

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 2)

1 After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. 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. 4 And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. 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. 6 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.” 7 Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue. 8 Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized. 9 And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; 10 for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.” 11 And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. 12 But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, 13 saying, “This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.” 14 But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; 15 but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters.” 16 And he drove them away from the judgment seat. 17 And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things.

Over the past several weeks we have been following Paul on his second missionary journey. His goal was simple; communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ with anyone and everyone with whom he had the opportunity. We have seen him do this under both accommodating circumstances, being invited to preach at times; and under less than ideal circumstances, being under the threat of death all for telling people of the great love of God manifested in sending a Savior to redeem them from their sinful, God-neglecting; God-less lives.

One of the key activities we have seen in Paul's life when seeking to reach people, be they pagan, pluralistic, or, even as we see now in Corinth, pleasure centered, was simply putting himself into the very places where the people were. All of this reminds us that wherever we go, wherever we find ourselves; whether you be at work, outside watering your yard, riding bikes in your neighborhood, going to the doctor's office, doing your grocery shopping, we need to get into the mindset of Paul and see these as divine providence; God's placing us in those places and circumstances so that we might by grace and with all boldness, tell people about Jesus Christ. To borrow from a phrase; the danger for us; the danger for you and me is not speaking of Jesus too much; but rather of speaking of Jesus too little.

To that end, I have been noting for myself and proclaiming to you the repeated pattern of Paul's life of going to people, of using Scripture to point people to Jesus and then calling people to a response. Beloved, it is not enough for us to hear this over and over. We must be resolved

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to doing something about; being determined to start with even just one person and intent on talking to that one about Christ, or inviting that one to Church. Then we must pray that one turns into two; and two into four; and four into eight; and you get the picture.

Paul’s heart was to see as many people as possible be exposed to and then express faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We ought not be content with any less from our hearts and be more determined than ever to reach our culture for Christ. And remember this, that Paul’s heart; what we have seen from his life since Acts 16, is nothing short of the very heart of God. Remember what Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:3-4 saying, **“3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”** That is the heart of God; it is the passion of Christ, who left His church, left you and me here to carry on the work that He began some two thousand years ago. How are we doing? How are you doing? If you were the only witness for Christ left on the earth, what would people around you know about Jesus?

But just how do we reach a culture for Christ? I would have you recall that here in Acts 18 we find Paul in Corinth; truly a city saturated in the muck and the mire of depravity. While many today hide behind the anonymity of the internet to indulge their flesh with things that are not worthy of a believer in Christ and are worthy only of inciting the wrath of God; the people of Corinth indulged their flesh openly, in the streets, before others, even their children, with immoralities, impurities, gluttonies and false worship of all kinds. We are becoming more and more like Corinth, only instead of it being only in the streets, it streams into our homes via TV and we stream to go see it in movies. We have people who neglect God because He and His people interfere with their TV shows, their hobbies, their children’s sports games; whatever it may be. Can you imagine a family in Israel while they were in the desert, dependent upon God for food and safety, upon seeing the Shekinah glory of God, the visible pillar of cloud representing the presence of the Lord, saying, “Sorry, we can’t come tonight, little Enoch has an award night at school?” Why would your family, friends and neighbors regard God, His people and church important if your life reflects how little you are engaged and committed to them?

I. We must be resolved to purposely herald Christ (Acts 18:1-6)

How do we break out of the static, seemingly rote and mediocre routines of present day Christianity and actually reach those around us for Jesus? That is what we have been seeing in the life of Paul and last week we noted the first of three simple commitments of Paul to reach the pleasure-oriented culture of Corinth. The first is found in Acts 18:1-6 and is simply this, we must be resolved to purposely herald Christ. Let me remind you of verse four, that upon entering Corinth, Paul, **was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.** This was Paul’s pattern, his custom. He would first find the synagogue knowing that there would be people interested at some level with his message. He entered 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.

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How can we impact a culture, a city, or even a community where sin reigns? You impact best by injecting Scripture. Not only is there no impact without contact; but there is no true impact without injecting the Word of God into the conversation. You must find ways to make known the Word of God to people. Use Scripture liberally, including it in birthday, anniversary, and thank you cards along with a brief explanation as to why you chose it. Your Christian worldview needs to become increasingly saturated with Scripture so that whatever you talk about becomes an opportunity to point people to Jesus. So, how are you doing at heralding Christ? Are you resolved to talk to people about Jesus even when it feels awkward. Let the Word of God speak, herald Jesus Christ. So, Paul’s first commitment to reaching a culture intent on its own pleasure was to speak about the Prince of Peace. A resolve to purposely herald Christ. This brings us to Acts 18:7-16 and the next two commitments of Paul to reach this culture. One of these commitments is something we have not seen Paul do up to this point, revealing to us that while the message is always the same, we can use many different means to get the message out. In addition to heralding Christ, we must...

