



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

"RIDING THROUGH"

THE BOOK OF ACTS - LESSON 18

In chapter 17, Paul had some very "interesting" experiences in Athens. We don't know exactly how long he stayed there, but I wonder if he was glad to move on!

In chapter 18, he continues his journey by heading west, traveling 53 miles to the city of Corinth. While Athens was seeped in idolatry, Corinth was drenched in debauchery. Corinth was a key city in Greece.

William Barclay explains more about Corinth:

"Greece is almost cut in two by the sea. On one side is the Saronic Gulf with its port of Cenchrea and on the other side is the Corinthian Gulf with its port of Lechaem. Between the two there is a neck of land less than five miles across and on that isthmus stood Corinth. All north and south traffic in Greece had to pass through Corinth because there was no other way. But the voyage around the southern extremity of Greece was a voyage of great peril. Consequently the east to west trade of the Mediterranean also passed through Corinth, for men chose that way rather than the perilous voyage. Corinth was also the home of the Isthmian Games which were second only to the Olympic Games.

Corinth was a wicked city. The Greeks had a verb, "to play the Corinthian," which meant to live a life of lustful debauchery. The word "Corinthian" came into the English language to describe in regency times a reckless, roistering buck. Dominating Corinth stood the hill of the Acropolis. The hill was not only a fortress, it was a temple of Aphrodite. In its great days, the temple had 1,000 priestesses of Aphrodite who were sacred prostitutes and who, at evening, came down to the city streets to ply their trade. It had become a proverb, "Not every man can afford a journey to Corinth." (The Acts of the Apostles, Barclay) This is the city that Paul now faced.

First Day

1. Read Acts 18:1-28. Answer the following questions:
 - a. What is the key verse in this chapter?
 - b. Did you learn anything new about Paul?

- c. List the main characters.
 - d. List any new or interesting facts you find.
2. Paul describes how he felt when he arrived in Corinth. Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-3. What does he say?
 3. Paul wrote the Book of Romans while he was in Corinth. Read Romans 1:18-32. Describe the sin that Paul saw in the city of Corinth.
 4. Do we see any of the same sin in our world today? Has the world "cleaned itself up"?
 5. Are you living like a "Corinthian"? From the list in Romans 1, do you see any of the same sin present in your own life? (Especially verses 29-31)
 6. Read the five "uns" from Romans 1:31. Do any describe you?
 7. Why is forgiving others so important? Read Mark 11:25-26. (Is there someone you need to forgive?)
 8. What does Jesus say about mercy? Read Matthew 5:7. (Is there someone you need to show mercy to?)

Paul had to learn to be forgiving, merciful, and loving to even his enemies. He followed the example of Christ, who said of his persecutors, **"Forgive them, for they do not know what they do"** (Luke 23:34). As Paul walked around Corinth, he must have been overwhelmed at the sin he saw in the city. Paul's heart for the lost must have ached as he realized their need to know the truth.

9. Reread Acts 18:1-3. Whom did Paul meet in Corinth?

Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned six times in the New Testament. We don't know for sure if they were Christians at the time, but most likely they were, seeing that their conversion was not mentioned with the others in Acts 18:8. Perhaps they were part of building the church that had been established in Rome.

10. Read Romans 16:3-5. What does Paul say about this couple?

Aquila and Priscilla departed from Rome because of an edict made by the Emperor Claudius, in approx. A.D. 49. It is said by Suetonius, a Jewish historian, that the Jews were expelled from Rome for causing continual disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus. The name "Chrestus" may have been referring to Christ, and most likely the trouble was the riots in the Jewish community over the preaching of Christ. (William Neal, The Acts of the Apostles)

11. What was their trade?

The word "tentmaker" comes from the word "**skenopoi**oi," and it literally means "**leather workers**". Paul was from the province of Cilicia, which was noted for their production of a cloth made from goat hair, called cilicium. This was used to make tents, curtains, hangings, etc. Paul was probably a very skilled craftsman.

We must remember that Paul was a rabbi, and according to Jewish practice, every rabbi must have a trade. They were not allowed to take any money for preaching or teaching. The Jews had two sayings: "**He who does not teach his son a trade teaches him robbery,**" and "**Excellent is the study of the law along with a worldly trade; for the practice of them both makes a man forget iniquity; but all law without work must in the end fail and cause iniquity.**" Paul most likely worked during the week, while he preached on the Sabbath. (Although I'm quite sure Paul preached while he worked too!) When Timothy and Silas came to Corinth, they brought a love gift of money to him from the church in Philippi (Philippians 4:14-19, 2 Corinthians 11:8-9).

