

PAUL AT CORINTH

Acts 18:1-17

Corinth was located in the southern part of a narrow isthmus about forty miles west of Athens. It was the capital of the province of Achaia. It had grown rapidly in a hundred years and had developed a vast commerce with both the Orient and the Occident. Because of its strategic position, it became a great maritime center. It was the most dissolute and profligate city in the empire, surpassing in wickedness, it is believed, even its three great capitals--Rome, Antioch and Alexandria. It may be described as commercial in spirit, unwarlike in policy, luxurious in living, and licentious in life. The city was proverbial for its debauchery.

Paul might reach Corinth by the overland route, or by way of the sea. His poverty, haste, and infirmities would probably lead him to avoid the tedious walk overland when five hours of sailing would carry him there. Paul seems to have been unusually depressed in spirits. Apparently he was much cast down, not only by the continued absence of his comrades (for he had come on from Athens to Corinth alone), but also by his comparatively unsuccessful ministry in Athens. As he confronted the greater city, and compassed the magnitude of the work before him, he threw himself more unreservedly on his Lord, and solemnly vowed renewed fidelity to his great commission.

In this lofty spirit of increased devotion, Paul entered Corinth. As in other places he first of all sought for lodgings, and then some means of earning his daily bread. A gracious providence favored his search. He soon found an abiding-place and work with his fellow countrymen, Aquila and Priscilla, who, like himself, were tent-makers. They had been banished with other Jews from Rome by the Emperor Claudius. It does not appear clearly whether they were already Christians, or were converted through Paul's ministry. It is certain that they and the Apostle soon became very dear friends. They wrought together both in the prosecution of their trade and in the fellowship of the Gospel.

Paul was always in search of a real man. He found Timothy, Titus, John Mark, Apollos, Onesimus, Philemon, and many other notables who changed the currents of history. When he came to Corinth he discovered Aquila and his wife Priscilla. Aquila was a Jewish businessman, but he was a devout Christian.

I. To Discover Men Is A Noble Business.

1. To discover a noble man is worth more than the discovery of a gold mine. The businessman in Philadelphia who discovered Russell H. Conwell gave to the world a more valuable heritage than Admiral Byrd did when he discovered the South Pole.
2. A true man is worth more than anything he possesses.
The author should be better than any book he can write. The singer should be better than any song he can sing. The artist should be better than any picture he can paint. The carpenter should be better than any house he can build. Most of us look rather on what a man has or what he can do instead of on the man himself.
3. Where did Paul find this noble man?
He found him in Corinth, one of the most corrupt cities then existing. It is possible for a good man to live in a wicked city without becoming wicked. It was a city of departed glory, but here was a man who remained true in the midst of the collapse of the fortunes of the city.
4. When Paul found this man he was engaged in an humble business.
He was a tent-maker. There are many noble souls hid in inconspicuous places. There are many noble men whose nobility has never been discovered. They may live and die unknown.

5. Paul likely never would have found this man had he not been willing to make tents in times of emergency. He did not regard himself nor his calling too high to engage in any honorable work that he might earn an honest living.

II. To Discover Men Is A Preacher's Main Business.

1. To discover them for the Lord.
Thousands of men who were made in the image of God need to be rediscovered. That image is blurred. They have drifted so far away from God that there does not remain one trace of similarity. It is our business to find them and bring them home.
2. To discover them for themselves.
Many men have never discovered themselves. They have talents that have not been discovered. They have ability that is being wasted because no one has ever discovered it. They may become experts in some valuable field if some one would only help them discover themselves. It is fortunate that someone helped Spurgeon to find himself. The same is true of D. L. Moody and Billy Sunday. Almost every great man has been discovered and rescued by somebody.
3. To discover them for future generations.
Paul went his way, leaving Aquila and Priscilla behind. Long after he had passed out of their lives a young, vigorous, and enthusiastic Christian came that way and fell into the hands of this godly couple whom Paul had discovered, and they took the unseasoned young man in and taught him the way of the Lord more perfectly, for he was quite immature in his knowledge of God. This young man became an eloquent disciple of the Lord and did much for God.

Verse three gives us a new picture of Paul. By trade Paul was a tent-maker. There is honor and dignity in honest toil. No man should feel that he is too good to do manual labor when it is necessary. A great man never despises honest toil. He always respects and honors honest toilers. Things in common give one new advantages. Paul was not out to get something for nothing. He was not a parasite on the church. An honorable man does not want to be a burden on anybody.

One of the finest decrees God ever made was that a man should earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. He has never repealed that decree. In this God dignified labor. Paul's Christianity made him as good a tent-maker as he was a minister. He was as honest a Christian in the shop of Aquila as he was in the temple.

Verse six gives us the attitude of Paul toward the rebellious people to whom he had tried to minister. He had not failed to do his duty in witnessing for the Lord in that wicked city. He had told them his own personal experience of conversion; he had faithfully borne witness to Christ; he had argued that Jesus was the Messiah the prophets had foretold and for whom they had waited and looked; but now that they had closed their eyes to the facts, their ears to reason, and their minds to truth, he could do no more. He felt that his conscience was clear and that it was useless to waste his time, so he turned away from them.

Duty demands that we perform our task with all faithfulness whether there are visible results or not. We are not commanded to have results--we are commanded to do our duty and leave results with the Lord. We are not commanded to win--we are commanded to try with all our might. We are not commanded to convince men--we are commanded to declare the whole counsel of God to them. It will be a glorious experience for any man to be able to face men in eternity with the assurance that he had done his full duty toward them. A man must answer to four courts for his conduct--the courts of the land, of public opinion, of one's own conscience, and of God.

Paul had no right to leave Corinth until he had cleared his own conscience. No preacher has a right to run away from his difficulties until he has cleared his own conscience. There are too many leaders who are cowards. They run from their problems instead of facing them honestly and seeking to solve them. Cowardice may get rid of one problem, but it will lead into more.

Quite frequently ministers, who want to move to other fields, say, "I think my work is finished here." In most of those cases it did not take long for them to finish their task. Some develop the habit of moving, to their own hurt. It is sometimes easier to move than to study, or it may be easier to move than to face unpleasant tasks, or it may be easier to move than to work. These ministers are like people who move when they get behind with their rent; it is easier to move than it is to pay back rent.

Paul had come to a dark hour in his experience. The opposition had almost crushed him. He was discouraged and ready to run away from the conflict. This is typical of many of God's servants. Elijah was an example. The Lord knew just what remedy to apply for such an illness. He gave an inner assurance of secret help.

The Lord told him not to be afraid. The threatening persecutions would not fall on him. The apparent dangers would disappear. Such an assurance from the Lord will make any disciple bold in the performance of his duty.

The Lord also told him to speak and not to hold his peace. There was too much at stake. Souls were in the balance. Responsibilities were grave. Sin was bold and daring; that was no time for a spokesman of God to hold his peace. The hour was big with destiny. All heaven looked down to see what the servant of God would do in this situation. How can one be silent when souls tremble on the brink of hell?

The Lord assured him no man could hurt him. This gave him new courage, new enthusiasm for his work, and comfort for his troubled spirit. He faced his enemies with a new zeal. He dismissed all thought of running away and remained for a year and six months.

The Lord told him He had much people in that city. He probably referred to those who had secretly trusted Him but were not bold enough to confess the Lord publicly, as well as to those who had been saved and made a public confession. The Lord assured him that He was with him. He was with him in his trials and problems. He was with him when opposition arose and when his efforts seemed fruitless. This assurance must have made Paul rejoice. Such assurance will make any man rejoice.