II. We must be resolved to practice hospitality (Acts 18:7-8)

7 Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue. 8 Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.

This is the second of the commitments and means by which Paul sought to reach people for Christ. He had no hesitation with a home bible study. What Luke informs us is that having little success in preaching primarily to the Jews in the synagogue, Paul now heralded or preached Christ in a home, the home of Titius Justus, a Gentile worshiper of God. Conveniently, it was right next door to the synagogue.

I need you to notice Paul’s strategy as it is important for us to imitate if we would reach a pleasure-oriented culture. Paul used a home Bible study right in the midst of the people of Corinth. Do you want to know how to start a home Bible study (on a different night than our church Bible study of course)? Talk to your neighbors, friends or co-workers; find someone who is interested in studying the Bible and ask if you can meet in their home. Now it does not have to be a home per say; it could be at a restaurant for breakfast, a coffee shop for an afternoon study, whatever. However, if you can go to someone else’s home, you are generally guaranteed that they will show up! Then you start inviting others to come. “But what should I teach,” you may ask? Teach them about Jesus. We have some great material about the person and work of Christ with which we can set you up. Then, keep working with those God sends your way until they either stop coming or God saves them. I would like you to note with me two things we need to be reminded of by Paul’s using the home of Titius, the Gentile.

Frist, we see that God can save anyone by means of any circumstance. We tend to think of some of our family or friends or neighbors as “too hard to reach” – right? Did you notice who Luke recorded as the first person saved in the home of this Gentile? It was *Crispus, the leader of the synagogue*, a Jew. Paul had left that synagogue yet Crispus and his family came into the home of a Gentile and ended up saved. Notice as well what this Jewish family did to reveal the sincerity of their faith? They were baptized. I am sure that went over well in the synagogue. How significant is this? Do you know that Paul rarely baptized anyone? He generally left that to others on the team. But in 1 Corinthians 1:14 Paul said to this very church at Corinth, “**I thank**

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God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius...”, What is the point? We must know, believe and thus act as though God does indeed have the ability to save anyone. It does not matter whether they are religious, intellectual sinners like that of Crispus; or the depraved and degenerate sinners like many who were saved in Corinth. Notice there at the end of eight that *many* of the Corinthians who heard Paul also believed and were baptized. So, God can save anyone – believe it and act like it. But there is more...

Second, *God intends to bring the most unlikely of people together in the church.* What does a pious, law-abiding, self-righteous Jew like Crispus have in common with wild, wicked, Gentile Corinthians? Apart from Christ, nothing! The Corinthians were womanizers, prostitutes, homosexuals, bold-faced liars, thieves, drunkards, and swindlers. Many were idolaters, worshipping Aphrodite. That is what they *were*, past tense, but according to 1 Corinthians 6:11 God has washed them clean through the blood of Jesus Christ. God had sanctified them, set them apart from their sin-saturated past and them His Holy Spirit, enabling them to live new lives. And in the very midst of this motley crew, God saved the prim and proper Crispus, a Jew, and now a former synagogue ruler.

Included in this new band of brothers is Titius Justus and others like him who were nothing but raw pagans. Yet now, they all have Christ in common. They are all one in Christ. Does this mean that they instantly got along and their differences vanished? By no means. They had a lot of problems to work through, many of which Paul would write to them about in his letters to the Corinthians. But the truth remains, God brought this group together to be a light in the midst of a dark culture. It started with the resolves of Paul, Silas, Timothy, Aquila and Pricilla, yet was growing into a force of the glory of God.

Beloved, some of us could never have imagined rubbing shoulders with the likes of one another. But then Christ revealed Himself to us and saved us, bringing us together under the banner of Hope, to reach a culture like that of Northwest Arkansas. Some of us need to get this drilled into our brains and our hearts; that we are here to be a light to our culture. Not a flashing, intermittent light, but a bright beacon of hope, heralding the gospel, practicing hospitality, whether it be in our own home or in the home of others. If we are going to impact Northwest Arkansas, we need to believe and support the primacy of preaching the Word of God in the plan of God. God changes lives, He God changes *cities*, as His Word is preached, wherever it is preached. Will you resolve to not only speak to others about the gospel of Jesus, but will you also resolve to practice hospitality, the kind of hospitality where God’s word is preached. That may mean opening your home; it may mean attending one of our own Bible studies and helping make other feel comfortable, realizing that as you do that, you are helping other grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

But there is one final resolve we see in our text, one that we need to be reminded of constantly...

