

## Scripture Reading: Acts 18:1

“After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. 3 So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them & worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. 5 When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. 6 But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” 7 And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. 8 Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized. 9 Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; 10 for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.” 11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” 12 When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, 13 saying, “This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.” 14 And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. 15 But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters.” 16 And he drove them from the judgment seat. 17 Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things. 18 So Paul still remained a good while.

# 'The Beast Begins to Turn'

Here in Corinth, we see the Apostle Paul continuing the pattern of his ministry, going first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. As I pointed out last week, it is instructive that we are no longer given any details of the sermons that Paul or the others preach until Paul returns to Jerusalem in the later chapters of Acts. In verse five we are reminded that Paul showed the Jews that the Christ, the Messiah they were expecting, was in fact Jesus of Nazareth. When Paul turned to the Gentiles he would again confound the wisdom of the world with the foolishness of God as we learned in our study of his great sermon on Mars Hill:

- Proclaiming that the resurrected Jesus was the Creator and Sustainer of all there is and the just judge of all men!

We have often made the point that the story of Acts is the story of how the Spirit of God is filling the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus.

- This is what He was sent to do and He does so to bring glory to the Father and to His Son.

If we don't understand this, the end of Luke's orderly account will not seem very orderly, nor satisfying.

IF we do understand this,

Luke's account ends right where it should with the Apostle Paul sitting in the seat of political power for that day, Rome itself, receiving “all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”

- As we pointed out last week, God promises Paul that He has a great harvest for him to work here in the City of Corinth...
- Proclaiming “I have many people in this city” in very strong terms!

We see some of the most prominent Jews coming to Christ and a great many Gentile converts from this depraved city. Both Jews and Greeks respond to the Good News that Paul preaches to them and we will consider Paul's great love and care for these Saints in more detail next week. Last week, we focused on our calling or vocation. Today I want to consider what Luke tells us about the civil magistrates of that time & our lessons for today.

- Luke introduces Aquila & Priscilla as Jews who were forced to leave Rome because of Jewish persecution.
- Luke also introduces us to the Roman proconsul, Gallio who ruled from Corinth.

There are some important lessons for us to consider from the actions that we see Gallio take here in Corinth and the actions of the greater Roman Empire because God has not left us ignorant about where history is going. We certainly do not have all the details, but we are often given the big picture and many of the major players. When we read in Psalms 2 & 110 that God the Father is giving all the nations of the earth to His Son, it should not surprise us when Paul declares in I Corinthians 15 that part of the Gospel includes this conquering of the nations:

“20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that Slept.

21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive 23 But every man in his own order:

Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

24 Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom of God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”

Now if we were one of the Saints living at this time, either a converted Jew or Gentile, we would wonder how the Nation of Israel and the Empire of Rome would play a role in all of this.

- Both would have been seen as long-standing empires and no one of that day could have imagined either being gone from the earth.

And yet just a few hundred years later, both would be only a memory.

- To understand all that is going on we must remember the powerful images that the Bible gives us about Jesus as the King of Kings.

Remembering again, that the Holy Spirit knows where history is going. The coming destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, did not catch Him by surprise, nor did the fall of Rome in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century.

I certainly would not have enough time this morning to go through all the details that the Bible gives about this, but let's remember the big pictures and I will leave the details for your further study. Sadly we find the best explanations and images in the books of Daniel and Revelation which are either ignored or very wrongly used by many today.

There are two pictures that we should not miss: The first is given with King Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation. We see a majestic statue representing the four major empires of the world: Babylon, Persia, Greece and finally Rome!

The statue representing these Kingdoms is destroyed with the coming of Jesus and His Kingdom then fills the earth, just as the Great Commission implies and Paul explains in the passage from I Corinthians that we just read.

- Daniel goes on to reveal VERY specific information about when all of this will happen and pictures of a beast that is the Empire of Rome.

All of the prophets tell us that the Nation of Israel is coming to destruction because of their sin and both Isaiah and Ezekiel tell us of a New Temple and a New Creation that will fill the earth after the nation of Israel has been destroyed. John is reminded of all this as he sees the whore of Babylon sitting on a great beast with seven heads and ten horns. This woman is identified as the nation of Israel, the Jews who persecuted Paul and the other Christians in allegiance with Daniel's beast: The empire of Rome, whose capitol is the city that sits on seven mountains.

- In the end BOTH the nation of Israel and the Empire of Rome are destroyed and the Kingdom of Jesus is established as Jesus rules from the Father's right hand after His ascension.

Remember, Luke told us about the ascension, not once but TWICE in his orderly account: Once at the end of the Gospel of Luke and again at the beginning of the Book of Acts, so we would not miss its importance! It is pictured by Daniel as the Son of God ascending on the clouds to the Ancient of days and by John in Revelation as the Lamb that was slain appearing in heaven with the power and authority to open the Book of God's judgments. Sadly today, many Christians have been taught that all of the great events that surround the ascension of our Lord, the establishment of His Kingdom, the destruction of the nation of Israel and the crushing of the earth's great kingdoms are yet future.

- The Bible tells us that the whore of Babylon and the cruel Roman Empire have been left behind and the Kingdom of Jesus is now filling the earth.

However, according to the popular "Left Behind" series of books from today, all of these battles are yet future after believing Christians are taken out of the way and the Kingdom of Jesus does not make an appearance until late in what I think is the twelfth book of this purely fictional series.

- Which of these two you believe will greatly impact how you live as a Christian today!

