Jesus. Luke informed us that Paul was “reasoning” with them. The word “reasoning” is *dielegeto* in the Greek. We get our word “dialogue” which means to speak through the words. Paul was not just preaching, but having an interactive dialogue, answer questions, and even asking some of his own. From other texts in Acts, we know that Paul always reasoned from the Scriptures, the Word of God, letting it speak to the hearts and minds of the people.

How can we impact a culture, a city, or even a community where sin reigns? You impact best by injecting Scripture. We said over the past couple of weeks that there is not impact without contact. We must involve ourselves in the lives of unbelievers. But equally true, there will be no impact if we do not inject the conversation with the Word of God. We must find ways to make known the Word of God to people. We should send birthday, anniversary, and thank you card with a carefully chosen Scripture along with a brief explanation as to why you chose it. Your Christian worldview needs to become increasingly saturated with Scripture so that whether you are talking about family, your job, your hobbies; whether about politics, sports, or even the weather, you inject Scripture into the mix.

I do not care if you know this verse that I am about to quote, what I care about is whether you can say you are living out this verse more and more regularly in your day to day life. What verse? Romans 1:16 which says what? ***For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*** Our hearts desire ought to be what Paul’s heart was toward this pleasure-centered Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 2:2 he said: ***For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.*** Did Paul ever talk about anything else to the Corinthians? We know he must have, but he always sought to bring the conversation back to Scripture and back to Christ.

If we would reach a culture that is more concerned about their favorite TV shows than learning about Christ, is more concerned about watching football than gathering with the saints, is more concerned about partying or getting wasted than growing the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is more concerned about surfing pornography than studying about the Prince of peace, it all begins by you resolving to become a people of the BOOK, the Word of

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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God. What portions of Scripture are you reading and studying? Even more to the point, what verses have you memorized recently? We reach a culture by *preaching Christ*.

But Pastor, I am not a preacher! Maybe not by office and role, but each believer is a witness, a testifier for Christ. So, just how can we be better witnesses and proclaimers of the gospel? Let me point out three characteristics of people who are seeking to reach a pleasure-centered culture with the Word of God.

First, reaching people for Christ involves “*teamwork*.” Again, in verse one we read, **After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth**. Remember that Paul had been chased out of three cities in recent months. It was only from Athens that he left on his own timetable, but his results there were limited, no known church was established. I imagine that when he got to Corinth, alone, that he was a bit discouraged. God knows our needs; and knowing Paul’s needs, God sent him two people who would share his ministry and become enduring partners in the faith.

We read in verses 2-3, **2 And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, 3 and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers.**

It is always amazing to see the people God brings into our lives. For Paul, God brought Aquila and Priscilla. Luke tells us that they, like Paul, were Jews. We are also informed that they, like Paul, were travelers, Aquila being a native of Pontus (modern day Turkey) but that they had just come from Rome, Italy.

Before meeting these two, it would seem that Paul’s missionary support had run out. He was alone, tired, and without income, so he sought to generate some funds by using his trade as a tentmaker. Paul was originally from the province of Cilicia where there were herds of a certain kind of goat with a special kind of fleece. This goat’s skin and fleece was popular for making tents, curtains, and wall hangings. It would seem that Paul had been trained in this technique.

We learn that Priscilla and Aquila were also tentmakers. Perhaps it was this trade that brought them all together. But in the providence of God, these three would form a bond of Christian love that was unrivaled. We are never told exactly how Aquila and Priscilla became Christians. It could be we have a clue from our text. The command of Emperor Claudius is significant. One ancient Roman historian, Suetonius makes mention of this command saying, “As the Jews were indulging in constant riots at the instigation of Chrestus, [Claudius] banished them from Rome.” The name “Chrestus” differs in only one letter from Christ, which is Latin for “Christ” which has led some to conclude that the disturbances in the Jewish community were caused by the preaching of Christ.

But whatever the reason, God’s providence brought Aquila and Priscilla into Paul’s life when he most needed encouragement. These two would join Paul in his work in Ephesus as we will see in Acts 18:18-28 where they opened their home for church meetings (1 Corinthians 16:19).

