

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
November 29, 2015

Lesson Text: Acts 18:1-11
Lesson Title: Teaching God's Word

Introduction

After Paul's difficult ministry in Athens (Acts 17), the Lord led him to the city of Corinth. Today Corinth is a small town with little significance other than historical. But in New Testament times it was a thriving, prosperous, and strategically located city with a population larger than Athens. Corinth was destroyed in 146 B.C. and refounded in 46 B.C. by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony.

Corinth was the crossroads of culture, trade and corruption. It was located between two gulfs on a small strip of land four miles wide. When ships arrived in port on the eastern side they were taken out of the water and transported by land to the gulf on the western side. During this process the sailors came into Corinth where the city provided them everything they needed from religion to sexual gratification. Needless to say, like most cities today, Corinth needed God's Word and through His grace the Lord sent His word through the teaching ministry of the Apostle Paul and the missionary team.

Paul and Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:1-3)

The first part of our lesson deals with Paul's arrival in Corinth and him finding Aquila and Priscilla. Paul needed work, rest, and companionship. God provided this for him through this precious Christian couple.

Verse 1-2

"After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them."

"After these things" refers to the events Paul faced in Athens. Leaving "Athens," where he had limited results, Paul "came to Corinth," some sixty miles away. No doubt Paul had left Athens with a heavy heart but he continues on to do God's will. Upon his arrival he "found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately from Italy, with his wife Priscilla." "Aquila" and "his wife Priscilla" who had come from "Italy" to "Corinth" as part of the general expulsion of Jews from Rome ordered by Claudius.

In Corinth Paul found friends who would be a great help to him personally and to the message of the cross. God takes care of His faithful servants. It is no strain for God to move Roman emperors or a husband and wife to insure His servant Paul receives the help he needs. In Romans 16:3-4, Paul speaks of Aquila and Priscilla as *“my helpers in Christ Jesus, who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.”*

Verse 3

“And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.”

Apparently Paul arrived in Corinth in financial need and without a place to lodge. So the first thing he needed was to find lodging and work. Since he was skilled in the trade of tentmaking, for which his hometown of Tarsus was famous, he went to the street of tentmakers and found a friendly and hospitable couple “Aquila” and “Priscilla.” He lived and worked with them.

If you were a Jew in the first century living in the Roman world, “tent making” was not a bad occupation. The Roman army alone would require many tents which meant there would be a great opportunity for work. Since Paul knew how to make tents he was able to work with Aquila and Priscilla. God providentially placed these three believers and “tentmakers” together so His word could be taught.

Paul and the Jews (Acts 18:4-6)

The second part of our lesson deals with Paul’s work among the Jews. The goal of the Apostle was to bring the Jewish people to saving faith in Jesus as the Christ. Again, we are reminded of Paul’s deep love for his own people (Romans 10:1).

Verse 4

“And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.”

As was his custom, Paul “reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.” Paul “reasoned” or “entered a dialogue” with them about the person of Jesus Christ and His salvation. He “persuaded the Jews and the Greeks” means he did his best to convince them Christ was the Messiah. The “Greeks” were God-fearing Gentiles who were proselytes to Judaism.

Verse 5

“And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.”

By the time “Silas and Timothy” rejoined Paul “from Macedonia,” Paul intensified his ministry. “Pressed” means “constrained or convicted.” With the “Jews” his main emphasis was “that Jesus was Christ,” meaning the Messiah.

There was urgency in Paul’s teaching and preaching. He not only disputed in an argumentative way, but he followed up his arguments with a passionate persuasion. It was as though he was genuinely begging the Jews to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Verse 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.”

Finally the inevitable happened. The Jews “opposed themselves, and blasphemed.” “Opposed” means “to set oneself against.” The Jews argued and contradicted everything Paul was teaching concerning Christ being the Messiah. “Blasphemed” means “to vilify, to speak vile against.” They verbally insulted Paul.

Because of the rejection of truth by the Jews, Paul “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.” By “shaking his raiment” Paul is visually indicating he is finished with his ministry to them. Jesus told His disciples, “*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...*” (Mark 6:11). When a person’s mind is firmly set against God and truth, we should turn our efforts to others. There is no benefit in trying to force salvation upon anyone. Salvation is for all who will accept the message of the cross by faith.