III. **We must be resolved to have persistent heart (Acts 18:9-16)**

Sometimes it can be hard to start something; to muster up the mindset to get after some project, right? You just don’t want to get into it. Have you been there? But is it not also true that it can be even harder to finish something! Beloved, if we are going to accomplish anything of eternal value, especially this rescue mission, seeking to help those who are trapped in this cesspool culture, we will need stout, persistent hearts that refuse to give up, refuse to give out,

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refuse to cower in fear, and refuse to stop just because things get busy or difficult! Progress may be slow, but progress is progress.

Spurgeon once said, “By perseverance, the snail reached the ark.” If we are going to be effective for God, we must learn how to deal with difficulties. As one author has put it, “Most of the Psalms were born in difficulty. Most of the Epistles were written in prisons. Most of the greatest thoughts of the greatest thinkers of all time had to pass through the fire. Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim’s Progress* from jail. Florence Nightingale, too ill to move from her bed, reorganized the hospitals of England. Semi-paralyzed and under the constant menace of apoplexy, Luis Pasteur was tireless in his attack on disease. During the greater part of his life, American historian Francis Parkman suffered so acutely that he could not work for more than five minutes as a time. His eyesight was so wretched that he could scrawl only a few gigantic words on a manuscript, yet he contrived to write twenty magnificent volumes of history. Sometimes it seems that when God is about to make preeminent use of a man, he puts him through the fire.”¹

This is why we must resolve to have persistent hearts. But how can we have persistent hearts in a world that is constantly discouraging, constantly attacking, constantly seeking for us to compromise, constantly saying in effect, “just give up!” When this happens, there are a couple of expectations we need to remember.

First, we need to remember that we, the witnesses of Christ, have God’s assurance. Notice what this looked like for Paul beginning in verses 9-10, **9 And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; 10 for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.”**

The Lord is reminding Paul who is in charge. Remember that Paul had just come alone off a disappointed experience in Athens. He had previously been run out of three other cities and now things are heating up for Paul in Corinth. Up to this point it does not seem as though Paul spent much longer than about a month at any place. Perhaps Paul was thinking he would always be on the run, always in danger. But then God goes on, charging Paul to keep speaking; and then tells him that speaking means not being silent. In other words, “Paul, keep telling people about My Son, Jesus! I am with you and I will protect you!”

Now I can’t promise you that speaking about Christ will keep you from being attacked, but I do know that God has promised to be with us; that even if we should be harmed in the telling of others about Jesus, God is with us. We have God’s assurance that His presence is with us.

And so, like Paul, you and I can be assured of two things. 1) that we have a responsibility to speak about Christ. “Go on speaking,” God commanded Paul. Beloved, will you take up the task? “Go one from this place and tell people in Bentonville, in Rogers, throughout Northwest Arkansas about My Son. Do not be silent. Be of persistent heart.” But Lord, what if it offends people? What if we do not see result right away? Preach, proclaim, speak, and tell others about Jesus. If we are persistent in this, there will be results.

2) We can be assured that it is God’s responsibility to save, not ours. We speak, God saves. Notice that God said to Paul there in verse 10, **for I have many people in this city.** There is the sovereignty of God in salvation. God knew who He had in the city to save. Paul had a guarantee that God would save some in Corinth. Can you imagine Paul’s thought and delight? “Lord, you intend to save some of these wicked, depraved and utterly sinful people?” And the Lord says, “Yes, they are Mine and you must tell them about Jesus.”

¹ Tim Hansel

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Beloved, we are the ambassadors of Christ sent to your very neighborhoods, jobs, schools and such to tell people about Jesus. This is how we reach a pleasure-oriented culture for Christ, we see them as God sees them. There are some around you who belong to the Lord. It is the Lord’s responsibility to save them but it is your responsibility to speak to them about Jesus. We are to point people to Jesus because God has people right here He will save. This is God’s assurance.

