

## ***Jesus Wins the Makers of Low Culture***

Acts 18:1-17

Acts of the Exalted Jesus Sermon Series

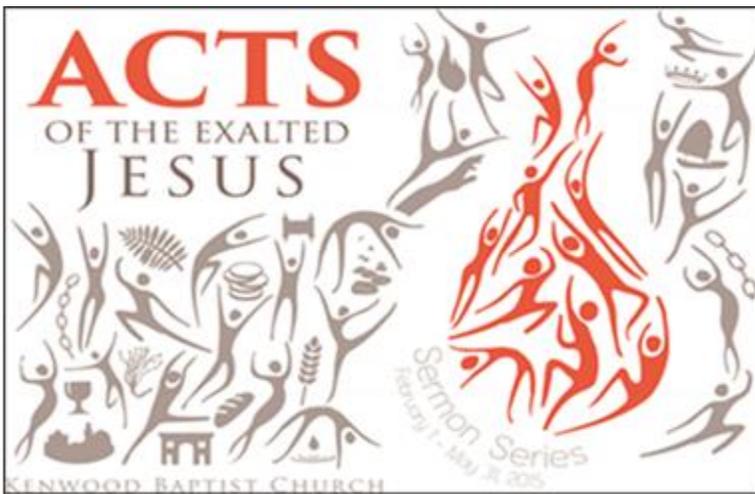
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

May 17, 2015

**TEXT:** Acts 18:1-17

We continue this morning in our series on the Acts of the Exalted Jesus. That which we see Jesus doing in the pages of the New Testament, He continues to do around us today, and we



need eyes to see that. At times, following Christ can push you. It can take you into new territory of far distances from home, crossing cultural barriers, and if you look at the needs of the world around you square in the face, it can be overwhelming. If you are not overwhelmed by the spiritual opportunities around us, then you are not looking. In this passage we

see Paul a long way from home, and we see Jesus Christ encourage him. This is the account of the Gospel that comes to the city of Corinth, the city that will produce a set of churches to reach an entire region. Two of the letters of the New Testament will be addressed to this church, and this is the beginning of the Word of God's coming to this particular city and area. It is a text that breathes encouragement, and so I hope that you are lifted up. I have been lifted up this week by the encouraging presence of Jesus, and I want to signal three of those ways, though there are many more.

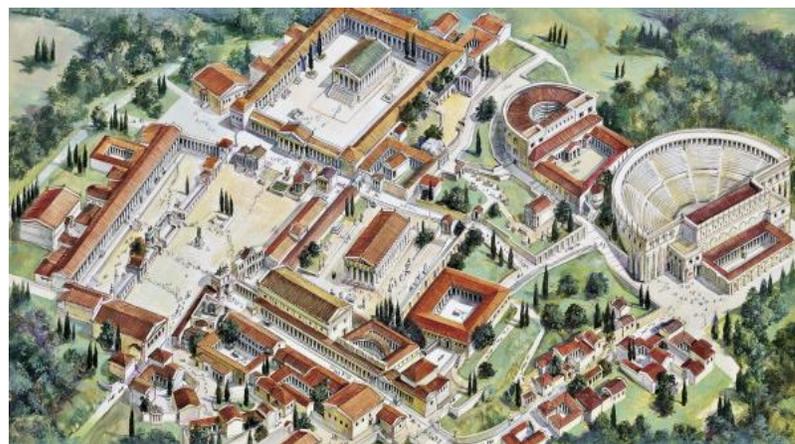
Let's get ourselves to Corinth. We read in Acts 18 that Paul left Athens and came to Corinth. Corinth is a universe away from Athens, though it is only 60 km, 36 miles, away. Corinth is on the other side of the tracks, if you will. There wasn't really a track until modern times when there was a canal sliced through the land. There is a great difference in antiquity between Athens and Sparta. It is a very different cultural place. Corinth is a city in the Peloponnesus. Corinth was in a strategic location. It was a center of business and trade. It had two ports: Cenchreae to the southeast, Lechaion on the northwest. This city was a new city at the time of Paul. It was a Roman colony, a regional capital. It was a city that had just been rebuilt. It was

burgeoning with a rapid influx of new capital and settled military veterans. It was known as a city of vice, immorality, and quick money, and so I think of Corinth as the Las Vegas of the ancient world. Corinth was laid out on a vast grid pattern, and when Paul arrived in the city, he became up this road, Port Street, which is still well preserved. There were shops on either side, temples to the right and to the left, and this towering mountain in the back, the Acrocorinth



which dominates the landscape. As Paul came into the city, it was not in a state of ruins like this. it was a new city that had been radically rebuilt, and we see here an artist's conception of it. As he came into the city, it was it was a thriving place, and it was overwhelming. It was the farthest away from home that he had been to this point.

Now he crosses over yet another line as he stares at this city, this new city. Last Sunday, we talked about how sophisticated people can be intimidating. This Sunday, in Corinth, we see fast-paced business people and quick money. That is also intimidating in a different kind of way. He faced a city of vice, immorality, and a big, growing, rapidly expanding city, and when he looked at the needs of Corinth, I think he was



overwhelmed. He was overwhelmed because when he first arrived in the city, it appeared there was no Christian witness there. None! It seemed as though no one had ever spoken of Jesus Christ in this place. Can you imagine coming into your neighborhood, or into our city or community and realizing that no one around here knows anything at all about Jesus Christ? Look around you at the thousands of people. I loved participating in *Go! Cincinnati* yesterday for many reasons. It was fun to get dirty for Jesus, to plant, to dig holes, and to work side-by-side with brothers and sisters in Christ. But I also liked the opportunity get to know some

people in our community that I would never have otherwise met, and to feel my heart pricked to ask: “What do they know of Christ? Have they heard of Christ?” The math teacher that we worked with at the high school was just amazed that a local church was there planting trees at their school. He said, “Do you do this regularly?” It was very moving.

When Paul arrives in the city, he is overwhelmed at the scale and scope of need. How does Jesus Christ encourage him? The first way Jesus Christ encourages him, and us this morning, is **by sovereignly bringing people alongside us to help us**, and Jesus does this. In Acts 18:2, we read that:

*“There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome.”*

Upon arriving in the city, Paul meets a Jew who is there already. His name was Aquila, which in Latin means *Eagle*. He is a native of Pontus on the Black Sea coast, and he had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla. *Prisca* in Latin means *pristine*, and that's the diminutive form of this. He sees *Eagle* and *Pristine*, and they are tentmakers, and they are there already. Do see that? They are already there, and not because of a great master plan of their own. They are there because they have been kicked out of Italy, together with all the Jewish community, as will read, because of the decree of Claudius. You might be tempted to think this is so discouraging, having been kicked out of Rome. Yet this was by Jesus' sovereign hand. Do you believe that Jesus Christ can use the decree of a Roman Emperor, who doesn't even know Him, to move His servants into position for ministry? I believe that. Do you believe that you can lose your job and be sent to a different city because Jesus wants you in that other city? I believe that. I also believe that you can come to this city because Jesus wants you here. So, if you need encouragement, the first application of this passage is to look around to see who Jesus Christ has already put in position nearby to help you, and keep your eyes open for *Eagle* and *Pristine* and where they might be.

So, Aquila and Priscilla are there because Claudius expelled the Jewish community from Rome. This is a fascinating moment, and we actually have a record of what happened in A.D. 49. The Roman Emperor Claudius, his deeds and life accomplishments, are recorded by a Roman historian named Suetonius, and he lists a whole set of accomplishments of Claudius, things like:

“He stationed a cohort at Puteoli to guard against fires; he issued a decree that people who were taking Roman names, that didn't really have Roman names, should be killed; and he deprived the Lycians of their independence, because they couldn't get along; he allowed the Germans to sit in the orchestra pit because the Germans were upset that they weren't allowed to sit in the orchestra pit and they thought they were just as good as everyone else.

All of a sudden, in the next line, he says:

*“Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.”*

Isn't that fascinating? Isn't it fascinating that about 15 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Jewish community, which was a large community in Rome, is in riots and disturbances and all the parties can figure out is that some man named Chrestus is at the head of it. Who is that? It might help us to remember that *Chrestus* is the Latin variation of *Christos*, the Greek name for *Christ*. All the way in Rome the Word is spread, and the community is in a lather because of Christ. Claudius kicks them out, and Jesus uses this. Claudius also abolished the religion of the Druids, which is not our topic today.

In Acts 18:3, we read:

*“Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.”*

Paul goes to see Aquila and Priscilla, and he stays with them and he meets with them. They work together. They were tentmakers, probably goat hair tents. Paul labored with his own hands. When you think of ministry, it's very important to remember that Paul was a bi-vocational missionary, that he often supported his own needs. He stresses this as he wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:9:

*“For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.”*

In Acts 20:34, he says:

*“You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me.”*

In 1 Corinthians 4:12, he says:

*“We labor, working with our own hands.”*

It's not good to have too much time on your hands. Rabban Gamaliel III, one of the teachers of Israel, Paul's teacher, said:

*“Excellent is the study of Torah together with a worldly occupation, for toil in them both puts sin out of mind.”*

You will be too busy to sin. Isn't that great? Studying the Bible and working is the right kind of busyness.

Well, this begins a very long-term friendship. *Eagle* and *Pristine*, Aquila and Priscilla, travel with

Paul. They go with him later to Ephesus in Acts 18:18. They are seen there discipling Apollos in the ways of Christ. In Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla are hosting a church in their home. In Romans 16:3-4, when Paul later gives a list of his companions and coworkers in the Gospel, Aquila and Priscilla are the first ones mentioned:

*“Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.”*

So, this partnership fuels Paul's ministry, and he flows out of that encouraged by Jesus Christ by these colleagues. Every Sabbath, then, he reasons in the synagogue and persuades Jews and Greeks, a weekly activity. Then Jesus brings more people to help them 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.”*

When Silas and Timothy arrive, he gives his exclusive attention to the ministry, probably meaning his full-time, day-to-day mode is now devoted to teaching and discipleship. He testifies that Jesus is the Messiah. The first way that Jesus encourages us in this text is to bring His workers alongside of us. It would have been discouraging yesterday to work alone, and yet every team had a little pod people. Jesus' ministry works in this way.

A second way that Jesus encourages us in this text is **by the gift of a clear conscience whether He grants opposition to the ministry or success**. I want you to cherish this gift of a clear conscience. A clear conscience is motivating and encouraging. When your conscience is racked, your strength kind of leaks out of you. I want you to notice the gift of a clear conscience in Paul's growing ministry in Corinth. The needs are overwhelming, and yet Jesus brings people alongside to help him, and then he actually goes about doing the ministry. He goes about it in a way that his top priority appears be keeping his conscience clear and clean in the sight of Christ. In Acts 18:6, Paul's preaching ministry first arouses opposition and some of Paul's kinsman oppose him and become abusive to him, and yet he shakes out his clothes in protest and he says:

*“Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it.”*

This is a crucial line. It is actually a quotation from Ezekiel 33:2-4 in which the Lord had told Ezekiel:

*“Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, ‘If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman, and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people, then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, **his blood shall be upon his own head.**’”*

That is the quote. Then God tells Ezekiel in Ezekiel 33:5b:

*“But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life.”*

God tells Ezekiel in Ezekiel 33:6:

*“But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.”*

Then the Lord says in Ezekiel 33:7:

*“So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from My mouth, you shall give them warning from Me.”*

People around us are unaware that there is a judgment coming with no mistakes, accurate, making humanity fully accountable in the eyes of the living God, and God has called you and me as His watchmen in this world. If we do not sound this alarm, then as in Ezekiel, the blood is on us. The thrill of Ezekiel 33 is that when the trumpet is sounded and the warning is given, the people respond and are saved.

Paul says to the Corinthians: “I am innocent of your blood because I have sounded the alarm.” If we are silent about what we know of Christ, then our conscience should plague us and afflict us and our life will drain away. But, if we are faithful in announcing the call, the trumpet note with the instrument in the place that God has called us to be, then our conscience is clear and we are encouraged to go forward, even if we are opposed. Paul was opposed on the one hand, but then Jesus grants him success. As he is kicked out of the synagogue, he has a fantastic idea and says: “Let’s just go next door.” Can you imagine that? It would be like owning a thriving pizza restaurant, doing a burgeoning business, and the community says: “We don’t like your pizza: we don’t like the advertisement; we don’t like your color scheme; we don’t like the smell of your pizza in our neighborhood. Get out of here!” You say: “Okay, I’ll set up a pizza shop just 15 feet down the street.” We read in Acts 18:7 that:

*“Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God.”*

He goes next door! I still am trying to get a hold of that. I don't know exactly what safe separation is, but clearly this is not what it is. The Greek text says that the house of Titius Justus is actually attached to the synagogue. It was really not even next door. It was like the next wing of the structure. He goes to this house of Titius Justus, a Roman name. He's a God-fearing man, and guess what? Paul goes to his house, and he believes. Not only does he believe, but we learn in Acts 18:8:

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

Crispus, who is in charge of the entire synagogue, and his entire household become Christians. So, whether you're opposed and people reject the sharing of Christ, or Jesus grants success to His Word, we are accountable; we are watchmen to our community. The synagogue leader and his whole family become believers and are baptized.

Paul continues with his team in the city, and then he experiences one of the most precious breaths of encouragement from Jesus, beginning in Acts 18:9-10. There are some results, some opposition, some are believing. Then Jesus comes to Paul in a vision at night. In this vision Jesus says:

*“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.”*

The third way Jesus encourages Paul, and encourages us, is **with His own presence, and the promise of protection, and results**. Jesus says: “Keep speaking; I'm with you. No one is going to attack and harm you.” And then, and this is one of my favorite small lines of the entire New Testament, Jesus says: “You keep going because I have many people in this city.” The church has just begun. All we know about are two families and a few Corinthians. Then Jesus tells Paul to keep going because, and it literally says: “there is a large people that belong to Me in this city.” Do you believe that? Do you believe that there is a large people that belong to Jesus Christ in our context and we must keep ministering and serving because they belong to Jesus, and those dots just need to be connected? Jesus sees the flourishing church of Corinth which will be given responsibility for reaching the entire province of Achaia. Jesus sees it already and says: “Paul, you keep going because I have a large people here. Paul says okay, and he does something that we tend to forget that he did when Jesus told him to do it. He stayed put. We tend to think of Paul constantly on the move, and the narratives in Acts are telescoped, and they move rapidly from scene to scene, but it is often the case that Paul stays in a location. When Jesus has him stay, he'll stay there for even three years. Here he stays in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching, proclaiming Christ daily, and seeing the church grow. The last portion of the Scripture that we heard this morning demonstrates the truth of Jesus' promise. Paul was obedient to it in that he continues to speak. He is teaching, sharing, sounding the trumpet. Jesus is faithful to Paul, and He protects him from harm. As Paul continues to minister with this ministry team in the city, there is opposition that comes, and Paul is dragged before the proconsul of Achaia, a certain man named Gallio, the brother of Seneca, the Roman philosopher. We know from an inscription that Gallio was the proconsul of Achaia from A.D. 51 to 52, and this incident then is a linchpin for reconstructing the whole chronology of Paul's ministry. It is a very important fact that Gallio was mentioned. Seneca says he was a man of

gentle demeanor. He fittingly dedicated his moral treatise on the control of anger to Gallio. Well, Gallio has Paul in front of him, and the Jewish community of Corinth is attacking Paul, as we read in Acts 18:12:

*“While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment.”*

They bring into the place of judgment, a place called the Bema in Greek. The Bema platform in Corinth is still standing there. It is one of places in the world where you can go and stand and know that you're standing exactly where the apostle Paul stood. It's kind of awesome, and when he says we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, the word he uses is the Bema, as well. This is the image. It is a raised, elevated platform where the person in charge is seated in the front. Paul is brought before Gallio



in this place. He hears the charges against him, and Gallio listens. The Jewish community explains their accusation to Gallio in Acts 18:13:

*“This man is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.”*

It is not against Roman law, but against their understanding of scriptural law. Paul is just about to speak. Jesus had said to keep on speaking, so Paul, in front of the Bema, was ready. But, before he speaks, Gallio cuts him off and says in Acts 18:14:

*“If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law--settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things.”*

In essence, he was saying: “If your complaint were serious, a case of fraud, something that had an economic impact on the community, maybe I’d listen, but, in fact, this whole debate is only about quibbles and questions about Scripture verses, names in your Book, and I don’t want to decide this case.” He then dismisses the assembly. Why does this Roman governor do this? Is it because of his benevolence? No, it is just fulfilling Jesus’ word: “I’ve got work for you to do here, and you are not to be harmed. Keep on speaking.” The delegation is so upset they are dismissed, that we read in Acts 18:17:

*“Then the crowd there turned on Sosthenes the synagogue leader and beat him in front of the proconsul; and Gallio showed no concern whatever.”*

They are so upset that they pound on Sosthenes, the new person in charge of the synagogue, and Gallio shows no concern. The wonderful thing about Sosthenes, is that the next time we hear about him, or from him, we find him on his knees, together with Paul, as one of the senders of the letter of 1 Corinthians. Sometimes we skip over these names, and we miss a lot. 1 Corinthians, a letter back to this community, is from Paul and our brother Sosthenes. We read in 1 Corinthians 1:1-2:

*“Paul and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

What happened to Sosthenes after he was pounded in front of the Bema for being unsuccessful in securing the accusation? He becomes a believer. This church was loved by Paul. He wrote at least two long letters to them and desired them to grow in faith and faithfulness, and they do spread out from here to reach their entire region.

I want you to be encouraged this morning from Jesus Christ as I make three applications from this message. The first application is: **Are you serving or working feeling alone?** Look around to the resources and people that the Lord has already brought to you. I want you to be encouraged to spot *Eagle* and *Pristine* wherever they are around you, the *Aquila* and *Priscilla* that Jesus has already moved in position. If He has moved you into position because of circumstances of adversity, embrace that. It means He wants you over here. The second application is: **Are you living with a clear conscience?** This is not a clear conscience of our own morality, but a clear conscience in this vocation of being a watchman for the Lord in your environment. Can you say, “I’m innocent of your blood; I have made known Christ to the people around me”? We have an obligation in this world. The third application is: **Are you terrified or afraid of results of ministry?** Always remember, the results belong to Christ. There is work to be done that He has appointed for us. Unless God has called you out of a place, then stay there, stay in it and work at it with all your mind. Trust the outcomes to Him. Hear His promise: “I have many people in this city; I have many people in this office; there is a great people that belong to Me in this neighborhood, in this high school, in this extended family, living in this retirement community, being served in this emergency room or faculty lounge or workshop.” Jesus Christ has many people, a great people. He is gathering them and using us. Are we willing to receive His encouragement today to keep going so that we can say what the apostle Paul would later say of the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 3:2-3:

*“You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” Amen.*