Isn’t that just like God? When we really need something, God brings the blessing. Paul’s work in Philippi, in Thessalonica, and in Berea all resulted in churches being established. Paul was alone in Athens and while some believed, there was no church started. I believe one of the things we learn here is that the ministry of proclaiming the gospel takes teamwork. Paul was constantly adding to his team. Think about this; if we are going to reach lost people in a pagan, pluralistic, pleasure-seeking culture, we will not do it alone. And we are not called to do it alone. We are called to do it as a team. So the first characteristic of reaching a pleasure-centered

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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culture is to get yourself with a team of committed believers, challenging your spiritual growth and standing with you as you share the gospel. But there is a second characteristic...

Second, reaching people for Christ involves *preaching Christ*. We cannot emphasize this enough; our conversations must intentionally point people back to Christ and His Word. If Christ be anything, He must be everything. We see Paul on message in verse 5, ***But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.***

Remember that Paul left Silas and Timothy in Berea with later instructions to join him in Athens (17:15). We are not sure if they made it to Athens, but we do know they caught up to Paul in Corinth. Just before their coming, Paul would work during the week as a tent-maker so he could stay in Corinth and preach in the synagogue on the Sabbath. But after Silas and Timothy arrived, the ministry strategy changed. Paul once again preached full time. It would seem that the love gifts of money from the Macedonian (the northern) churches that Paul speaks about in 2 Corinthians 11:9 and Philippians 4:15, made this possible.

Let me drive home a point here as it relates to Hope CBC reaching our culture with the gospel. Our goal ought to be to encourage and provide a person to use his or her spiritual gift(s) to the fullest for the advancement of the gospel. It would seem that Paul was not the best tent-maker in the bunch. He did when he had to, but God had gifted him to preach. Notice that Silas and Timothy understood this, doing all they could to free him up so that he could preach.

Beloved, ministry, church life, and evangelism are a team effort. It takes each and every one of us to do this well. In order for preaching to occur here at Hope CBC, we need people; people here early to help set up the equipment and deal with last minute details. We need people to be nursery workers to care for the babies so other parents can come and hear. We need greeters to provide a warm environment. We need people to do visitation and follow up on visitors and those who might have questions about the church or Christ. We need people who will organize our nursing home ministry. We need people who will be prayer warriors, those who pray for the pastor's message, who pray for the worship team and worship service, who pray for our Awana ministry. We need more people joining the team.

The truth is, as everyone does what God has enabled him or her to do, the church can most effectively fulfill her mission. But when some saints allow other matters to keep them from serving, then understand this, another saint will pull double duty, which often minimizes or even prevents him from devoting his efforts to where he is most gifted. Beloved, each of you is crucial and each of you is needed in this ministry.

And in the midst of all this; all this set up; all this preparation, all this visitation, all this involvement; we must remember to stay on message; that message being the greatness of the Person and work of Jesus as the Savior and Lord to all those who call upon Him, who trust Him. I mentioned this before, but Paul reminded the Corinthians of his message. In 1 Corinthians 2:2-5 we read, ***2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and He crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.***

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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The only message that can save sinners of any kind is that of Jesus Christ who was crucified in the place of sinners, the substitute, the one who took your place on the cross so that you might, by faith, receive the gift and hope of eternal life. That is the message of hope. Jesus Christ paid the price of sin’s penalty on the Cross and rose again from the dead three days later. And still today Jesus offers forgiveness to all who will repent and believe in Him. Would you call on Him? Would you trust in Him to change you into the person you were created to be; a holy saint and worshipper of God? This is our message; Christ and Him crucified.

Let me close by quickly pointing out the last characteristic necessary to reach a pleasure-centered culture...**Third**, we must be intent on pleasing God, not man. Notice in verse 6 what happens next; **But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”**

I will have to pick this up in more detail next week, but we need to have it settled in our minds who we are trying to please when we do ministry. If we do not do this, we will find ourselves on a roller coaster of emotions. The truth is that we cannot please people who do not know the Lord and please the Lord at the same time. And, perhaps a bit more convicting is this, we cannot claim to be God-pleasers if we are not serious about making Christ known to unsaved people. If you make the gospel known, if you share Scripture and point people to Jesus, you will irritate some and create opposition. According to verse 6, the Jews did not like Paul’s message and cursed him. What did Paul do? He left them in good conscience. He had told them the truth and they resisted. Notice that he left them, but he did not leave Corinth. And this is where we will leave our study for now. Let us commit ourselves to a ministry of teamwork; of proclaiming Christ; and of being God-pleasers rather than man-pleasers.

Soli Deo Gloria

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