**PP Acts: To the End of the Earth**

**Part 49-Acts 18:1-17, *Better Together*  9/17-18/2022**

I experienced culture shock years ago on mission trip to Haiti, as our group went to a small

town that was celebrating the St. James Festival

Hundreds of Haitians had gathered in front of the town’s Catholic church, many of whom were

holding candles that were lit

While there with the mission group, the local priest and also the town witch doctor came out to

the porch of the church, and began to work the crowd into a frenzy

The candles had been lit by worshipers who were inviting a demon to possess them, their hope

for power and a way out of their horrific poverty

As the worship reached its climax, the priest and witch doctor signaled and the people rushed to

nearby mud pits where many were possessed by demons

All kinds of immoral activities began, and the Haitian national pastor with us told us it was

getting dangerous for us to be there and that we must leave at that moment

I could already feel the hair on my neck and arms lifting from something that was going on

My white skin and red hair stood out, and as we worked our way through the crowds back to our

vehicle, the men became increasingly aggressive toward me especially

In a country where I have never seen more beautiful, kinder people, that day, in that town, at that

festival, they were completely different

**PP 1-Church, our mission is daunting**

***“After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.”* Acts 18:1**

Paul traveled west 50 miles, leaving Athens, to Corinth which was a moral cesspool

Going from Athens to Corinth was a little like going from Boston to Las Vegas, from a city of

culture to Sin City…culture shock for this Jewish Apostle

It was a major city in Paul’s day, with over half of its population being slaves, forced to carry

shipping cargo across a 3 ½ mile land bridge called an isthmus

Corinth was built on this land bridge, and sailors would dock on one port, offload its cargo which

would be carried across and loaded onto ships waiting there

Otherwise sailors would have to sail around Cape Malea, a long and dangerous journey

With its two ports connecting the Aegean and Adriatic seas, it was commercially booming

Being the capital city of Achaia, it was politically powerful

Hosting the world Isthmian Games, second only to the Olympics made it culturally important

Yet the city was infamous for its immorality

There were no less than 12 temples there, none more popular than the Temple of Aphrodite being

one of the architectural wonders of the ancient world

It loomed 1900 feet over the city, employing over 1000 female prostitutes who would make their

way down into the city every late afternoon to pleasure men and women

The city was so full of immorality that all over Rome, the term *Corinthian* was used as an insult

for an especially immoral person

It was a city as far different from Jewish culture and morality as one could get, and here walks

the Apostle Paul who didn’t yet know it, but he would be there for 1 ½ years

*How*, he must have wondered, *can the gospel make a dent in this level of immorality?*

The mission before him was daunting but as we will see, depravity can often be more fertile soil

for the gospel than the stony, prideful ground of Athens where knowledge abounded

Look at your own mission field a moment: your family, your workplace, your school, your

neighbors…does it not seem daunting…how can I be a witness to them?

**PP 2-Our mission is daunting, and we are better together**

One of the greatest lessons of church life was taught to me by National Geographic

It was an episode of a herd of wildebeests on the Serengeti Plains attacked by a pride of lions

The wildebeests instinctively circled up with their young in the protective center while the lions

roared and darted at them, and all the wildebeests needed to do was stay together

I was on the edge of my chair, willing those animals to not break the circle, but inevitably, one of

the adult wildebeests took off running in fear, and into that opening ran the lions and the

entire herd of adult wildebeests scattered leaving their young as prey

That video stunned me, and immediately drew my mind to the strategies of the devil

His name, *diabolos*, means one who throws slander and accusation against God’s people, and his

goal is to divide us

Division in friendship, marriage, family, neighbors or church, he divides and attacks

But his strategy of division is not always conflict, as he often simply isolates God’s people from

one another

A busy family and there isn’t enough time leftover to be involved with Christian community

