

Keep On Keeping On!

Acts 18:1-17 on August 15, 2021

Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson



Please read Acts 18:1-17 before going further in this transcript.

One of the wonderful things about living in northern Minnesota is the opportunity to go camping! Some of us like tent camping, others prefer RVs or staying in a cabin, and still others have a fondness for hotels (I believe that's called "glamour camping" or "glamping"!). This past year I learned of a brand-new way to go tent camping, and that's to go "truck tenting!" As someone who recently bought their first used pickup truck, this is VERY appealing to me. You get a quality tent, that is up off the ground, tucked inside of your truck bed rather than just secured by a few stakes in the ground, and... it makes your truck... look EVEN cooler! Well, I haven't bought one of these bad boys YET, but Pastor Eric has, and he told me it's super cool! So, feel free to ask him about his. Today's passage mentions that the Apostle Paul was a tentmaker. This is an intriguing little detail that Luke, the author of Acts, decides to mention. And as we dig into this a little bit, we'll find that there are actually some fairly important ramifications to it.

Please turn or click in your Bible to Acts 18:1. It begins, "After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth." We haven't looked at our map in quite a while, so take a quick peek at the end of this transcript.

[MAP] Back at the end of Acts 15 Paul and Barnabas had a bit of a disagreement and decided to part company. Paul chooses Silas and begins his 2nd Missionary Journey. They leave from Antioch, by the GREEN arrow on the east edge of our map, and head north and then west toward Derbe, just below the 1st YELLOW arrow on the right of our map. They then proceed west, revisiting some of the prior towns where Paul had shared the gospel during his 1st Missionary Journey, places like Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch. After re-visiting these places, Paul and Silas keep heading west and then a little north, by that 2nd YELLOW arrow in the top-middle of our map. The Holy Spirit directs them further west, over to Macedonia, in the upper left corner of our map. Here they preach in Philippi, where a woman named Lydia responded to the gospel, as well as a Philippian jailer and his entire family. They then move further west to Thessalonica, where a LARGE number of people come to faith, but they have to leave that town due persecution from a mob. This leads them even further west to Berea

where MANY MORE people believed. However, once again, Paul needs to leave town due to intense persecution. Paul is then carefully escorted down south to Athens, which is in ACHAIA, the 3rd YELLOW arrow on the far left of our map. Some of the people in Athens respond to the gospel, but not a lot. Then, in Acts 18, we come to Corinth, right by that LITTLE WHITE arrow on the far left of our map. Traveling from Athens to Corinth took ~1 day by sailboat or ~3 days on foot.¹ We're not sure what means of transportation Paul used, we just know that he got there. Personally, I think I would have gone sailing, which sounds fantastic! Now all total, the 2nd Missionary Journey lasted about 3 years. And up to this point, Paul has been moving along pretty steadily.

However, when he gets to Corinth, Acts 18:11 tells us, “So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.” In other words, Paul spent approximately half, of his 3-year Missionary Journey, FOCUSED on one particular city: Corinth. Luke, the author of Acts, thought that this was worth noting. But WHY Corinth? Why not one of the other cities along the route of Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey? Well... Corinth was a major shipping port in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea; it was at the crossroads of east/west travel.² This alone made it a strategic location for Paul to share the gospel, since he could impact, not only the large population of locals, but also all of the MANY travelers and businesspeople who passed through this city.

So, one reason for this FOCUS on Corinth was because...

1) Corinth was in a strategic geographical location.

But were there any other reasons to FOCUS on Corinth? Let's take a closer look and see what we can find. Acts 18:2 tells us that “There [*in Corinth*] he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius [*The Emperor of Rome*] had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. ...” At this time in history, there were approximately 50,000 Jews living in Rome.³ So this was quite a sizable dispersion.⁴ In God's providence, Aquila and Priscilla were forced to

¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 577.

² Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 577.

³ Citing Polhill, Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 578.

⁴ One Roman historian recorded that these Jewish expulsions were related to riots instigated by a guy named “Chrestus.” (*The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, p. 2257 footnote on Acts 18:2.) This was probably a case of mistaken identity, and a lack of having all the right information. This historian likely misunderstood the ongoing conflict between Jews and Christians over Christ. That is “Chrestus” is likely a reference to “Christ” Jesus. If this is the correct information, what this means then, is that the gospel had already been received by some people living in Rome, including

leave Rome and they found their way to Corinth, right around the time when Paul just “happened” to be there. This does indeed turn out to be a fortunate “coincidence,” because not only do Aquila/Priscilla make a significant gospel impact in Corinth, but they will also later accompany Paul to Ephesus, where they will make an even greater gospel impact. We’ll learn more about this in a couple of weeks.

