

## Paulician Resolutions – I Corinthians 2:1-8

### I. Introduction:

- A. We have no way of knowing how long Paul was in Athens before moving across the isthmus to Corinth.
1. By the year 51 AD, Athens had lost its greatest luster and had a population of about 20,000 – smaller than Post Falls.
  2. This was about a fifth the size of bustling Corinth where the Apostle later had an eighteen month ministry.
  3. Let's say that Paul was in Athens three months. It may have been more, but probably less.
  4. He had been left there **alone** while his traveling companions returned to Macedonia to summon Timothy and Silas.
  5. Paul was not only lonely, but he was spiritually challenged unlike anything he had experienced before.
    - a. He had often preached in heathen communities which were more barbaric than others.
    - b. But those challenges were quite different from this.
  6. Athens was unique – there wasn't another place in all the world like Athens – the city of Athena.
    - a. It was not like the secular commercial city of Corinth.
    - b. This was a center of culture, education, pride – and as a result – arrogance.
    - c. *"All the Athenians... spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing."*
    - d. That reminds me of some **"Baptists"** who are in a constant search for some new doctrine to make them different from everyone else.
    - e. Athens it was definitely not a Jewish community or even culturally Roman, like Philippi.
  7. It may have seemed to Paul as if those three months were 435 days long.
- B. Was it perhaps comparable to your 2020?
1. It seems like just the other day, 2019 was coming to a close and we were celebrating the new year – 1,439 days ago.
  2. It has been an exceedingly long, tedious – and in many ways – unproductive year.
    - a. No visitation and door-to-door evangelism.
    - b. No enthusiastic invitations to strangers to visit our church services.
    - c. No Bible studies on the Spokane Indian Reservation. No recent trips to the Tricities.
  3. Not in our lifetime have we experienced society's push back like we have this year – telling us to cancel services, wear masks to church, and even to tighten our cliques while sitting in church.
- C. And how was Paul's 2020 – his stay in Athens?
1. How did he feed & house himself without support from the churches or the people to whom he ministered?
  2. This was not a commercial city, so he probably couldn't ply his trade – employ his training at tent-making.
  3. Like many people around us who are losing their jobs, he may have been getting hungry.
  4. For some people, quarantined and isolated, this has been the loneliest year of their lives.
    - a. And that loneliness has been intensified by those loved-ones we have lost this year.
  5. Rodney Spears, somewhat like Paul, made a missions trip to Peru and got stranded there, and Vic and Norma Smith were in stuck in the Philippines for months.
  6. Last March I flew to N.Y. to minister the Word, and finding myself stranded & alone, immediate flew back.
  7. Like Paul on Mars Hill, we've been forced to climb to the highest point available and to broadcast the gospel from there through the internet.
  8. And the need is still much the same – we live in a world **"wholly given to idolatry."**
  9. Superstition abounds when it comes to society's treatment of this virus.
- D. Then **Acts 18:1** says, *"After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth."*
1. After a disappointing year and ministry, 2021 and the City of Corinth have arrived.
  2. Paul didn't wait for Timotheus and Silvanus to join him in Athens; he moved to Corinth alone, and they eventually joined him here.
  3. He couldn't get out of 2020 quickly enough; he turned the calendar three weeks before the end of the year.
  4. With these things in mind we come to the question which ignited this message