You take a new job and now you are too busy and too tired to be in a Community Group or serve

in the church or make disciples of people in your lives

That new lake home and you maybe you worship at any church once a month

The reasons are many, but the devil’s goal is to divide and isolate Christians

Yet here is a truth you want to know: **PP** *We cannot do the work God has for us to do, alone…we*

*are better together*

Now, stay with that truth as we follow Paul, who had just come from Athens where he had been

alone, only to leave there abruptly to come to Corinth by himself

This is the second of his missionary journeys and it had been an exceedingly difficult one

He, Silas and Timothy had gone to Philippi where he and Silas were beaten and jailed

Then Paul and Silas left for Thessalonica where the whole city was thrown into an uproar, and

immediately they were sent to Berea

In Berea the crowds were stirred up again, and Paul was immediately sent by himself to Athens

He was at Athens waiting for Silas and Timothy and he preached his heart out but no church

started, no great salvation response happened

Something moved him on to Corinth even though he had intended to wait for Silas and Timothy

in Athens

When he arrived to Corinth he was not in a good frame of mind and spirit

**PP *“And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of***

***God with lofty speech or wisdom…I was with you in weakness and in fear and much***

***trembling…”* 1 Corinthians 2:1, 3**

Now watch what God did for His fearful, struggling Apostle

***“And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife***

***Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.”* 18:2**

We will look more closely at this dynamic husband/wife team soon, but notice what else happens

In verse 5, Silas and Timothy make it to Corinth, and they bring with them a financial gift from

the churches in Macedonia (**2 Corinthians 11:9)** that allows Paul to go from part-time,

tentmaking ministry, to full-time where he ***“was occupied with the word.”*  18:5**

**PP 3-Our mission is daunting, we are better together, and our God is with us**

Now watch what God did personally for this beleaguered, struggling saint

He spoke to Paul in a vision: ***“Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I***

***am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who***

***are my people.”* 18:9–10**

God did not berate Paul for his fear, his anxiety, but rather spoke courage into his heart for the

true remedy of fear is not a promise all things will be okay, but the presence of God

God assured Paul, ***‘I am with you’***

And then said, ***‘for I have many in this city who are my people.”***

You are not alone at all Paul, for I am the One performing this work, and this is what I have

done, so keep on being My witness

Does it seem that in your school, your place of work, your neighborhood or family, you alone is

a Christian?

Then perhaps what God said to Paul He intends for your lonely, discouraged heart as well…I am

with you, I have others besides you…don’t be silent, be My witness

As we close, let’s apply this to our own lives

God who ordains all things has given us life in this time in history, in this part of the world, in

the families we belong to, with the talents and abilities we possess

You were not born at the wrong time, to the wrong family, in the wrong place

Your time and place is where you are right now, serving the God Who loves you literally to death

What better life is there than that of knowing God and making Him known to those who don’t

A life where our knowledge is ever increasing through His Word and we share what we know

A life of simply, wonderfully, lovingly, sharing what you know of your God

However, we cannot be effective in living out that mission if we isolate ourselves

Can I ask you to get involved in Christian community in both structured and organic ways?

We have Community Groups, Discipleship Groups, and Ministry Teams for you to join

But we also have organic ways to be together, as the dozens of people this weekend are

experiencing as they are camping together, something the church didn’t organize

Or calling someone to check in after surgery, that card to encourage that troubled spouse, that

coffee that you and few others enjoy each week at a local diner, or going over to fix a

dripping sink in a widow’s home

We are simply better together and if we are to successfully accomplish the vision of this church,

we must move beyond a friendly church to a loving church

Finally, think of Jesus for a moment, whose mission was the most daunting of all: live

perfectly obedient to His Father, die a horrific death as the Sin Bearer, raised to life as

God’s promise for all believers

Jesus, God in flesh had the most daunting mission ever given, was rejected and put to death by

the very people He came to save, and Who experienced the utter forsaking of God

He suffered so we wouldn’t have to, died so we could live, was forsaken so we could be accepted

Have you trusted Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, and have you begun to share what you

know to those who do not yet believe?

Pray