

## Corinth & Ephesus: 3 Things the Lord wants us to see!

Acts 18:18-28

Acts 19:1-12

What I love about Paul is that with all the success and fruitfulness he had seen in the Gospel he never let it go to his head: 'I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling' (1 Corinthians 2:3). Now there's someone I can relate to!! The story of how Paul planted and established Churches in Corinth and Ephesus is amazing but I believe the Lord would want St Andrews to focus this morning on three things the Lord wants us to see to help us cooperate with Him in the building of His Church.

1. No Second-Class Christians
2. Husband and Wife Teams
3. Paul Strategy for Urban Evangelisation

But first the context: the urban centres of Corinth and Ephesus. In 1850 there were just four cities of over a million inhabitants, by 1980 there were 225, in 2000 over 500! 23 cities in 2000 had over 10 million inhabitants. Over half of the world's population dwells now in cities. We need Christian planners and architects, local government politicians, urban specialists, developers and community workers who will work for justice, peace, freedom and beauty in the city. Christians need to move to the cities and experience the pressures and pains of living there in order to win city dwellers for Christ. Commuter Christianity is no substitute for incarnational involvement.

It would seem to have been Paul's deliberate policy to move purposely from one strategic city-centre to the next. On this second journey Athens, Corinth (at its height had  $\frac{3}{4}$  million) and Ephesus (half a million). Athens as we saw last week was the Intellectual Centre, Corinth the Commercial Centre and Ephesus was famed for its culture. In each city Paul tries

first to persuade the Jews (the religious), then having been rejected he goes to the Gentiles (a house in Corinth, a lecture hall in Ephesus), the result of his boldness is that in both many believe. Jesus (the Church builder) confirms His word and encourages Paul in both cities: by a night vision in Corinth and by extraordinary miracles in Ephesus. Finally, signalling a real breakthrough, the Roman authorities in both cities dismiss the opposition and declare the legitimacy of the gospel, in Corinth through proconsul Gallio and in Ephesus through the Town clerk: wow isn't the Holy Spirit amazing to have done all that!

So to the three things the Lord wants us to see:

No Second Class Christians:

On arrival in Ephesus Paul 'found some disciples': at least that is what they claimed to be! In reality, however, they were disciples of John the Baptist, and were decidedly less informed than Apollos in Corinth had been! *Read dialogue v 2-7.*

This incident has become a proof text in some Pentecostal/Charismatic circles especially v2: Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? From it, it has been argued that Christian initiation is in two stages, beginning with faith and conversion, and followed later by receiving the Holy Spirit. But these 12 'disciples' cannot possibly be regarded as providing a norm for a two stage initiation. On the contrary, it is crystal clear that these disciples were in no sense Christians, having not yet believed in Jesus, whereas through the ministry of Paul they came to believe and were then baptised with water and the Spirit more or less simultaneously. Paul assumes firstly that they are believers: but then sees no evidence of the Holy Spirit. Hence his two leading questions: whether they received the Holy Spirit when they believed - and into what had they been baptised? The

first linked the Spirit with faith; the second linked the Spirit with baptism. Both questions expressed Paul's assumptions that those who have believed and those who have been baptised, have received the Spirit: as Peter had taught in Acts 2:38/39. To have believed and have been baptised, and not to have received the Holy Spirit constitutes an extraordinary anomaly. In truth 'they had not even heard there is a Holy Spirit': they had just heard John's prophecy of the Spirit not its fulfilment, they were ignorant of Pentecost. Lets me stress one more time: the norm of Christian Experience is a cluster of four things: repentance, faith in Jesus, water baptism, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. All of course in the orbit of the Saviours work of Building His Church. So let's end this painful divisive division: there is only one definition of being a Christian. Let's end this disunity and let Unity be the wings that the Spirit without measure is released upon is do His work. Lets all as the one Body of Christ get caught up into Pentecost as the norm for the Church Jesus is building.

Husband and Wife Teams: Now before I get into this, I always get a hard time from those who are single on this one. Some are called to the single life even celibacy and that's good, many more have sadly not found a life partner or experienced a broken marriage. God uses each one of us just as we are and in sharing about Husband and Wife teams I am in no way implying that single folk are less effective as Paul clearly epitomises!!

Aquila and Priscilla are a couple clearly used by God: because of the gospel they moved from Rome to Corinth and eventually to Ephesus. They are mentioned in Romans 16, 2 Timothy 4:19, and I Corinthians 16:19 as well as Acts. They are referred to by Paul as 'fellow-workers in Christ Jesus' and as having 'risked their lives for' him. They shared the same

trade and faith, and Paul stayed with them in Corinth. In 18:26 they counselled Apollos in the 'way of God' and a Church met in their home (1 Corinthians 16:19).

Husband and Wife Teams together in the gospel are Gods lethal cocktail, ministry in Gods image, and need to be honoured and let go in missionary sense. A man working in isolation can do so much, a women the same, but together God can use them in a unique way which is more than the sum of the parts. 'One Flesh' is the mystery of Christian Marriage: One Flesh Ministries is the next logical step.

Couples used to work together in traditional Churches until pay and changes in society encouraged the wife not to be the unpaid curate: this was a huge loss to the ministry as a whole. New Churches however picked this up immediately and many of the fruitful movements over the past twenty years have been pioneered by husband and wife teams (Roger & Faith Foster, Terry & Wendy Virgo, etc.). Lorna brings a unique gifting to our ministry and without her I would not be able to do and be what I am. Sadly today this goes largely unrecognised and unrewarded by traditional denominations forcing younger couples in ministry to compromise on their calling and not offer all that God intended. This is ministry in God's image (male and female he created them) and we need to release its potential once again.

#### Finally Paul's Strategy for Urban Evangelism

*The secular places he choose:* True that in both C & E Paul began in the Jewish Synagogue; that was his custom. But when the Jews rejected the gospel, he withdrew and moved to a neutral building instead. In Corinth he choose a private house, the home of Titus Justus, while in Ephesus he rented the lecture hall of Tyrannus. And easily the greater part of his evangelistic ministry in both cities was spent in secular situations. Today we still have to evangelise the religious: the

equivalent to the Synagogue in our Culture is the Church. It is here the scriptures are read, prayer is offered, and God-fearers congregate, people on the fringe who are attracted but not committed. The gospel must be proclaimed to them but we must not limit our evangelism to the religious and neglect the irreligious. If religious people can be reached in religious buildings, secular people have to be reached in secular buildings. Perhaps the equivalent to Paul's use of Titus's home is for us to use our homes for evangelism, and equivalent to his use of the hall of Tyrannus is lecture evangelism. People will come to a home, to listen to an informal talk and engage in free discussion, who would never darken the doors of a church building. There is also an important place for Christians to engage with the public in local colleges or in the market place.

*The reasoned presentation he made:* Luke uses several verbs to describe Paul's evangelistic preaching: two stand out, one meaning to reason or argue, the other to persuade. Both in religious/secular contexts Paul combined argument and persuasion. His presentation of the gospel was serious, well reasoned and persuasive. Because he believed the gospel to be true he was not afraid to engage the minds of his hearers. He did not proclaim his message in a 'take it or leave it' fashion; instead he marshalled his arguments to support and demonstrate his case. Paul was seeking to convince in order to convert and in fact, as Luke makes plain, many were persuaded: this was Paul's method. In C he renounced the wisdom of the World not the wisdom of God, and the rhetoric of the Greeks not the use of arguments. Arguments of course are no substitute for the work of the HS but then trust in the HS is no substitute for arguments either. We must never set them over against each other as alternatives. No, the HS is the Spirit of Truth, and He brings people to faith in Jesus

not in spite of the evidence, but because of the evidence, when He opens their minds to Christ.

*The extended periods he stayed:* Luke is careful to give us details - in C Paul began in the synagogue, thence to a house (18 months), then a further period: so at least two years. In E: 3 months in the synagogue, 2 years in the lecture hall and a little longer: total 3 years (20:31). In the lecture hall he spoke daily for six hours ignoring the siesta: Paul did not sleep: he swapped his leather work for lecture work. 6 days weekly x 6 hours for two years equals 3120 hours of gospel argument: 19:10 (the all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord) seems not to be an overstatement! Ephesus was in a key position: all roads of Asia converged there: the seven churches of Revelation were planted plus Colossae and Hierapolis. If the gospel is reasonably, systematically and thoroughly presented in the City Centre, visitors will hear it, embrace it, and take it back with them to their homes.

When we contrast much contemporary evangelism with Paul's it shallowness is immediately shown up. Our evangelism tends to be too ecclesiastical (inviting people to Church), whereas Paul also took the gospel into the secular world; too emotional (appeals for decision without an adequate basis of understanding), whereas Paul taught, reasoned and tried to persuade; and too superficial (making brief encounters and expecting quick results), whereas Paul stayed in C & E for 5 years faithfully sowing gospel seed and in due time reaping a harvest.

Such is the commitment, which will eventually turn the spiritual tide here in the East Kent.

Pastor David

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