## II. WHY did Paul go to Corinth?

- A. As you might have surmised this question has evolved into another New Year message.
1. Paul entered the city of Corinth in the much the same way that we have entered 2021.
  2. For example, we had no choice in the matter – it was God’s will that we move on.
  3. Someone – long before the Rolling Stones – said *“Time waits for no man.”*
  4. Other than perhaps Donald Trump, just about everyone has been looking forward to using their new calendar. It is definitely time to move forward.
- B. I wonder how Paul determined it was time to walk the 50 miles to Corinth?
1. Did an angel visit him one night, kicking him in the ribs, as one did to Peter, telling him to wake up?
    - a. Was there a thunderous voice from Heaven, or did the finger of God write a message on the wall?
    - b. I doubt it.
  2. Most likely, the Holy Spirit simply laid it on Paul’s heart that it was **time** leave Athens.
  3. The Spirit **also** put a **burden** on him for **Corinth** – rather than pointing his heart toward Ephesus or Egypt.
- C. There was certainly a need in the city of Corinth.
1. There were unbelieving Jews there who needed to hear that the Messiah had already come.
  2. There were a few believers who had emigrated from cities where God’s churches had been established.
  3. And there were heathen hedonists who were standing on the brink of Hell, who needed to be pulled back from the flames.
  4. There were a 100,000 Corinthian souls in need of the Saviour and the fellowship of other Christians.
- D. And just as there were things to be done in Corinth, there are things for us to do in 2021.
1. While some people are telling us that the world has essentially come to an end – obviously, it hasn’t.
  2. And while it is certainly true that our translation is nearer than when we first believed, there is no guarantee that the Lord will come for us this afternoon.
  3. The spiritual needs in Corinth are exactly the same as they were in Athens.
  4. 2021 is no different from 2020 as far as that is concerned.
  5. Paul was drawn into his new ministry, because it was the **need of the hour** and it was the **will of God**.

## III. But HOW did he enter that new ministry?

- A. Paul lived in the same kind of flesh that you and I do.
1. Just because he was an apostle, especially called to that special office, the Lord didn’t coat him in Teflon.
  2. He was enrobed in the same divine righteousness as you and I, but he wasn’t issued an Hazmat suit.
  3. He says in **verse 3** – *“And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.”*
- B. Why does he describe himself in this way?
1. **What caused** his fearfulness? **About what** was he fearful?
    - a. Was he afraid of dying in Corinth? Certainly not. He didn’t fear the chilly hand of death.
    - b. And didn’t he also believe in the imminent return of the Saviour for His saints?
    - c. Was he afraid of physical pain? He had felt enough of that before, and knew he could handle it.
    - d. Perhaps it was that he might be as much a failure in Corinth as he had been in Athens.
      - (1) **THAT** is certainly something to fear.
      - (2) Maybe **we** should be concerned about being as ineffectual for the Lord in 2021 as we have been last year.
      - (3) But I don’t know why he would bring that up before his friends at this point.
  2. The word *“weakness”* is *“astheneia”* (*as-then’-i-ah*) – that has a medical ring to it, doesn’t it?
  3. Besides *“weakness”* it is translated nearly four times as often with *“sickness,” “disease”* and *“infirmity.”*
  4. Paul could have been fearful because he was showing some symptoms of *“the virus.”*
    - a. Don’t **you** have a cough? Isn’t your throat a little scratchy.
    - b. Haven’t your sinuses been draining a lot lately? Should we be so fearful we can’t function or serve?