For example, instead of seeing the end of Acts as Paul's triumph in the Spirit as He takes the Kingdom of Jesus to all the earth, you would think of it as Paul desperately trying to save a few more souls as the Roman Empire continues the reign of Satan on the earth until Jesus returns.

Well that may leave you with quite a bit of homework to catch up on, but I share it as an introduction to our lessons about civil rule! The persecution of the Jews that Luke mentions and the actions of this Roman governor do indicate the beginning of the end for Rome, but they also provide us with lessons about what good civil government should be.

This is very timely in our turbulent age with civil unrest in once mighty England and a contentious presidential race on the horizon for our nation. Mighty Rome was losing its patience with the Jews and under Nero this would grow into major persecution of the Christians. They failed to heed the warning of Psalm two where nations are told to fear the Son...

- Need I point out that today the Kingdom of Jesus continues to fill the earth and the Empire of Rome was left in the dustbin of history?
- A lesson America must not ignore: Lest they end up in the same place!

On a more local level, Luke seems to go out of his way to show the weakness of Gallio as a civil ruler...

As Paul teaches in Romans 13; good civil rulers, "are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. 4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil."

What we see in these few short verses is Gallio failing to enforce both Tables of the Law: A good civil magistrate must look to God's Law, NOT avoid it!

**The Jews come to him accusing Paul of disturbing the peace of Rome by preaching false doctrine. Gallio says he wants nothing to do with their religious squabbles and throws them out of his court yard. There are many like Gallio today in the civil realm who argue that we must leave religion at the door of the statehouse:**

- **You can't legislate morality we are constantly told.**

**They forget that ALL legislation is supporting or opposing someone's religion and morality...**

- **Even if it is the materialism of the humanistic evolutionist!**
- **If nations will not be ruled by God's Law then they will be ruled by the tyranny of man's law.**

**This was the very sad and costly lesson learned in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by many western nations who knew better! As would be expected from a civil ruler who takes no interest in the things of God, it is not long before Gallio ignores even the basic duties that he has been tasked with as a magistrate. After the Jews are removed from his court, a mob seizes Sosthenes and beats him and there is no action on the part of Gallio to stop this unlawful behavior.**

- **How often have we seen similar things today?**

**Someone is elected to office as a strong family man, sometimes even wearing his Christian faith on his sleeve for all to see. Then he is taken in by the trappings of power and falls into grave sins: Sometimes there is great sexual sin or sometimes forgetting that the commands against theft, bearing false witness and coveting apply in the civil realm as much as they do in the personal realm.**

**In the end you have representatives who act like Gallio: They are no longer interested in any discussion of what God might have to say on matters and they learn to turn a blind eye to the real injustices that takes place around them...**

- **Like the loss of more than a million unborn children each year or the destruction of Biblical marriage.**

**Derek Carlsen put it well in his commentary on this passage: "Good intentions are not enough, for there is only one basis for true justice to triumph and that is to make all our laws and decisions according to God's Word. Justice does not arise by speaking about justice, but by acting and thinking in line with God's justice. God's justice is defined by Him and any action that is not in submission to His revelation cannot produce true, long-term justice. The concepts of justice, even from "good" and "sincere" people, are filled with the seeds of injustice. Thus no matter how high the ideals of a society might be, if they allow man's wisdom to be the source of their law and justice, they will reap a mass of injustice in time. To seek to live by words other than those that proceed from the mouth of God is a journey to self-destruction. To try and build a just social order apart from God and His Law will ultimately reap a state of lawlessness."**

- **May God grant us the wisdom and courage to hold our elected representatives accountable today!**

**May we have the courage to give them the warning of Psalm two: That they should kiss the Son lest He be angry and they perish from the way.**

**May God help us to train up a new generation of Covenant Children who know and believe that God is in control of history and knows where things are going.**

- **A generation who believes in all the power of the Gospel and presents AND obeys Jesus as the Lord of Lords and King of Kings!**

When we began chapter 18 and Paul's visit to Corinth, I said we would see preaching, persecution and promise. This is much more than just a well alliterated three point sermon...

- It is a beautiful picture of the Christian life and just what Jesus told us to expect and to do!

Jesus said that we were to pray to the Lord of the Harvest to send laborers into the fields white unto harvest... We are to be those harvesters, those who are the beautiful feet that carry the Good News that Jesus has come and died for the sins of His people!

- That He has been raised in power and brings new life to those who repent and believe!

Jesus also warned us that because the world hated Him, they would hate us... The Good News that brings the aroma of life to those who come to Jesus is the stench of death to those who are hardened in their unbelief and they will lash out at those who bring this news.

- There will be conflict & we are the foot-soldiers used by the Spirit to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus.

And that brings us to the final "p" of promise: Jesus speaks to Paul and tells Him to preach boldly without fear because He has many in that city of Corinth who will respond to the Good News.

It is a small picture of the great promise that Jesus gave to all of us in His Great commission...

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen." Matthew 28:19,20

This is right where Luke will leave his friend Theophilus at the end of his orderly account and it is right where we are as the Kingdom of Jesus continues to advance to the entire world in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century!

- May we be those who are carrying the Good News to a dying world...
- Trusting God as we face whatever persecutions the world, the devil or our own flesh may throw at us...
- And believing the promises of God for us, our children and all those whom God will call!
- Serving faithfully until the fullness of the Gentiles have been brought in!

**Communion Meditation: Psalm 42:**

"As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. 8 The Lord will command His loving-kindness in the daytime, And in the night His song shall be with me-- A prayer to the God of my life. 9 I will say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" 10 As with a breaking of my bones, My enemies reproach me, While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" 11 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God."