Then, in verse 11, we can see what kind of impact this had on Paul. Did it give him a stout, persistent heart? We read in verse 11, **And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.** How do we know this impacted Paul? Because it change his entire strategy. As one commentator pointed out, “*Before this Paul had been moving from place to place. He spent a week here, three weeks there, a month somewhere else. Then he moved on. But as soon as God spoke to him Paul changed his tactics and stayed on. And do you know what happened? People believed and came to Jesus Christ.*”²

How do we know this was not just a fluke? Well, the next major city Paul ministered in was Ephesus and he stayed there two years. After this he was imprisoned in Caesarea for two years. Eventually he ended up in Rome and stayed there for several years. In a sense, Paul turned from being a missionary/church planter to a church planting pastor. This allowed him to truly invest in some people; to devote himself to in-depth teaching over a period of time so that he might firmly ground people in doctrine. All of this because Paul remained of persistent heart. And given God’s assurance and promise was and is necessary because of the second expectation we must have.

Second, we must remember that as Christ’s witnesses we will experience man’s *antagonism*. One of the ways we know that God is using us is when we run into the opposition of man because people do not want to hear that they are sinners, that their lives are not being lived according to God’s standard, that they need help and that they need a Savior. Notice how this played out in Paul’s life.

It began in verses 12-13 with the Jews attacking Paul. We read, **12 But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, 13 saying, “This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.”**

This Gallio mentioned by Luke was the brother of Seneca, the famed Roman philosopher and tutor of Caesar Nero. Seneca described his brother Gallio as “an intelligent person who hated flattery, and was blessed with an ‘unaffectedly pleasant personality.’” It was not as though Gallio was some simple mayor of the city, but rather was the ruler over the entire Roman district of Achaia. He was more like a governor. The fate of Christianity seemingly rested in this man’s decision. If Gallio had ruled against Paul, his decision would have applied throughout the Roman empire and would have prevented further preaching. It was a precarious situation from Paul’s perspective. But God already promised that He was in control.

Oh how we need to remember such things when school boards, city councils, state governments or even national politics seem to fly in the face of our faith. None of these people are in control ultimately. We are called to be faithful to God. He will take care of the rest.

And so, as we read in verses 14-17, God protects Paul, just as promised. We read, **14 But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; 15**

² James M. Boice

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but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters.” 16 And he drove them away from the judgment seat. 17 And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things.

What a turn of events! The new ruler of the synagogue, Sosthenes, who brought the charge before Gallio, was beaten publicly as the case was thrown out. We might feel sorry for Sosthenes, but it is possible that the Lord used this very thing along with the persistent preaching of Paul to turn him to Jesus. Why do I say this. Look with me at 1 Corinthians 1:1 where we find something interesting. We read, **“Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother...”** Is this the same Sosthenes? We cannot be sure, but it seems plausible.

You know, we have plans, all of us. We have plans for this church. One of them was to put up banners and signs advertising our church and our Awana program. Then we were informed that according to city codes and regulations, we cannot put up such banners on the roads. It seems like a bummer, but God continues to do His work according to His plan. Sometimes God allows those in charge to stand in antagonism to the church. Sometimes He softens their hearts. But it is all according to God’s plan.

There is a story about the noble hero of the Spartans named Leonides. Around 500 BC, Leonides defended Greece from the Persians. The enemy was coming against him and his army by the thousands. So many that one of his men said to him, “General, when the Persians shoot their arrows, there are so many of them that they darken the sky.” Leonides replied, “Then we will fight in the shade.”

How can we reach a pleasure-oriented culture, a culture that delves deeper and deeper into spiritual darkness for Christ? We go into the darkness with the light of God’s Word and with a persistent heart, eager to proclaim the excellencies of Christ. How can you do this? ^[slide 09] Let me close with three resolves I would ask you to make:

First, use, *inject, proclaim, and teach God’s Word in any and every situation you can.* Be ready to meet with those who have questions about Jesus. Ask the Lord to open your eyes to opportunities and to open your mouths to proclaim the truth.

Second, *involve yourself in the lives of those in whom you see God at work.* Sometimes that may put you in seemingly awkward situations. I would imagine that at one level, Paul did not like living in Corinth, surrounded by such depravity and debauchery. At the same time, we, like Paul, need to know that some of God’s people are out there. If someone expresses an interest in spiritual things, get working with him or her!

Third, and finally, *impress upon your mind that God will save His people.* We have His promise to do that. Our responsibility goes back to the first resolve to speak the Word of God so that through our obedience, God will bring many to faith in Jesus.

Soli Deo Gloria

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