**So, a 2nd reason for this FOCUS on Corinth was because...
2) God had gospel plans for Aquila and Priscilla.**

Acts 18:2-3 continues, “...Paul went to see them [*Aquila and Priscilla*], and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.” There are two connotations to this term “tentmaker.” One connotation is a literal tentmaker, someone who makes tents. Paul did this in order to support himself financially in his early days of ministry. The other connotation of this term “tentmaker,” is more figurative. It comes out of a more modern-day usage. A figurative “tentmaker” is someone who works one job for financial income, in order to support their other job in ministry. In other words, most ministry “tentmakers” are not dependent on the church, or the support of other Christians, for their income. This usually means that they need to do ministry on a more part-time or bi-vocational basis. Even though Paul had grown up very well educated, and probably in a fairly wealthy home, “It was the Jewish custom to provide manual training for sons, whether rich or poor.”⁵ Paul had grown up learning to make tents, or perhaps more accurately, as a leather worker,⁶ since tents in those days “were made from animal hide....”^{7 8 9} Many of the Greeks in Paul’s day would have looked down on Paul for working with his hands. They would have deemed this kind of blue collar, hard labor as beneath him.¹⁰ But Paul wasn’t at all afraid of hard work, and he was in no way embarrassed about working with his hands. In Acts 20:33-34 Paul declares, “I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of

Aquila and Priscilla. In other words, the gospel was stirring up conflict between the new Christians in Rome and the Jews who lived there. So, in order to keep the peace, the Emperor Claudius decided to kick the Jews out of Rome!

⁵ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2011, p. 1862 footnote on Acts 18:3.

⁶ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, p. 2257 footnote on Acts 18:3.

⁷ “...using wooden supports, ropes and wooden stakes support, and this basic design and construction method did not significantly change for 40 or 50 thousand years.” <https://www.turas.tv/2018/07/a-brief-history-of-tents/>

⁸ Therefore, the work of a tentmaker “likely included working with leather in general.” Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 578.

⁹ Or, in the words of Red Green, “If the women don’t find you handsome, they should at least find you handy.” ☺

¹⁰ Kevin DeYoung sermon, “Sovereign Fuel for Ministry Faithfulness,” based on Acts 18:1-11.

<https://www.avisualguide.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/43.-Sovereign-Fuel-for-Ministry-Faithfulness.mp3>

mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions.”¹¹ So even though it meant that he needed to be “bi-vocational” for a while, Paul wasn’t afraid to make his own living when he needed to.¹²

All this being said, we can only imagine that there must have been times when Paul would have preferred to FOCUS MORE on ministry. But as a tentmaker, there were times when he needed to work on tents, so that he could pay his bills. At this point in his ministry, Paul did most of his teaching on Saturdays, in part because he was working as a tentmaker the rest of the week. Acts 18:4 explains, “Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.” But THEN, something changes ALL of this in Acts 18:5, “When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.” The first few times that I read through verse 5, I was pretty sure that what this was saying, was that Timothy and Silas took over the tentmaking work, in order to free up Paul’s time, so that HE could devote himself to preaching fulltime. And that might be the case. However, after some further study, it turns out that it’s more likely, that they brought him some financial support from the churches up north. In fact, Paul later writes about this, when he sends a letter back to the Corinthian Christians. In 2 Corinthians 11:7-9 Paul says, “Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so.”¹³ In other words, these “brothers who came from Macedonia” were probably Silas and Timothy, in Acts 18:5.¹⁴

**So, a 3rd reason for this FOCUS on Corinth was because...
3) Church funding enabled exclusive devotion to preaching.**

¹¹ In 1 Corinthians 9:11-12 Paul explains, “If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn’t we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.” Paul didn’t want to unnecessarily burden those with whom he was sharing the gospel, nor did he want to be open to the accusation that he was merely peddling the gospel for financial gain. (*The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, p. 2257 footnote on Acts 18:3.) 1 Thessalonians 2:9 agrees, “Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.”

¹² In 1 Corinthians 4:12 he says, “We work hard with our own hands....”

¹³ Also see Philippians 4:14-15. Philippi is located in Macedonia.