By “shaking his raiment” Paul is also visually indicating he does not want any of their blasphemous words and actions to stick to him. He said, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean...” The Jews were fully responsible for what they were doing and the results of their actions would “be upon their own heads.” They made the choice to reject truth and they would suffer the consequences.

“From henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles” reveals Paul’s intentions to take the gospel to the Gentiles. He had offered the gospel to the Jews and since they would not accept his offer, he would extend it to others who would receive it.

The spiritual poverty of the Jews would become the spiritual wealth of the Gentiles (Romans 11:12-14).

Paul, Justus, and Crispus (Acts 17:7-11)

The third part of our lesson deals with Paul turning to the Gentiles. In this section we find him entering the house of a man named Justus, not to stay, but as a preaching headquarters. What the Jews would not allow Paul to do in their synagogue, Justus permitted him to do in his house. Once again, God's providence is amazing!

Verse 7

“And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.”

“Justus” is a Latin name often used by Jewish proselytes. Little is known of this man beyond what Luke records about him here in the text. He was a man who “worshipped God” and his “house joined hard to the synagogue.” Paul did not have to travel far to find a place to declare God's Word.

Verse 8

“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.”

Paul immediately saw the fruits of his labor. “Crispus” is also a Latin name, but his name is not the important thing in this story. “Crispus,” was “the chief ruler of the synagogue.” Luke tells us he “believed on the Lord.” We all know not everyone who hears the gospel will believe, but we also know that when the word of God is faithfully proclaimed some will believe. The conversion of “the chief ruler of the synagogue” must have been a hard pill for the religious establishment to swallow! Furthermore, “his house” was saved and “baptized” along with “many” other “Corinthians.” What a blessing the unbelieving Jews missed!

Note: If you have never trusted Christ as your Savior, you are missing a blessing. In fact, you are missing life. Like Crispus, hear the word of the Lord today and call upon Him for salvation (Romans 10:13).

Verse 9-10

“Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.”

After the conversion of “Crispus,” the Lord visited Paul “in the night by a vision.” He told Paul not to be afraid but continue to preach the word of God as he had preached it. He assured Paul He was with him and “no man” would lay a hand on him or hurt him. The Lord had “much people in this city.” That would probably have been hard to believe if you came walking through Corinth and seen the religion, fleshly establishments, and lost people congregating there. Nevertheless, the Lord had “much people” in Corinth.

As believers we sometimes get discouraged when we see the multitude of lost people compared to those who are saved. Be encouraged, God has always had a people. In every city, in every town, in every church there are some who are truly saved by grace!

Verse 11

“And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”

Because of God’s encouraging words to Paul in the vision (verse 10), Paul stayed in Corinth “a year and six months,” or eighteen months. Paul spent those eighteen months “teaching the word of God among them.” Paul did not teach reformation or health and wealth. He did not go into the low class areas of Corinth to teach a social gospel. He taught the “word of God” which is the Gospel of grace and relied upon the Holy Spirit to change lives.

Commenting on this verse, Doctor Woodrow Kroll, formerly of Back to the Bible says, “Every place the power of God is seen in the book of Acts, a miracle does not occur. But every place the power of God is seen in the book of Acts the teaching of God’s Word occurs.”

It is not the sensational that brings the Spirit of God or the power of God. It is the teaching of the word of God (Romans 10:17). There is nothing more important in ministry than the faithful teaching and preaching of God’s Word.

Conclusion

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “*And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified*” (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). Paul’s preaching and teaching of God’s Word was consistent throughout his ministry. He was not afraid to engage the culture at Athens or Corinth. However, he wanted those at Corinth to know the Lord sent him to Corinth to preach “*...Christ, and him crucified.*”

The lost world and the church today needs to be taught the word of God. Social programs, recreation, and fellowship gatherings may be beneficial in some cases, but nothing will ever replace the teaching of God's Word.

Teaching God's Word is never easy, but it can be joyful when hearts are open to receive truth. Many souls were saved at Corinth during the eighteen months Paul was there and the newly established church began to grow. Teach God's Word. The results are both joyful and eternal!

Amen.