- C. Once again I say, it is not unwise to remain medically cautious as we enter our new Corinth.
1. I don't care if people laugh at me when I go into the bank, or a store, or even a restaurant wearing a mask.
    - a. I don't care even if they sneer.
    - b. My mask will certainly not do me any harm – even spiritually.
    - c. In fact, I believe that it enhances my Christian witness – it says, in a very small way, *"I care."*
    - d. And if there is a 1% chance of protection, I'm willing to accept it, knowing I'll never know if it worked.
  2. It is not an act of unbelief to wear a mask any more than Paul's fear (*"phobos"*) was unbelief on his part.
  3. He still entered the city of God's choosing.
  4. And despite our precautions, we should walk tall as we enter into 2021 – we are the Lord's ambassadors.
- D. Can we apply what Paul says in **verses 1-4** to our precautions?
1. *"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.*
    - a. *For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*
    - b. *And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."*
  2. God's apostle learned something in Athens during 2020.
    - a. He learned that we are not going to be successful trying to compete intellectually with self-important know-it-alls.
    - b. The pathway to the soul is not through the mind, but through the heart.
  3. Paul tried excellency of speech and fancy oratory, and he was erudite enough to do a good job.
  4. But his words bounced off their steel helmets as if they were tiny golden beebees fired from a toy rifle.
  5. He quoted heathen poetry, but the Athenians weren't impressed. Poets were a dime a dozen.
    - a. He tried the philosophies of human wisdom, but, again, it was pointless.
    - b. He attempted to make friends with them – *"I beheld your devotions."*
  6. If God doesn't open men's hearts, all the intellect and arguments in the world are going to fail.
  7. Other than one special message, Paul had neglected God's primary tool of evangelism – preaching.
    - a. He had forgotten – *"For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."*
    - b. Perhaps Athens in 2020 had been the most fruitless of any city or year in Paul's ministry.
    - c. And it stung; he had learned his lesson.
- E. Every morning I try to promote our ministry here way by putting a quote on our church Facebook page.
1. Again, that is like firing a golden beebee at a grizzly bear – but I'm stubborn, and I'll keep plunking away.
  2. Usually, after my little post, I take a few minutes to see what others have put up.
  3. I have to admit, I am saddened by the things many, otherwise good men, are posting on Facebook.
    - a. Some of them can do little else but make references to their past ministries – ancient history.
    - b. And many preachers seem to prefer fighting the Covid hysteria rather than the Devil.
    - c. So many are screaming about political corruption rather than screaming about sin.
    - d. Some good men are promoting relative good things over social media, but publically they say very little about the best thing – the gospel of Christ.
  4. I think Paul was saying that he tried those kinds of tactics, but he gave them up.
  5. His 2020 ministry was not a complete failure, Dionysius, the Areopagite, and Damaris were saved.
  6. But he realized that he needed to return to his ministerial roots – to the root of man's problem and God's solution to the problem.
  7. *"I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom."*

#### IV. What was Paul's GOAL as he entered Corinth?

- A. Again I ask, Why did Paul go to Corinth?
1. A few weeks had passed, so maybe he could have safely returned to the arms of his friends in Macedonia.
  2. He didn't do that.
  3. Have you ever considered the fact that one of the greatest cities in the world was Alexandria, Egypt, and it, too, was filled with Jewish expatriates – the Jewish diaspora?
    - a. It was a relatively easy sail from Athens to Alexandria.
    - b. What a ministry he could have had in Egypt.
  4. He might have returned to Asia, building on the work that had been started there.
  5. Or in fear for his life, with his tail between his legs, he might have run to Antioch, calling it quits.
  6. But he did none of these things. He had the call of God and a burden to go to Corinth in 2021.
- B. It is safe to say that in doing so his primary concern was the glory of the Lord.
1. But what followed that? What were his secondary goals? What are yours?
  2. His goals had nothing to do with anything about himself – personal glory, wealth, power and influence.
  3. Even apart from the gifts of grace which came with his salvation, Paul was a blessed man.
  4. He was smart; he was talented; he was highly educated – but as I've already said, he shed these extraneous things for the sake of preaching the gospel.
  5. He said in this letter to Corinth, *"I came to you for Christ's sake alone, 'declaring unto you the testimony of God.'"*
- C. He may have been somewhat fearful, but he didn't fear God's will, even if it included death.
1. *"Behold, I go bound in the spirit unto [Corinth], not knowing the things that shall befall me there.*
  2. *Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth ... saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.*
  3. *But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, & the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."*
- D. Many of the Jews of Corinth were like most of the Jews of our own century – secular religionists.
1. They weren't in that city to worship Jehovah.
  2. If they wanted to do that they should have returned to Jerusalem.
  3. No, they were in Athens to make money in the one of the world's foremost centers of commerce.
  4. And even though they didn't ply their trade on the Sabbath, they were essentially no different from their Gentile neighbors.
  5. Both groups needed to know that the Messiah had come – Christ had given His life & had arisen to Glory.
  6. Both Jews and Greeks needed to hear that God's Saviour had died as a ransom for many.
  7. It is not necessary that the people of 2021 die in their sins; there is a Saviour.
- E. Consider Paul's statement, *"I came... **DECLARING** unto you the testimony of God."*
1. He didn't go to the city to debate the intellectuals, as he might have tried to do in Athens.
  2. He wasn't looking for knowledge or truth, in order to compare what he believed with what they espoused.
  3. He came *"declaring"* – that is – he arrived as God's ambassador – publishing, promulgating, preaching God's message.
  4. And, *"I came to you... declaring unto you the **TESTIMONY** of God."*
  5. When a man is called as a witness in a court of law, he is asked to give a statement about what he saw – he gives his testimony with a promise to be as truthful and accurate as possible.
  6. Paul entered Corinth with the testimony of God Himself – the One who cannot lie.
  7. It may have been confusing to men in their sins, and it may have been contradictory to the intellectuals and philosophers....
    - a. *"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:*