12. Are you teaching your kids the importance of working hard? Read **2 Thessalonians 3:7-14**. Why is training them to work an important part of bringing them up in the Lord? Read **Ephesians 4:28**. What does Paul say is one reason to work? Are you teaching that to your kids? Spend some time this week sharing with your children how we should do all that we do for His glory -- even our chores!

We will talk more later about Aquila and Priscilla and how the Lord used this godly couple to minister. But let's end with this quote: "**The task ahead of us is never as great as the Power behind us.**" I'm sure this is what gave Paul the courage to face this city. Does it give you courage to face the "city" that is in front of you?

Memory Verse of the Week: "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you, for I have many people in this city." Acts 18:9-10

Second Day

Review your memory verse.

Yesterday we learned about the city of Corinth and what exactly Paul was up against. We also met the Jewish believing couple, Aquila and Priscilla. Today we will look at the reaction of the Jews to Paul's message.

1. Read Acts 18:1-6. Who arrived in Corinth to help Paul? (vs 5)
2. What was Paul trying to get the Jews to understand? (vs 5)

In Athens, Paul had been sharing with pagans who knew nothing of the Scriptures, much less the coming of a Messiah. The Jews were familiar with the idea of a Messiah, but did not understand that Jesus was the one the Scriptures spoke of.

The movements of Silas and Timothy are only partially recorded here in Acts, so we need to look at other information in the epistles to piece it all together. The following must have occurred: **1.** Silas and Timothy had been left behind in Berea with instructions to meet Paul in Athens (17:14-15). **2.** They did meet Paul as planned (17:16, 1 Thess. 3:1). **3.** From Athens, Timothy was sent to Thessalonica to encourage the church (1 Thess. 3:1-2). Silas must also have gone to someplace in Macedonia, perhaps Philippi (18:5). **4.** Both men rejoined Paul in Corinth, bringing a report from Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:6) and a gift (2 Cor. 11:8-9, Phil. 4:15). It was at this time that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, and shortly after he probably wrote 2 Thessalonians from Corinth also.

3. How did the Jews react to the teaching that Jesus was the Christ? (vs 6)
4. In verse 6, what is Paul saying? Is he giving up? Is he frustrated? Is he losing his temper?
5. How was Paul following the counsel of Jesus from Matthew 7:6?

"Shaking your garments" is a gesture of publicly disowning responsibility of someone or something. (See Acts 13:51) By saying that "your blood be upon your own heads," he is saying that they are now responsible for rejecting the Messiah. Paul had done his best; he had a "clean" conscience. (If you have "blood on your hands," it means that you bear the responsibility for another's death.)

Paul now leaves the synagogue. The Jews had their chance, so to speak. Paul's main focus is now the Gentiles.

6. Where did Paul go? (vs 7) Why was this a wise decision?

Some think that Justus' full name was Gaius Titus Justus, who is referred to in 1 Corinthians 1:14 and Romans 16:23. He may have been a Roman citizen, or perhaps a colonist.

7. Who else was saved? (vs 8)

The job of the chief ruler of the synagogue was to oversee the maintenance of the building and make sure the services were done correctly. This position was one of high influence within the Jewish community. The salvation of Crispus and his household most likely shook up the Jews! According to 1 Corinthians 1:14, both Crispus and Gaius were baptized by Paul himself.

8. Read Matthew 28:19-20. Was Paul doing his part in the Great Commission?

9. Read Acts 18:9-11 and answer the following questions:

- a. What did the Lord tell Paul to do?
- b. What did He tell him not to do?
- c. What two promises did the Lord give to Paul?
- d. What was Paul's response?

Paul may have been getting a little fearful. Can you blame him? After all, when the Jews got mad in Lystra, they stoned him. When they got mad in Philippi, they beat him and put him in prison. When they got mad in Thessalonica, he had to flee because of the uproar. Here in Corinth, they were getting mad. Perhaps Paul was worried about what they were going to do to him.

God reassures him that he's on the right track and that he would be protected. Knowing that God was with him gave him the courage to remain in the city

for a longer amount of time than usual. Because of the love gift that was brought to him by Silas and Timothy, it is thought that Paul could then minister full time.

God comforted Paul with a promise. He gave him His Word. God gives you and me over 3,000 promises in His Word. The promises are there -- it's our job to believe and apply them. We can choose to worry and feel defeated, or, like Paul, continue "in the city".

10. Find two different verses in the Word that are promises from God to you. Do you believe them? How do they encourage you?

11. Read the following promises. Choose one to meditate on today - then believe it and apply it to your life.
 - a. 2 Timothy 4:18
 - b. James 4:7-8
 - c. James 4:10
 - d. 1 John 1:9
 - e. Psalm 84:11
 - f. Psalm 55:22

The Lord told Paul that He had "many people in the city" (vs 10). God knew who were His before they were even converted! As a result, Paul took courage and pressed on. I pray that His promises give you a **"Reason to Rejoice"** and also encourage you to press on!

Third Day

What's your memory verse? Is it encouraging you?

The Jews were really getting mad! Their rabbi had become a Christian. The number of Gentiles next door was growing, due to the preaching of Paul in the house of Justus, and they were not about to stand by and watch. They decided to try to have Paul stopped legally.

1. Read Acts 18:12-22. Who was the proconsul at this time?

Gallio was the brother of the philosopher, Seneca. He was famous for his kindness. His brother said of him, **"No man was ever as sweet to one as Gallio is to all."** He governed during the period of A.D. 51-52 or A.D. 52-53. As far as we

know, this was the first time that Paul, or any other apostle, had been on trial before a Roman provincial governor.

2. What did the Jews accuse Paul of? (vs 13) Compare to Acts 16:21 and 17:6.
3. Did Paul have to defend himself?

In verse 13, whether the Jews were referring to the Roman law or the Jewish law is unclear. It is most likely that they were referring to the Jewish law, because the Romans had given the Jews the right to practice their own religion and even make converts (with the exception of Roman citizens).

4. What was Gallio's decision? Do you think it was wise or unwise? Why?

There are varied opinions on this. **John Stott** gives us his point of view in his commentary, Spirit, Church and World:

"Gallio's refusal to take seriously the Jewish case against Paul was immensely important for the future of the Gospel. In effect, he passed a favorable verdict on the Christian faith and thus established a significant precedent. The Gospel could not now be charged with illegality, for its freedom as a 'religio licita' had been secured as the imperial policy. Paul could stay longer in Corinth because of the judicial decision of Gallio. Jesus had promised to protect him, the chief means of protection would be the Roman law."

Gallio knew that Paul was not guilty of any crime, and the Jews were probably trying to use him for their own purposes.

5. How did the people respond to Gallio's decision? (vs 17)

The text is unclear which group of people were actually doing the beating of Sosthenes. The Jews may have beat him, thinking that he had not presented their case properly. (He was the ruler of the synagogue who apparently took over after Crispus.) The Gentiles may have been rioting to vent their anti-Jewish prejudices. It may have also been those who were responsible for the conduct in the courtroom. (They were the ones who drove the Jews out of the court.) Whoever it was, Gallio still refused to get involved in this dispute because he believed it was not under his jurisdiction.

6. Do you think it was right for Gallio to stay out of this beating? Which law did this fall under?

7. Who is Sosthenes? Read 1 Corinthians 1:1. If this was the same man that Paul was referring to, what do we know about him?
8. How does God use "bad" things in our life to bring us to Him? If that's the result, would those "bad" things still be considered "bad"?
9. What "bad" things in your life has God used to bring you closer to Him? Can you share them with the group?

This ends our lesson for today. What is your "**Reason to Rejoice**"? Reading over these verses, I rejoice that God kept His word to Paul and no one hurt him. I bet he was rejoicing too!

Fourth Day

Repeat your memory verse to someone in your home. (If you live alone, tell a friend.) Explain how God kept His promise to Paul.

Paul remains in Corinth a while longer, taking advantage of Gallio's ruling. But now he decides to go back to his home church in Antioch. All aboard!

1. Read Acts 18:18-22. Whom did Paul take with him?

Cenchrea was the eastern seaport of Corinth on the Aegean side. There was a church in Cenchrea (Romans 16:1).

2. What did Paul do in Cenchrea?

Paul was probably taking the Nazarite vow, which usually lasted for 30 days. We can read about this vow in Numbers 6:1-21.

3. Read Numbers 6:1-21. Explain this vow. What couldn't they eat, etc.?

Many times Jews took this vow to express their thanksgiving to God for some blessing. At the end of the vow, they would cut or shave their hair. This hair was supposed to be burned on the altar as a sacrifice to God. Paul probably took this vow while in Corinth to express his thanks to God for the fruit of his labors. Maybe he

took the vow after Gallio's decision. In any case, this was most likely the reason that Paul felt he needed to hurry back for the feast in Jerusalem (vs 21).

You may ask yourself why Paul would put himself under such a bondage, while he was preaching freedom from such things. Paul did what he did, not because he had to follow any particular law, but out of love and respect for His God.

4. How do you express your thanksgiving to God? Can you name some ways?
5. Why is it so important to express our thanksgiving to God?
6. In Acts 18:19, Paul came to Ephesus. What did he do? What did he do with Aquila and Priscilla? Why?
7. Did the Ephesians welcome him? (vs 20)
8. What does Paul say in verse 21 that should be our attitude?

Our plans should always be subject to God's will (James 4:15).

9. Do you seek God's will when making your plans? Are you flexible with your plans if God changes them?
10. Is God concerned with your everyday decisions, or just the "big ones"? (Where you should live, etc.)
11. How are we to live our life? Read 1 Peter 4:1-2.
12. Can we know God's will? Read Romans 2:17-18.
13. How are we supposed to do His will? Read Ephesians 6:6.
14. How should we pray? Read 1 John 5:14.
15. Read Psalm 143:10. How does God teach us to do His will?
16. How is He teaching you right now?
17. Is it the desire of your heart to live in His will? Are you listening close to His voice? Can you hear Him when He whispers -- or only when He shouts?

Paul believed that he was not supposed to stay in Ephesus, so he sailed to Caesarea, said hello to the church, and continued home to Antioch (vs 22). ("Going up" usually refers to going to Jerusalem.)

Paul had learned to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The closer you walk with the Lord, the more you can recognize His voice. Are you listening? If the answer is yes, are you responding?

Fifth Day

Write your verse by memory. Can you share with your group how this verse encouraged you?

Acts 18:23 begins the story of Paul's third missionary journey. He begins by touring Galatia and Phrygia, encouraging and strengthening the believers.

We leave Paul for a minute and take a sneak peek at what was happening in Ephesus while Paul was gone -- exciting stuff!

1. Read Acts 18:23-28. Whom do we meet in verse 24? Where was he from?

Alexandria had a very large and independent Jewish community. It was a university town with a worldwide reputation for learning.

2. How is Apollos described in verses 24-25?

Apollos had obviously been exposed to the teachings and works of Christ. He just didn't have all the facts.

3. What was lacking in his teaching?

4. What does the "baptism of John" mean? (See Acts 19:3-4)

Apollos understood the need for repentance and recognized Jesus as the Messiah, but he didn't fully understand the Gospel of grace, completed by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Nor did he know about the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. His teachings were accurate, just incomplete.

5. What did Aquila and Priscilla do when they heard Apollos preach?

6. Did Apollos receive from them? What did he do once he was corrected?

7. Why do you think he was such a "great help" to the believers? (vs 27-28)

Aquila and Priscilla made a great team, don't you think? They were a great example of Christian hospitality. As refugees in Corinth, they opened their home to Paul. As missionaries in Ephesus, they took Apollos under their wing. 1 Corinthians 16:19 tells us that they opened their home as a meeting place for the church. Later, when they moved back to Rome, a church also met in their home (Romans 16:5).

This is why Paul refers to them as "co-workers". They had a pilgrim mentality and gave of their home and possessions to those in need.

8. Do you have a pilgrim mentality? Are you ready to go wherever the Lord calls you, or are you too firmly planted where you are?

9. Is your home open to others? Are you willing to come alongside others by offering not only your home, but your time, and your possessions to them?

10. Is it important to you that the Word of God is handled correctly? Would you pull aside a friend who was teaching some false doctrine, and correct them in love?

11. How are Aquila and Priscilla an example to us? What can we learn from them?

12. If you are married to a believer, do you work together as a team like Aquila and Priscilla? Do you have the same goal of winning and discipling others for Christ? What changes can you make as a couple to make you a better "team"?

Apollos sailed for Achaia, and God used him there to defend the faith. He was a very passionate man, and now that he understood that Jesus was the Messiah, he was passionate about sharing the truth (vs 27-28).

It's great to see Paul spend time with Aquila and Priscilla, training them in the Lord. They pass what they learned on to Apollos, who now carries the message to those in Achaia where Paul had started! We are all carrying the baton, so to speak, and are supposed to pass it on.

13. To whom are you handing off your baton? Is it your children? Your neighbors and friends? Are you showing them how to live the Christian life by your example, so they will be able to show someone else?

14. How would looking at the children in your life as disciples change your perspective toward them? What would be different about the time you spend with them?

Paul got scared, and God spoke to Him. We see that God's grace is sufficient for us when we are fearful. Swindoll said, "**The darker the scene, the greater the challenge; The weaker the spokesman, the stronger the message; The greater the resistance, the lesser the fear.**" Paul understood this concept. Later in his life he wrote **Romans 8:31b**, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

God reassured Paul by sending him companions, by speaking to him in a vision, and by allowing him to see the fruit of what was happening in Corinth. How is God reassuring you?

15. What is God doing in your life to reassure you in the situation you're in today? How is God's power being perfected in the weakness that you are experiencing now? (2 Cor. 12:9a)

16. This is our last question for today. If God spoke to you in a vision as He did to Paul, what would He say? "Don't be afraid of _____ any longer, but _____."

I pray that you learned a lot this week, but more importantly, I pray that you applied it! If you had to pick one specific "**Reason to Rejoice**" this week, what would it be? Share it with a friend to give them a "**Reason to Rejoice**" too!