¹⁴ “Timothy and Silas evidently brought a financial gift from the churches of Macedonia that freed up Paul to devote himself ‘exclusively to preaching.’” *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI 2015, pp. 2257-2258 footnote on Acts 18:5.

At certain times, Paul was a full-on tentmaker, covering most, if not all, of his own expenses, AND those of his team. At other times, he received support from the church, so that he could fully concentrate on the ministry to which God had called him. Many of you at E-Free Bemidji give consistently and generously to fund the ministry of this local church. Your giving sustains a steady gospel witness, both within the walls of this church building, as well as beyond these walls, into the Bemidji community, and even to other parts of the world, through our various Global Partners. Your financial giving, empower many men and women to serve in fulltime ministry, rather than having the burden and distraction of also trying to maintain a second job or a “tentmaking” business on the side. So thank you, thank you, thank you, to each and every person who financially supports the ministries AND the staff of E-Free Bemidji! Tentmaking does have a place in ministry; in fact, there are times when it is necessary, sometimes even preferable. But there are also times when ministry calls for full-time, fully focused, ministers of the gospel.¹⁵

Well even though Paul can now devote himself to full-time preaching, that doesn't that mean everyone will WANT to hear it. In fact, it's interesting to note the timing here. Right after Paul devotes himself exclusively to preaching in verse 5, he then encounters opposition and abuse in the very next verse. Acts 18:6 says, “...they *opposed* Paul and became *abusive*, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”¹⁶ ¹⁷ Acts 18:7-8 continues, “Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius¹⁸ Justus, a worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue

¹⁵ Many places in this world don't have the blessing of a vibrant, fully funded local church. And many of the places that do have a local church, don't have the blessing of being fully funded. What a privilege it is for E-Free Bemidji to be on this corner of town, with the funding we have, the building we have, the staff we have, and the incredible Church Family we have, all serving together for God's glory!

¹⁶ Paul's declaration, “Your blood be on your own heads!” harkens back to the Old Testament book of Ezekiel. Thanks to Kevin DeYoung for pointing this out in his sermon, “Sovereign Fuel for Ministry Faithfulness,” based on Acts 18:1-11. <https://www.avisualguide.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/43.-Sovereign-Fuel-for-Ministry-Faithfulness.mp3>. In essence, Paul is saying that he's warning these Corinthian Jews just like the watchman in Ezekiel 33:1-9 warned people. If the watchman doesn't sound the alarm to warn the people, then THEIR blood is on the watchman's head, because he FAILED to warn them. However, if he DOES warn them, then their blood is on their OWN heads! Paul is saying, I've warned you; I've done my part. But you are choosing not to listen, SO “your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it.” See Acts 20:26.

¹⁷ This kind of makes you wonder, if at this point, Paul maybe thought about going back to tentmaking fulltime!

¹⁸ “TIH shuhs (Roman)” Severance, W. M., & Eddinger, T. (1997). In That's easy for you to say: your quick guide to pronouncing Bible names (p. 158). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.”

The conversion of this synagogue leader is significant. Crispus was a Jewish man, who had come to faith in Jesus Christ. As the synagogue leader, his duties as a layman in the Jewish synagogue, would have been to administer things like “looking after the synagogue building and supervising worship.”¹⁹ In other words, this was a pretty important position among the Jews. It was sort of a combination of our church’s Facility Supervisor, Ron Bodenheimer, and our church’s Worship Committee members, who help to plan and carry out our various worship services. This news of Crispus coming to faith in Jesus, would have CERTAINLY made its way into the conversations, of many of the Jews in Corinth!

So Paul should feel encouraged, that even though he is facing such opposition and abuse AGAIN, the gospel IS having an impact: an impact on Titius Justus, on Crispus the synagogue leader and his entire household, and on MANY of the Corinthians. However, perhaps much to our surprise, Paul does NOT feel all that encouraged at this time. Instead, he feels afraid! Can we even imagine, “the great and mighty Apostle Paul,” being afraid of ANYTHING? I’m probably as guilty as the next person, of occasionally making these Early Church leaders seem somehow superhuman. As though they never struggled with following Jesus, as though they never feared, and never felt even the slightest hesitation of jumping headlong into danger, on behalf of the gospel. But the fact is, Paul is a real human being, just like you and me. The reason I say all of this, is because of what we find in the very next verses. Acts 18:9-10 record, “One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” (Either many believers or many about to become believers, which is why Paul needed to stay and do ministry fulltime.)

The Lord reassures Paul of two particular things in verse 10: **His presence** and **His protection**.²⁰ His presence: “I am with you.” His

¹⁹ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2011, p. 1662 footnote on Mark 5:22.

²⁰ Kevin DeYoung sermon, “Sovereign Fuel for Ministry Faithfulness,” based on Acts 18:1-11.

<https://www.avisualguide.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/43.-Sovereign-Fuel-for-Ministry-Faithfulness.mp3>

protection: “no one is going to attack and harm you.”^{21 22} A few verses later we see that Sosthenes gets attacked, but Paul finds favor with Gallio. The very fact that the Lord Jesus Himself needed to speak to Paul SO directly with the words, “Do not be afraid,” reveals that even the “great and mighty Apostle Paul” did indeed feel fear sometimes.²³ Paul confirms this with his own words, when he later writes to the Corinthian Church in 1 Corinthians 2:3, “I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling.”

So, a 4th reason for this FOCUS on Corinth was because...

4) The Lord encouraged Paul to “keep on keeping on!”

Right HERE is where Acts 18:11 then tells us that “...Paul stayed in Corinth (FOCUSING) for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God,” because the Lord told him to “keep on keeping on!”^{24 25 26}

Today’s Bible passage lays out at least **three different ways that people were involved in the gospel ministry** in Corinth. And all three of these ways directly apply to the gospel ministry right here at E-Free. Many of us are **financial supporters**, like the church in Macedonia. We give financially so that the pastors and ministry staff here at E-Free Bemidji can devote themselves more exclusively, to leading our various ministries. This financial giving also goes to support our various Global Partners. A few of us are **paid ministry workers**, like Paul was enabled to be. We bear the responsibility of serving and leading well, as we steward the incredible

²¹ Consider **Isaiah 41:10**, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Also, **Luke 12:7**, “Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

²² They sure attacked Sosthenes though in verse 17!

²³ Some of us have a Bible translation that puts verses 9-10 in red ink, indicating that Jesus is speaking. We know that the reference to “the Lord” in verse 9 is a reference to Jesus because the previous verse 8 is a clear reference to Jesus, and it functions as a sort of contextual antecedent to verse 9. See Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, bottom of p. 579.

²⁴ So Paul’s 2nd Missionary Journey wasn’t just a 2-3 week short-term trip, but rather ~3 years long, with about half of it spent in Corinth alone. This is in part because they didn’t drive him out, like they had in other places like Thessalonica and Berea.

²⁵ A 5th and final reason for this FOCUS on Corinth was because... 5) The Lord had many people there. This is the last thing the Lord says, right at the end of verse 10: “I have many people in this city.” Now this could be a reference to God’s abundant human resources in Corinth, but it’s more likely a reference to God’s divine foreknowledge that many people in Corinth were ready to come to faith in Jesus. In other words, not only does God have “people on the ground” everywhere, but He also foreknows that Paul is going to have a great gospel harvest in Corinth!

²⁶ In verse 12 the Corinthian Jews make a united ATTACK on Paul and bring him before a guy named “Gallio.” (Gallio “GAL ih oh” Severance, W. M., & Eddinger, T. (1997). In *That’s easy for you to say: your quick guide to pronouncing Bible names* (p. 69). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.) Then we come to a very interesting crescendo in this passage. **Acts 18:14** begins, “Just as Paul was about to speak...” Some Bibles translate this more literally, “when Paul was about to open his mouth.” In other words, Paul was about to make his OWN defense. But, as it turns out, Paul didn’t need to! In fact, even though the Lord had told him back in verse 9 to “keep on speaking” and “not be silent,” the very thing Paul needed to do here was to keep his mouth shut! Back in verse 10, the Lord had said something else; the Lord promised that he would be with Paul. In other words, “God’s got this,” just remain silent Paul and trust God. God gave Paul favor with Gallio. (To put it another way, God can even work through politicians for His purposes!)

privilege of being in parttime or fulltime paid ministry. Those of us who are not paid ministry workers, should view ourselves more like **tentmakers**, just like Paul was in his early days. Our regular jobs and careers enable us to pay our own bills, so that we can then volunteer in the various ministries that God has called us to. None of these ways is more or less important to the gospel ministry. We all play a vital role in advancing the Good News about Jesus. So, whatever our role may be... as fully devoted followers of Jesus, ***let's keep on keeping on together!***