*b. Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”*

8. The “*princes*” to which he referred were not only Pilate and the Jewish Sanhedrin, but the philosophers, scientific PhD’s, governors and all the movie stars who claimed secular omniscience.

F. We have obviously been tasked by God to enter 2021. It is God’s will.

1. And it is our commission to enter this year declaring the testimony of God, and that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who was crucified for our sins.

#### V. In the fading light of Athens and 2020, Paul made some New Year – New City – resolutions.

A. *“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.”*

1. He was resolved to pare down his ministry to the bare essentials.
2. He wasn’t going to rant and rave about the wicked emperor in Rome, or the state of economy, or the illegal immigrants filling the city.
3. He vowed to stay focused on Christ, the author and finisher of our faith.
4. He wasn’t even going to get bogged down in debating God’s ordinances or Biblical eschatology.

B. *“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”*

1. In the first chapter of this letter he said, *“Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.*
  - a. *For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.*
  - b. *We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;*
  - c. *But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”*
2. The people of 2021 need the power and wisdom of God – things expressed through Christ on the cross.
3. Some of **YOU** need the salvation of Christ this morning.

C. Paul learned his lesson in Athens and so he resolved to enter Corinth *“in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”*

1. The glory of God may have been at the forefront of his goals and ministry, but closely behind was “*your faith*” – the state of your faith and the direction of your faith.
2. *“For by grace are ye saved through faith.”*
3. Paraphrasing the Apostle John, Paul might have said, *“These things are **declared** unto you that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.”*
4. The residents of this coming year need the eternal life which is found only in Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour.
5. Paul considered himself *“a debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise,”* so much so that he yearned to preach the gospel unto them.

D. He appears to contradict himself in **verse 6** when he says, *“Howbeit **we speak wisdom** among them that are **perfect**”* – referring to people of maturity.

1. But to make sure that we understand, he says, *“**NOT** the **wisdom of this world**, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought, **BUT...**”* what a contrast...
2. *“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory.”*

3. The wisdom of God is as different from the wisdom of men as a candle is from the sun.
4. The wisdom of God is something *“which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”*
  - a. This highlights the difference between the two wisdoms – it reveals the ungodly underbelly of worldly wisdom.
  - b. The intellectual unbeliever is not just ignorant; he is *“wilfully”* ignorant – which boils down to **rebellious**.
  - c. The princes of Paul’s world refused to investigate the Lord of glory, and thus He was crucified.
  - d. The princes of 2021 continue to refuse to consider what the Bible says about sin, righteousness and judgment, and they would like to crucify the followers of Christ.

## VI. Conclusion:

- A. The child of God should be excited about the prospects of 2021 AD.
  1. Yes indeed, this could be the year of our Lord’s return for us.
  2. Or it could contain the day of our death.
  3. But as, important and blessed as those two things might be, there is something more important for January 3, 2021.
  4. It is entering our Corinth with a resolve to glorify our Saviour during every moment of every day.
  5. We have work to do. We have a commission to carry out.
  6. Every new day gives us opportunities to glorify the King.
- B. But, sadly, if you are not a child of God, 2021 brings a great deal of darkness and foreboding.
  1. You may have to face a collapsing economy, a corrupt government, and a virus which could send your soul into eternity.
  2. Anyone without the Saviour has real cause for worry and fear.
- C. There is a solution for the problems of this new year.
  1. His name is Jesus Christ – the Son of God.
  2. Prepare yourself for tomorrow by turning to the Saviour today.
  3. *“How shall (ye) escape, if ye neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto you by”* Paul and so many since?
  4. Put your trust for eternity – and for today – in the hands of the Saviour.
  5. Rest your soul on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved.